

Guided Meditation: Being Present and Compassion

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So welcome to our meditation today. And one of the remarkable effects of Zen practice for me, kind of touching into the stories I'm telling this week, is that I was slowly compassioned. I didn't do anything in meditation—very little. I just showed up for my experience. My understanding of Zen practice was encapsulated in this idea: it involved an unconditional, no-arguments-needed, no-questions-about-it just being with the experience that I was having. Unconditional acceptance of the present moment.

Now, in ordinary life, that's not the right thing to do, and for sure, that's not a policy of how to live a life. But sitting quietly, being still, sitting in a relatively dignified posture—that's not a posture of collapse, of giving up. Not a posture of resistance, pulling away. But kind of the *Middle Way* of just staying present in a dignified posture, whether that's standing, sitting, or lying down, and being willing to be present for what's there, whatever is there, without being for or against it. And of course, for and against happens. But coming back to that midpoint, that *Middle Way*, that uprightness of attention: just this, just this.

Allowing myself just to be with this. And when I sat then, I had a lot of suffering in the meditation. But this very simple practice, radically simple practice—I'm not doing anything but being present for the experience. I wasn't even taught so much to be mindful of it; just be present. Compassion grew, and so the question for you today in this meditation: What is it about a simple, dignified being present, being here? You don't have to accept anything. You don't have to reject anything.

My practice of radical unconditional acceptance may be another way of saying that is neither accept nor reject. Just be present. Just be present. What is it about that that gives birth, gives rise to compassion? And this is not a question to be answered with the rational mind, the thinking mind. But if you're quiet in this sitting and you feel your way into whatever for you

is the depth of your being, the depth of the nonverbal experience of life, is there something there about dignified presence, dignified being present that suggests itself to a sweet, soft form of compassion, form of love, form of care?

So, if those of you are interested, I offer you that as an orientation for this sitting. So, to take a posture that's right for you, that expresses some degree of dignity, some degree that you are important, you are valuable. Buddhist meditation is not meant to devalue you as a human being. If anything, to revalue, to add value and purpose and meaning, dignity to who you are, and to do it in an embodied way. And to gently close your eyes.

And to gently, softly become aware of your body breathing. Maybe like approaching your breathing gently, slowly, not directly, not forcefully. Maybe approaching the breathing from the back, or not from the head down, but from the sitting bone up. And to feel your way into some deeper nonverbal way of sensing and feeling the breathing, yourself, your depth—maybe a deeper nonverbal knowing. And in what way can compassion, love emerge from that depth, that stillness, that nonverbal place of being present that doesn't analyze, judge, make things up, come to conclusions? Just present, simple presence here now.

Okay. And as we come to the end of this sitting, to dip into the quietest, calmest place within you—is there a nonverbal place of sensing? A place within where the grounding place in your body for being present. As you breathe, is there some area inside that offers a stability? Maybe even a strength. It doesn't have to be a strong feeling of strength.

It doesn't have to be a clear feeling of stability. Because maybe the feelings, sense of being in your body, has a diffuseness to it. More of a pervasive feeling. And in the times in your life where you've had compassion, love, where you've cared about someone deeply, is there some place in that inner stillness, stability, presence, where that compassion lives? Not the active compassion that is a call to action, but a sweet softness of care, of love.

Is there something about being present in a quiet way, without being for or against, without accepting nor rejecting, just present? That touches the place of compassion, love, care—even if it's only hints of it. And if you center yourself there as you gaze upon the world, consider the people in your lives, the strangers, the neighbors, your communities. And gaze upon them from there without needing to do anything or interact with anyone. Just gaze upon the world with love, with compassion. That soft and easy gazing upon this suffering world, as if the gaze of compassion is a radiance of warmth and light in the early morning.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free, and may each of us stay close to that place inside where we breathe easily and we're ready to meet the world with love, care, goodwill.

Thank you.