# Guided Meditation: For my Longterm Happiness

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Hello and welcome. And in this week of introducing questions, as part of *Dharma* practice, this goes back to the time of the Buddha. Down through the histories of Buddhism, there's been a wise use of questions, and sometimes it's central to the whole enterprise—the practice in *Zen* and *Chan*. Sometimes there's a whole series of questions that engage a meditator deeply.

In the ancient teachings of the Buddha, he has a very interesting question: Does this lead to my long-term happiness? And this is using that as a reference point. It's kind of like asking, "Is this what I really want to do? Is this really for my best to be thinking this, to be engaged in this activity?" And this is particularly interesting around thinking, because behavior is easier to maybe evaluate: what is right and not right, what's good for us and not good for us.

But when we get into thinking, things sometimes go into automatic pilot. Or there's a strong authority of thinking. We don't think we can question it or change it. We think we are our thoughts, or we think there's no choice. We think that it's so integral to who we are that we can't shift what we think; it would be disloyal, perhaps. But we can.

And for this meditation, as you go along here and you find yourself thinking, rather than letting go of it and coming back to the breath, rather than practicing mindfulness of thinking—which is generally to be aware of the event of thinking, the process of thinking, and not the content—simply use your powers of reflection, of clarity, of wisdom, to ask yourself: "Is this what I really want to do? Does this lead to my long-term happiness and well-being?" To be on this train of thought, it might come with an aura of truth: "This is how this is true." But still, to ruminate and to be in thought loops around this, to live in that truth when there are other truths—maybe you're a bad meditator—but to live in thinking about that repeatedly is not for your long-term welfare. The long-term welfare is to think something else.


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You might think, “Well, how can I do better? I don't have to be good at this to enjoy it. I don't have to be good to find benefit from it. I've received benefit. Let me put that thought aside. Let me use my autonomy, my degree of freedom, also in relationship to what I think.” You do not have to go along with your thinking. If thinking has some deeper source that needs to be acknowledged, maybe that will appear if you don't go along, get on the thought train.

So for this meditation, you might, at some point, I'll introduce the idea. I'll ask you to introduce, offer yourself: “Is this what I really want to do? Is this really bringing me happiness, welfare, well-being?” So, to start, take some care to assume the posture that's right for you today. Even if you're a longtime meditator, maybe there's a subtle variation today of how your hands go, your elbows' relationship to your rib cage, maybe the small of the back. Gently close the eyes.

And take a few moments for a deep check-in. Check just without trying to change anything or make anything happen. Begin just checking in: what's here? What is it that is going on for you now? That's going to be the context for meditation. Checking in with your body, as you check in with your body now, are there some easy places in the body to relax and soften? Or maybe some places in the body to open up to that could use a little bit more caring attention.

And a deep check-in with your heart, with how you're feeling now, your mood, your state of mind, your emotional state. Just recognizing it, knowing it, as if it's allowed to show you how it is right now. And is there some easy way that you can soften around how you're feeling? Soften an attitude towards it, or the tension in the body around it. Allow the emotional state to be simpler, allowing it to be.

And then checking in with the thinking mind. Is there something you're concerned with particularly? Are your thoughts random? Are they determined or strong? Are the thoughts weak and easygoing? Are your thoughts troubling, or are they pleasant?

And if there's any tension associated with thinking, or any pressure or force, as you exhale, relax, soften it. And then, as a light, easy way to somewhat breathe through all of it, include all of it. Take some fuller breaths that are comfortable to take. Longer exhales, letting go, relaxing. Let your breathing return to normal, and without being involved with anything but breathing, breathe in and breathe out as if this breathing in and out, expansion and contraction, is a gentle wind blowing through all of you. Gentle wind of calm or peace.

And then, as we continue, if you find yourself involved in thinking, ask yourself some questions: “Is this the time for this kind of thinking? Is what I'm thinking about, and how I'm thinking, good for me? Does this way of thinking lead to my long-term well-being? Is there a


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better way to think?" And maybe, since you're meditating, a better way of thinking for your long-term well-being is thoughts about the meditation. It could be the thought, "Where does breathing feel the best? Where is it satisfying to place the attention?" And the thought, "What is this?" Without thinking an answer, but opening to feel and sense the breathing, the place where it's most satisfying to be aware.

Practice your inner freedom around thinking. Don't let thinking be in charge of you. You have a choice around what you think. And if you're finding yourself thinking in ways that are stressful or not pleasant, and it won't stop, then switch over to think about how to care for this part of yourself. What needs reassurance? What needs to be seen and acknowledged?

What's going on more deeply that can be reassured, or be acknowledged, or be loved? What is the deeper need that maybe we can care for now in meditation? We can acknowledge it and use it as a bridge to connect more deeply to a calm, strong depth of attention.

And then, as we come to the end of this sitting, turn your attention now outward into this world of your communities that you might live near, people of your life, the people of your region, people of the world. And imagine that your wishes for them, your attitude towards them, really matters. Imagine for a few minutes here that it's not just a private attitude, private well-wishings that you have, but that your wishes, your attitude towards everyone, will make a difference—a huge difference—for this whole world. And if that was the case, how would you wish well to the world? What attitude of goodwill would you generate if you knew it made a difference—a huge difference—like the world's waiting for you to tip the balance to go a new direction?

What would you wish? How would you be if you had that kind of influence? What would you wish? What would you not do if what your wishes were had that kind of influence? What habits of thinking would you put aside if you discovered that ill will or hostility actually harms the whole world? So, as if it really matters, because it does really, let's wish well for this world.

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 individually and collectively contribute to that happening. Thank you.


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