

## Compassion Meditation

After establishing a comfortable sitting posture, allow your eyes to close and your attention to settle into the present-time experience of the body. Relax any physical tension that is being held in the body by softening the belly; relax the eyes and jaw and allow your shoulders to naturally fall away from the head.

*Pause*

After a short period of settling into present-time awareness, begin to reflect on your deepest desire for happiness and freedom from suffering. Allow your heart's truest longing for truth and well-being to come into consciousness.

*Pause*

With each breath, breathe into the heart's center the acknowledgment of your wish to be free from harm, to be safe and protected, and to experience compassion for all beings.

*Pause*

Slowly begin to silently offer yourself compassionate phrases with the intention to uncover the heart's sometimes-hidden caring and friendly response. Your phrases can be as simple as the following:

*May I learn to care about suffering and confusion. Pause*

*May I respond with mercy and empathy to pain. Pause*

*May I be filled with compassion.*

*Pause*

If those phrases do not mean anything to you, create your own words to meditate on. Find a few simple phrases that have a compassionate and merciful intention, and slowly begin to offer these well wishes to yourself.

*Pause*

As you repeat these phrases in your mind, the attention will be drawn back into thinking about other things or resisting and judging the practice or your capacity for compassion. It takes a gentle and persistent effort to return to the next phrase each time the attention wanders:

*May I learn to care about suffering and confusion.*

Feel the breath and the body's response to each phrase.

*Pause*

*May I respond with mercy and empathy to pain.*

Notice where the mind goes with each phrase.

*Pause*

*May I be filled with compassion.*

Allow the mind and body to relax into the reverberations of each phrase.

*Pause*

Simply repeat these phrases over and over to yourself like a kind of mantra or statement of positive intention. But don't expect to instantly feel compassionate through this practice.

*Pause*

Sometimes all we see is our lack of compassion and the judging mind's resistance. Simply acknowledge what is happening and continue to repeat the phrases, being as friendly and merciful with yourself as possible in the process.

*Three minutes of silence*

Let go of sending compassion to yourself and bring attention back to your breath and body, again relaxing into the posture. Then bring someone to mind who has been beneficial for you to know or someone

you know of, someone who has inspired you or shown you great compassion.

*Pause*

Recognizing that just as you wish to be cared for and understood that benefactor too shares the universal desire to be met with compassion, begin offering him or her the caring phrases. Slowly repeat each phrase with that person in mind as the object of your well-wishing:

*Just as I wish to learn to care about suffering and confusion, to respond with mercy and empathy to pain, and to be filled with compassion, may you also learn to care about suffering and confusion.*

*Pause*

*May you respond with mercy and empathy to pain.*

*Pause*

*May you be filled with compassion.*

*Pause*

Continue offering these phrases from your heart to your benefactor's, developing the feeling of compassion in relationship to the pain of others. When the mind gets lost in a story, memory, or fantasy, simply return to the practice.

*Pause*

Begin again offering mercy and care to the benefactor.

*Three minutes of silence*

Now let the benefactor go and return to your direct experience of the breath and body. Pay extra attention to your heart or emotional experience.

*Pause*

Then bring to mind someone whom you do not know well, someone who is neutral. Someone you neither love nor hate— perhaps someone you don't know at all, a person you saw during your day, walking down the street or in line at the market.

*Pause*

With the understanding that the desire for freedom from suffering is universal, begin offering that neutral person the compassion-ate phrases:

*May you learn to care about suffering and confusion. Pause*

*May you respond with mercy and empathy to pain. Pause*

*May you be filled with compassion.*

*Three minutes of silence*

Now expand the practice to include family and friends toward whom your feelings may be mixed, both loving and judgmental:

*May you all learn to care about suffering and confusion. Pause*

*May you all respond with mercy and empathy to pain. Pause*

*May you all be filled with compassion.*

*Three minutes of silence*

Now expand the practice to include the difficult people in your life and in the world. (By difficult we mean those whom you have put out of your heart, those toward whom you hold resentment.)

With even the most basic understanding of human nature, it will become clear that all beings wish to be met with compassion; all beings—even the annoying, unskillful, violent, confused, and unkind—wish to be free from suffering.

*Pause*

With this in mind, and with the intention to free yourself from hatred, fear, and ill will, allow someone who is a source of difficulty in your mind or heart to be the object of your compassion meditation, meeting that person with the same phrases and paying close attention to your heart-mind's response:

*May you learn to care about suffering and confusion. Pause*

*May you respond with mercy and empathy to pain. Pause*

*May you be filled with compassion.*

*Three minutes of silence*

Now begin to expand the field of compassion to all those who are in your immediate vicinity. Start by sending compassionate phrases to everyone in the meeting. Then gradually expand to those in your town or city, allowing your positive intention for meeting everyone with compassion to spread out in all directions.

*Pause*

Imagine covering the whole world with these positive thoughts. Send compassion to the north and south, east and west. Radiate an open heart and fearless mind to all beings in existence—those above and below, the seen and the unseen, those being born and those who are dying. With a boundless and friendly intention, begin to repeat the phrases:

*May all beings learn to care about suffering and confusion. May all beings respond with mercy and empathy to pain. May all beings be filled with compassion.*

After a few minutes of sending compassion to all beings everywhere, simply let go of the phrases and bring attention back to your breath and body, investigating the sensations and emotions that are present now. Then, whenever you are ready, allow your eyes to open and your attention to come back to your surroundings.