

Guided Meditation: Release or Growth

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Hello and welcome. Welcome to this guided meditation that goes along with this week-long series on the qualities and characteristics of the *Dharma*.

And to introduce this meditation, I want to start by saying there are many activities that we do that involve a kind of careful distinguishing of different perceptions of what's happening. If you walk barefoot outdoors, say, and you walk barefoot on a trail in the woods, you would be very attentive to where the sharp gravel is and different kinds of things that might poke you. In a way, you wouldn't be if you were walking with shoes with heavy soles.

And you would look for, you'd feel your way. You'd look for the places where it's soft and without gravel, for example. Or if you are maybe walking after the rain, you'd be careful not to walk in the puddles. You wouldn't give much thought to it. Maybe it would be almost wordless, that you would just simply kind of walk around the puddles rather than step in the puddles.

And you would know the difference, and that's without seeing that difference. Nothing, you know, you wouldn't make that choice.

So the same thing can happen in meditation. And so, when we're sitting quietly in meditation, when we're somewhat still and quiet and attentive, one of the things that we're contributing is our attention itself, the way of being aware. And awareness is not a neutral phenomenon. In the same way, even though maybe awareness doesn't have an agenda, it still has an influence.

So it's like the sun. The sun has no intention to provide light for the plants to grow. It has no intention to dry the dew in the morning. No intention to kind of dissipate the morning fog. The sun just kind of provides its light without any intention, and it has this wonderful influence on our planet.

Awareness is like that too. We can practice awareness without a lot of intentionality. Awareness is just this providing of light, and I like breathing room, or light, or air to something. So two things can grow. Two things can happen: something can grow, and something can be released.

That which grows, like plants, will grow in the sunlight. That which is released from the plants, the dew that's sitting at the tip of the leaves, evaporates and disappears, gets released. Same thing within ourselves. If we're attentive, bring the awareness to different parts of our experience. Some parts of our inner life grow in the light of awareness.

Some things release. Some things evaporate. Some things relax and disappear. And these two different movements of practice are what we're most building on to go deeply into the *Dharma*. These are natural processes that we don't have to intend or engineer or make happen.

But it makes a difference that the light of awareness goes onto these areas. It makes a difference that we're actually seeing them clearly. And it's possible, as more and more we're staying in the present moment, starting to not be distracted, not be agitated, but kind of arriving here in the present with awareness, the awareness that we have, the attention, the mindfulness we have, can come here. Look here.

Like I said yesterday, there's a call. There seems to be intuition, like, here's where attention should be. And the two places that we start getting called to, two places where we're paying attention, is just like when we're walking in the forest: we're being called to pay attention to the trail to make sure we don't step on the gravel.

The two places we're called to in the *Dharma* practice that is onward-leading are either to the places where we feel, we sense, something is growing, something is emerging, or the place where there's some kind of tension, tightness, some kind of holding on, some kind of contraction that can be released, evaporate.

And so, in both circumstances, what's needed is simply to hold it in awareness. But there's an inner call, there's an inner sense: "Oh, here is where attention needs to be. Let me just be there as neutrally, or as spaciously, as acceptingly as I can. Let's just hold it in awareness, give breathing room to it."

So it's not a completely random field of awareness, choiceless field of awareness. There's a deep kind of knowing that's not necessarily you, the normal you that you think of as who you are, making choices and engineering and having the agency for things. It's something, a deeper kind of knowing that you almost can't appropriate into your normal sense of self. But

it's within you. It isn't separate from you.

It's there in the meeting of sensations and awareness. Right there, if you stay close to that, where your awareness and your mindful sensations meet, something happens in the space between them. One of them is here. This is where you should be. Here's where attention is needed. Here's where something can grow. Here's where something can be released.

Here, stay here. Breathe here. Feel this, and just let the *Dharma* take care of itself. You don't have to be the one who makes anything happen beyond giving things breathing room, bringing the light of awareness there.

So, assume a meditation posture and gently close your eyes. Allow yourself to be just as you are. Allow your whole experience of life to be as it is, without needing to change anything. As if what you're going to do now is to feel your way into how you are in your body, how you are emotionally in your heart, maybe, and how you are in your mind with your thinking.

And by simply feeling it, knowing it, is there, in fact, some sense that here is something that wants to relax? Here is something that wants to release. And don't do the relaxing, releasing, but hold your awareness close to where that is, and allow it, invite it to happen.

It's possible your attention wanders around different places in your body, and you can feel that different places in your body are calling you to pay attention here. Here, a change is needed. At first, don't do the change. Just feel and sense. And if a postural change is useful, you're welcome to do that, but follow the lead of the body's message.

And as you feel into your body, is there anything that wants to grow, anything that is good that wants to invite you to, "Here, feel this, be with this," and see what happens? Let it grow. Let it expand, if that's what it wants to do.

And the same exploration can happen for the mind, the thinking mind. Is there any discomfort in the thinking mind that calls attention to itself? And if so, hold it in awareness. The light of awareness shines on it, without needing to do anything about it. If it wants to relax, allow it to do so.

And might there be something good in the mind—feeling, sense, experience, openness, spaciousness, warmth, love—that also calls attention to itself, that can grow in the light of awareness, in the spaciousness of awareness?

And then gently, quietly, bring the light of awareness to your body breathing. And within the experience of breathing, what calls attention to itself? What sensations? Almost as if it's saying, "Here, look here."

And is it something that can grow, unfold, evolve beneficially? Or is it something that can be released, relaxed, let go, evaporate, simply in the light of awareness, if you're aware of it long enough, tenderly enough?

And then, for the rest of the meditation, let your thinking alone. Don't worry about it. But feel your way deeper under your thoughts. Stay close to the world of sensations that are perceivable here, that are immediately now, that are calling you to see here. And recognize if it's a process that wants to grow or be released.

Under your thoughts, a deeper sensitivity. Letting the thinking mind be as quiet as you can, gentle as you can, as soft as you can, so you can bring yourself more fully into the world of sensations, the world of sensations. Where there is a profound intelligence guiding you deeper and deeper into the *Dharma* of release, the *Dharma* of growth.

If you bring yourself to the place within you that is the most quiet, the most calm or peaceful, even if it's just a teeny little place, and from there you gaze upon your experience, what wants to be released? What wants to grow? Which of those two seems the most important to attend to, most important to allow to unfold?

And as we come to the end of the sitting, if again you find within you the place that's most quiet, the most calm, peaceful place, maybe underneath the turmoil, the challenges, deep down inside, maybe in your heart, maybe deep in your belly, maybe in the back of your mind. And from there, gazing upon the world kindly, gaze upon the world, seeing there what needs to grow, what can grow, develop, and what can be released, what can be settled, what can be healed.

And for these few minutes, trusting that all you need is to offer your kind awareness, the light of your caring attention, let your light shine in what the world needs. And in these beams of kindness that you send out into the world, wish the world well.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free.

And with, at least, our attention, with our kind awareness, may we attend to the world and benefit it in seen, known, and unknown ways. May all beings be happy. Thank you.