Guided Meditation: Being the Refuge

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Hello and welcome to this Friday guided meditation.

And building on what we've done in the whole week, building on our capacity to cultivate mindfulness, awareness, presence, to the point of clarity, clear seeing for what is here. Our seeing is not clouded by our ideas, our preferences, our likes and dislikes, our stories. But we see clearly what's metaphorically in front of us directly. For what it is, not what it was, not what it will be.

Just seeing clearly, like the fog has cleared, and to be here with the vitality that feels refreshing and feels good, and that we appreciate—that we are somehow the livingness, the feeling of being alive—is the lived experience, is valued, is appreciated, is taken in, absorbed, taken seriously. This now is a time that we're alive. This is our time. If you think about the future a lot or the past a lot, we miss out on the only time where we're alive. This is now.

It's the vitality of this moment, and then to have that vitality flow into what is healthy and good. Does vitality be fueling the awareness, the clarity, the understanding of what is important in a way that feels enlivening, feels good, feels enjoyable. Is that we flow into that enjoyment, into the joy, into the well-being, the contentment, the deep satisfaction of doing something important and valuable. And then to have that go to support being at ease in this world—a tranquility, a deep sense of ease.

The body eases up, the heart eases up, the mind eases up. Is at ease with all things, tranquility, calm. And there's a unification. All this together invites all of who we are to come together as a whole, rather than the mind preoccupied with only parts of the whole. Everything has a place at the table. Everything can be here, and with the feeling that the table is clear and open and receptive, the space is open.

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Maybe more like a council sitting in a circle with everything included, and the space in the middle is empty, filled with potential. And the final factor, limb of awakening—these biological limbs of who we are, part of who we are—is usually translated into English as equanimity. And equanimity can sound like indifference, but it's something really special. And I want to—and it can be a gift we give the world, give ourselves. Profound things can happen in the gaze of equanimity, the presence of equanimity.

And I'll give a metaphor or simile that maybe can support you in this meditation. Say that you've been tasked, you've been asked for some reason. There's good reasons for it. There's a need that you're asked to accompany a five-year-old girl on a boat across a body of water. Maybe a three-, four-hour ride.

Maybe there's been some war or natural disaster in her hometown, home village, and everyone's been separated, and things are difficult and challenging. And it's important to get her to the mainland on this small boat. But there's a big storm, and it's perilous, and waves and winds howling. But it's so important to bring her there. Maybe she's been injured and needs to go to the hospital.

And she's quite afraid and petrified, and hurt and confused, but your task to accompany her. And so it becomes imperative, invaluable for you to be a calm, secure presence next to her. That you are equanimous; you provide her with a refuge. You are stable, even though maybe ordinarily you would be afraid on that boat going across the sea. But she needs you.

She's on the edge of more beyond what she's really capable on her own, five-year-old. So you become the refuge. You stay equanimous. You find it in your heart, in your mind, in your belly, your ability to stay calm. Maybe you're a meditator, so you know how to do it—not by holding yourself frozen—but you know how to breathe deeply.

You know how to believe. Stay with your breathing, the fluidity of your breathing, as a way of keeping your heart and your mind fluid and relaxed. You see that as soon as your mind clamps up, the breathing clamps up. As soon as your heart freezes, something about the breathing freezes. But if you can stay with your breathing, the relaxed, the easeful flow of the breath, keeping your belly relaxed, that feeling your feet on the ground and on the boat, that you can stay equanimous and peaceful.

It is what is needed, and for it may be with that image, you could also then remember maybe there's something deep in you. Deeper than you could ever imagine, that needs to be accompanied in this way. That you need that. So building on all these factors of awakening this week, to sit here with a non-reactive mind, a peaceful mind, a mind which is not caught

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in anything or afraid or eager, that stays present for that little girl. She knows you're there for her. Something inside of you knows you're here for yourself.

So, to soften and relax and settle into your body, soften. Gently closing your eyes on the exhale, letting tensions and preoccupations gently fall to the side, shedding them. Shedding them so that what can arise and grow is a calm, peaceful presence. Taking a few deeper, fuller breaths is a way of claiming for yourself a presence that is not yoked to fears and desires and conceits. And relaxing a long exhale—that's reassuring here now.

For these few minutes of meditating, not needing to give authority to the thinking mind that is concerned with other things at other times, concerned with judging, evaluating, criticizing, worrying, letting that gently shed as you exhale. Letting your breathing return to normal, and noticing if there's any holding or tension. Or even controlling of the breathing, and to begin softening that from the edges in. Softening the breathing. Not all of it at once, but gently every breath on the edges.

Softening. The inhales. The exhales. Approaching a calm way of breathing, moving towards an easy breath, easing up on breathing. Don't try to be successful; just move towards calm, calming, easing.

And then, as if something within you needs you to be present with equanimity, with non-reactivity, being peaceful, reassuring, present with all of who you are, to convey that things are safe. There's a refuge. There's a peace. It's okay. Find a place within that's the refuge of equanimity, even if it's only the size of a pinhead or a marble.

Relax with that. With every breath, let it spread gently through your body, mind, and heart. Allowing the equanimity within, a soft breathing, a calmness that knows how important it is to be reassuring. To reassure your thinking mind, it's okay. A thinking mind can relax and soften.

The wisdom within that is reassuring to an agitated heart, a tense heart, a scared heart. It's okay. This tension, agitation—it's okay for it to soften. Equanimity is considered to be a balanced place within, a place of balance, steadiness. That's a refuge. Stay close to the refuge of equanimity.

Yeah. For the next couple of minutes, finding within your mind, your heart, your body, the place that's glowing or radiating a sense of non-reactivity that allows all things to be as they are, because this place of equanimity is so compelling, so informative, so clear. To stay close to it is a good thing.

And then, as we come to the end of this sitting, I'll tell you that the *Pāli* word for equanimity,

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upekkhā, comes almost literally means to gaze upon, to gaze upon things peacefully, to gaze with the big picture, to gaze with wisdom. To gaze with the wisdom of non-reactivity, non-clinging, and to look out and gaze upon this troubled world with all its troubles, but with all the people who are helping and supporting and loving and caring that are unreported in the news. Gaze upon all of it calmly, peacefully. So you can be a refuge for this world.

One of the ideas in Buddhism is to make ourselves a refuge for all beings. May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free.

Thank you.

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