Meditation: Just Like Me Compassion Practice

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 26:28

Good evening, everyone who is here together watching, listening. It's a pleasure to welcome you to this Monday night teaching from Spirit Rock Center. If we've not met before, my name is Jack Kornfield, and this is the 36th year that I've been able to teach these Monday night classes. Mostly it was once a week for thirty-some years, and the last few years it's been once a month. I'm really grateful to be able to do it—to reflect, to come together, to share with you, and somehow to listen. Because more than anything, I see these as a reminder of what we already know in our hearts, but that gets lost in the busyness of our lives.

It is, as we all know, a really divisive time. A lot of division—political, of course, very obviously for those of you who are in the U.S., but other parts of the world as well. Socially divisive. And now, in Thanksgiving week, you're about to—if not go home to your family—maybe Zoom with your family and friends. Have your Thanksgiving extended family Zoom. And there you have to be with those weird uncles and strange cousins, the ones who believe conspiracies that you don't believe in, or who voted differently than you did and so forth.

How do you relate to people who are different? By the way, they're all different, but the ones that are wildly different and stranger—the fact is, we're all strange. And we all took this human incarnation. In truth, we have more in common than not. In huge ways—not only 99.9% of our DNA—but when we see one another with the heart of wisdom, with the eyes of wisdom, however strange the other seems, when we look in the eyes of another or we just gaze over at another in a simple way and see them with the eyes and heart of wisdom, we're reminded that it's a bigger and different game than all our ideas.

So what we do on Monday night, and we'll do in just a moment, is start with a meditation for a time, follow it by a five-minute break to stretch or relax, and then some teachings and dialogue with others.

Let's begin with this meditation.

Let yourself find a way to sit that's stable and comfortable and at ease. This guided meditation is built on some of the beautiful practices from Joanna Macy and Mirabai Bush and Ram Dass and other dear friends. It is a practice sometimes called Just Like Me.

When you're ready, feet flat on the floor or body resting on the cushion or wherever you are, let yourself settle on this earth, halfway between heaven and earth in this human form. Let your eyes close gently. Take a few deep breaths to allow yourself to exhale and release whatever you can easily. Let your eyes and face be soft. Loosen the jaw. If you like, you can roll your head in a circle to release your neck and let it find a simple upright position.

Let the shoulders relax and the arms and hands rest easily. Feel your seat on the earth. How gravity pulls you—and you can let go and rest, fully supported where you sit. Let the belly be soft and the breath natural. Let the heart be soft as well, to receive whatever arises with a spirit of kindness and compassion.

Now, with this embodied presence, begin to notice the breathing of your body, how it gently and rhythmically breathes itself into breathing with the air, the trees, the wind, all the other creatures around you breathing the same breath. Let your body breathe on its own and you become the witness, the loving awareness that notices this breath. Relax with it, and from a place of presence and some invitation of stillness, we'll do a guided reflection.

Let yourself picture and imagine or envision, in the Thanksgiving and the holiday season coming up, that you will be encountering people who sometimes feel very different than you, or difficult for you, hard to understand, or sometimes just hard to be with. Let yourself select a person in that category. In the traditional teachings of loving-kindness, this person is sometimes referred to as a difficult person. Envision how you might see them—likely on Zoom this crazy year, but oftentimes in person—and imagine or sense that you can now gaze at this person with the heart of wisdom.

And as you picture them, let yourself reflect. This person is incarnated in a body going through life, just like me. This person was once a small child, a little vulnerable child, just like me. Be aware of all the emotions and feelings that arise with each of these reflections. This person has had happy times in their life, just like me. This person is creative, just like me. This person has loved someone, just like me. This person's heart has been broken, just like me.

This person has their measure of sorrows and sadness, just like me. This person has been hurt and disappointed, just like me. This person has been confused by life, just like me. This person has known physical pain, just like me. This person will be young and old, friend and enemy, just like me. This person has regrets, just like me. This person wants to be loved, just like me.

Look at their image. See that behind their eyes is the original spirit born into each one of us. Picture this person's happiest moments as a child—laughing, playing, joyful times. The child of the spirit is still in them, just like me.

As you gaze at them in your mind's eye with the heart of wisdom: I know you want to be happy, just like me. I wish you strength and support and healing in your life so that you can offer your gifts to yourself and the world, just like me. I wish for you blessings and courage, honesty and care, love and compassion, for you are a human being, just like me.

As you reflect, as you see with the heart, notice how this practice has changed the way you hold this person and the way you hold yourself. This practice is a form of loving-kindness and compassion.

Now let yourself continue in the stillness and picture yet another one or two or three people. Each one that you envision and hold in your mind's eye and in your heart, in your own way, gaze at them and

reflect just as we have. This person is—and you can fill in the blank—just like me. If you are still continuing with this practice of compassion and loving-kindness, stay with it. And if you feel like you've had enough of this particular active practice and you want to just rest and be, let it go and rest in the reality of the present.

Become loving awareness that notices the breath breathing itself, that notices the rise and fall of feelings and thoughts and sounds like waves of the ocean coming and going around the breath. Rest in the present. You are loving awareness.

For those who found this meditation to be of value for yourself, or perhaps for something that you might do with others, there is a version of it printed in my book, *No Time Like the Present*. You can find it there toward the end of the book.

What I always say at the end of a meditation, especially if it's guided and introduced in this way as a new practice: please don't use it to judge yourself. It may have been useful and mind and heart opening—lovely. Do it some more. Practice with it. It also may have felt mechanical or artificial, or even brought up its opposite. Hold that too with the same mindful loving awareness and simply recognize that it wasn't necessarily the right practice for you on this evening at this time. Know that there are dozens of other fine practices that we do together and alone. If this is of use, take its benefit, and if not, let it go and come back to the mindful, loving awareness that is the essence of our practice. Keep it simple.

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