

Compassion Practice

A Practice to Cultivate Compassion and a Healthy Mind



Overview

Compassion practice can help us build our personal strength to persevere in times of difficulty and can also develop our resilience. *Resilience* is the ability to bounce back after periods of stress and suffering. This practice can help people recover from burnout or empathy fatigue. It can also help you shift from being stuck in empathy and move yourself towards compassion. It also helps us hold multiple perspectives and be more inclusive of others.

This practice is adapted from Thupten Jinpa's book, *A Fearless Heart: How the Courage to Be Compassionate Can Transform Our Lives*.

Get Started

1. Take your seat.

- To begin, find a comfortable place to sit and take a meditation posture. Try to find a place where your spine can be straight but not rigid.
- Place your feet about hip-distance apart. Place your hands on your thighs or folded in your lap. Close your eyes, or if you prefer to keep them open, cast your gaze gently down toward the floor.
- You should be able to relax in this position and also find a sense of strength, openness, and stability.

2. Do three cleansing breaths.

- Deeply inhale through your nose, bringing the air all the way down into your belly. Then exhale by pushing it out through your mouth. You can imagine pushing out the stress of your day when you exhale like this.
- When you finish your third exhalation, let your breathing go back to its natural rhythm.

Do the Practice

3. Bring to mind a loved one, someone for whom it is easy to feel warmth and love

- When you think about this person, your natural warmth and affection should arise. It is helpful to avoid picking difficult or conflicted relationships in the beginning of this practice
- Bring an image of this person to mind or recall a memory of being with this person.
- Notice how you feel when you think about this person: How does your heart and chest area feel? You might feel some warmth or a sense of openness.
- If you feel nothing at all, don't worry – this will change with practice.

4. Imagining this loved one, and feeling in your body your natural warmth and care, silently say the following phrases:

May you be happy.

May you be free from suffering.

May you be healthy.

May you find peace and joy.

5. Now, refresh the image of your loved one in your mind, and repeat the above phrases two more times.

6. Now think of a time when this loved one was having some difficulty.

- This could be stress, poor health, anger, pain, or confusion of some sort.
- Notice what sensations or feelings arise in you as you think about this person suffering.
- You may feel an aching in your heart, a sense of uneasiness in your stomach, or the urge to reach out and help. These are your natural feelings of empathy.

Now, you will begin to shift from your natural empathy into a compassionate stance.

7. Being aware of your love and concern for your loved one while remembering this challenging situation for them, silently offer the following phrases:

May you be free from suffering.
May you be free from fear and anger.
May you find peace.
May you live with ease.

8. Now, refresh the image of your loved one in your mind, along with the challenging situation and your feelings of care and concern for them, and repeat these phrases two more times.

May you be free from suffering.
May you be free from fear and anger.
May you find peace.
May you live with ease.

9. Now imagine as you breathe out that a warm light emerges from the center of your heart.

- Imagine that this warm light extends outward and touches your loved one.
- Imagine that as this warm light touches your loved one, it eases their suffering and brings them peace and tranquility.
- Do this for 90 seconds or so.
- Now, let go of that imagery.

10. If you feel willing, you can try to expand your compassion to include more people.

- Bring to mind a person or several people that you care about who may be suffering in some way at this time.
- These may be people that you would like to help, but for many reasons feel somewhat limited or unable to help them right now.
- Imagine these people in front you and connect to your feelings of love and care for these people.

11. Silently offer these phrases to them:

May all of you be free from suffering.
May all of you be free from fear and anger.
May all of you find peace.
May all of you live with ease.

12. Repeat these phrases two more times.

May all of you be free from suffering.
May all of you be free from fear and anger.
May all of you find peace.
May all of you live with ease.

End the Practice

13. Let go of all visual imagery and bring your attention back to your breath and the space around you.

- Take a moment to connect to your body and notice what you feel there and also how your thoughts and mind may have been affected by this practice.
- This completes this compassion practice.