

## Guided Meditation: Compassion Where It is Easy

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Hello and welcome, and happy to see the greetings and to be back here from being gone for two weeks. I was teaching a wonderful retreat at IRC and feel still kind of in the settledness and calm of that retreat. I feel quite happy to be here to continue this series on compassion as part of the larger series on love. This week, the topic is *Compassion Samādhi*.

One of the important forms of meditation in our Buddhist tradition, one of the options and forms, is meditation that is centered on compassion, on *karuṇā*. This very beautiful quality of compassion, in its essence, just by itself, without the kind of stickiness that gets stuck to it or gets confused by it being distress or horror or anger or, you know, more personal suffering. There's a way of kind of entering into compassion so the tenderness and the warmth, the flow of compassion, becomes the entire field of awareness.

A metaphor for that is: when the sun comes up, the dark night ends. And if you can see, the entire field of awareness, walking around outside, becomes filled with light. And we seem to be able to get along just fine then in daylight, without too much thought about it. We can talk and take care of things and do all kinds of things together with light. So the same way with compassion, it can fill the field of awareness, almost like a kind of light, or an atmosphere, or a mood, or a state of kind of our whole being.

And it's a remarkable state. It's a very... and it's possible to go into deep *samādhi*. And so in talking about *karuṇā samādhi* today, I do so in the context of now spending, you know, almost four months on and off on the topic of love, and last year spending six months or so exploring the topic of *samādhi*. In a sense, this brings it all together around compassion.

So, the image that Buddhism sometimes presents for compassion is the beautiful statues of *Avalokiteśvara*, Kuan Yin. Maybe I'll try to have one here for YouTube in the morning, next tomorrow, where Kuan Yin sits in a posture of repose. It's at ease, soft, fluid, gazing upon the

suffering of the world, caring about it. Meant to be one of the beings that is most involved in supporting people who are suffering, helping them. And so it's not a passive ease, but an ease which allows the fullness of compassion to come forth.

So to begin the meditation, see if you can find a posture that has just the right balance for you of being alert and being at ease. And the ease is important somehow. So if you normally have difficult, deep, painful knees if you sit cross-legged, maybe this is a time to sit in the chair. And so to assume meditation posture and to gently close your eyes and to take a few long, slow, full breaths, without tiring yourself or getting winded, just enough to invite your attention into your body as you breathe.

Here, in this body, now, this is the place where the gold mine of compassion can be found. As you exhale, long exhale, relax and soften the body. And then letting your breathing return to normal. And in whatever way is easiest for you, have a broad experience, a broad sensing of your body. And within that broad awareness of the body, kind of panoramic, on the exhale, continue to soften your body.

Relax the shoulders, the belly. Maybe it's possible to soften, relax the arms and hands. Maybe the face can soften. And on the exhale, to soften the thinking mind. As if the thinking mind can be like a surface of a choppy lake that settles and becomes quiet, spreading its flat, quiet surface out in all directions.

And then to begin compassion, bring to mind some person or animal for whom it's very easy for you to imagine having simple, clear compassion, that you would care for them and feel a kind of warmth and love and care. Then want to support them and help them in a time of difficulty. But the difficulty is not that great. It's like maybe a five-year-old child who has tripped on the sidewalk and is kind of a little bit shocked and upset and distressed, but nothing more than that. Nothing to be distressed with as a grown-up, but someone who's to care for, someone to tend to.

Or an animal that maybe has been frightened by a loud sound. Maybe a pet has been frightened by a loud sound, and this animal is fine and safe, but afraid. And so you gently, your compassion is there to care, show that it's safe, and be with it. Or maybe there's a bird that has fallen from hitting a window and is stunned, and you hold it to keep it safe, gently, softly, and it begins to revive and you know it's going to be okay. And so your care and compassion is there without you being distressed or upset. Soft, clear, kind, holding the bird until it flies away.

A natural arising compassion, feeling in the body, in the heart, in the mind. How such com-

passion would live in you and arise in you. Compassion is more than just a logical thought to offer care. There's a softness, a tenderness, a warmth, and a motivation to act. Gentle, quiet, maybe slow.

And sitting here quietly, breathe through the place in your body where compassion is most at home. Breathe through it, breathe with it. Imagining a person or an animal that you're caring for in this kind of simple compassion. With every breath, compassion. Maybe in every exhale, even gently, softly, in the same tone of voice as the tenderness within, just quietly say the word compassion, letting go into the body's invitation, the body's possibility of tender, easeful, caring compassion.

As you inhale, spreading compassion, the warmth, the care, the gentleness, with ease, spreading it through your body, letting go of any thoughts that are different, that are other than staying close to compassion. And in whatever way you experience compassion or think of it or can direct it to some person or being that's easy, can you find within yourself the place where that intuition, impulse for compassion is calmest, quietest, maybe even silent within? And let the thinking mind and the heart settle into that quiet, the calm corners or center of compassion, breathing with it.

And then as we come to the end of this sitting, orient your calm care, your calm compassion. Wherever it's found within you may be tender, gentle, the way that compassion can be when it corners or deep inside, without any distress, where it can be sweet, and turn that compassion outward toward the world, and be the Kuan Yin that sits in a posture of repose, gazing upon the world with care, with compassion, with love. And for now, that's all that's needed. Nothing to do, nothing to respond to directly, but to be a person who for some minutes can gaze upon the world with compassion in a way that doesn't add more suffering to the world, but does the opposite, reassures everyone that there is profound care available in this world, starting with yourself here.

May all beings be free of their suffering. May all beings be free of tension, contraction. May all beings be free of fear, anxiety. May all beings be free of the incredible pain of hostility and hatred. May all beings be reassured in their loneliness that no one's alone, that our care, our love includes everyone. May all beings be happy, may all beings be safe, may all beings be peaceful, may all beings be free, and may we contribute to that possibility. Thank you.