Meditation: The Compassionate Heart

Jack Kornfield · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Jack Kornfield · 28:43

Good evening, dear friends. Let us begin by practicing meditation together. Tonight, the practice we will do is the traditional practice of the compassionate heart.

Let yourself settle and find a way to sit that's comfortable and at ease. Allow your eyes to close gently. Take a few deep breaths—slow, deep breaths—inhaling a long breath. As you exhale, release whatever tension you can. 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 the weight of your body on the seat—your buttocks, your feet on the floor—wherever you're seated. Sense how you can rest fully on the earth, just where you are. Relax and let the earth support you. Let the belly be soft and the breath natural. And let the heart be soft as well, to receive whatever arises with a spirit of compassion and tenderness.

Now, in this space of presence and attention, let us begin this guided meditation with a traditional practice of compassion that uses images and words as an invitation to the heart to open and to hold all with a deep sense of compassion. Find your way with this meditation, whatever ways work best for you. You can alter or change it as you need as we go along.

In this space of presence, let yourself first remember, think of, picture someone that you care about—someone that you love, where it's easy and natural and not too conflicted. As you bring them into the mind's eye and into the heart, feel the natural well-wishing of love, the care that you have for them, how you care about them.

As you think of and picture and imagine and sense this human being, this one you care about, feeling that care, let yourself also become aware of the measure of difficulty, the struggles in this person's life, as in all lives—the kinds of pains they've carried, the suffering that they've been through as all human beings endure, the struggles.

As you open to their struggles and difficulties, their pain, begin to surround them with a tender compassion and offer these simple phrases of well-wishing and care: *May you be held in compassion, a tender compassion.* Feel that you could almost wrap them with your care and kindness for all that's difficult. *May your struggles and sorrows be eased. May your heart be at peace.*

Feel how much and how natural it is to wish this tender compassion for one you care about. *May you be held in great compassion. May you hold yourself in compassion and tenderness. May your sorrows and pains*

and struggles be eased. May your heart be at peace. Surround them with the warmth, the warm light and field of compassion.

Now this one you care about gazes back at you. As you look into their eyes, they look at you and they see that you too have a measure of struggles and pain. They see that you too carry your sorrows. And they wish the same for you. They gaze at you so kindly, and this loved one, this one you care about, says: *May you too hold yourself in tenderness and compassion. May your sorrows and struggles and pains be eased. May your heart be at peace.*

As you receive their wishes of compassion, perhaps put a hand on your heart, taking it in. *May I hold myself, my struggles and difficulties, with compassion and kindness. May my sorrows and struggles and pains be eased. May my heart be at peace.* Feel that this is possible within you—a tender compassion, an easing of struggles, a more and more peaceful heart.

Now you become a beacon, a lamp of compassion. Let yourself think of someone else you know who is struggling in difficulty, and from this field of care and compassion...

Picture them, be aware of their struggles and pains—this human being, all of them—and wrapping them with the light or energy of tenderness and compassion, wish, offer:

May you hold yourself in great compassion.
May your pains and sorrows and struggles be eased.
May your heart be at peace.

And again, gently, in whatever words speak from your heart, words like:

May you hold yourself in tender compassion—and feel it.
May your sorrows and struggles be eased.
May your heart be at peace.

Sense how you are now seated in the field of compassion, and you can radiate this care and loving compassion out in a circle to include first all those close to you, wishing all your friends and family and dear ones—so many, each with their own struggles—as if you could gather them in your arms and hold them.

May you all hold yourself in the great tender compassion of heart.
May your sorrows and struggles be eased.
May your hearts be at peace.

As you extend the field of compassion, feel how your own body is breathing. And all of their bodies are breathing. Breathing beings on this earth.

Now let the circle of compassion, the field of the great heart of compassion, extend itself in every direction

to human beings everywhere and to breathing beings, human and non-human—animals, every kind of being breathing on this earth, breathing with you. Those who are being born and those who are dying, so many. Those who are struggling to feed or care for their children or their parents. Those who are struggling for dignity and justice.

Let yourself sense or feel now that you sit like Kuan Yin, the goddess of infinite compassion, with a thousand hands to hold the hands of all who are struggling, a thousand arms to support, a thousand eyes and ears to hear the cries and the longing.

You become Kuan Yin, Mother Mary. You become the grandmothers, the generation of great-grandmothers, the indigenous grandmothers who've seen it all.

As if you could float above the earth now and gaze at this blue-green ball floating in the vast space of our galaxy. And with a heart of compassion, the wisdom of Solomon, the Buddha, you spread your compassion and tenderness across this magnificent and troubled world.

All breathing beings, may you all be held in compassion and tenderness, every one.
All breathing beings, may your sorrows and struggles and pains be eased.
All beings in every form, may you feel this well-wishing of compassion.
May it touch you, radiating out from your heart.
May you all find a way for your hearts to be at peace.

Now you sit quietly as the bodhisattva of compassion. Take a few more minutes quietly to radiate this loving compassion and care, or to surround whoever arises in the heart and mind and make sure that they are included.

Finally, feel your breathing and sense how you're breathing together with myriad other beings—millions and billions breathing, all tender beings. And how, as you breathe together with them, wherever they are, you can share the great heart of compassion.

May their struggles be eased.
And may they and all beings be at peace.

When you're ready, let your eyes open gently. Keeping the spirit of compassion, tenderness for yourself especially.

Know that this is a form of meditation that you can alter or change as you need. You can change the phrases so they speak from your heart. You can do it silently, without words at all. And if it feels difficult or awkward or mechanical, have compassion for that too. Tenderness and compassion for how hard it is, for the awkwardness of it, the fears that it brings up. Hold it all with compassion.

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