

## Guided Meditation: Embodied Compassion

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So, good morning everyone, and welcome. Welcome to IMC and the continuation of our week on *Compassion Samādhi*. And it's a wonderful practice of meditation to focus on compassion. And it's for the obvious reason; some people would say it's wonderful because compassion is wonderful. And it's wonderful to see that grow and develop.

It's also wonderful because it can show us the opposite in us. It can show us all the things that stand in the way of having compassion, having love. There's a lot of beliefs, a lot of attitudes, a lot of thoughts, carried hurts that we carry, resentments we carry, that can get in the way. There's fears we carry that can get in the way of really focusing on compassion. There are beliefs.

And rather than seeing those challenges to compassion as mistakes, one way to understand this compassion meditation is that it succeeds if it shows us what makes it difficult. And the other thing that's wonderful about compassion meditation is the very things that make it difficult to have compassion are often good parts of ourselves to hold in compassionate care. And so we can practice the compassion on the very things that make it difficult. Though sometimes what we need to do is to have a deep kind of reflection and consideration about what these interruptions to compassion might need from us. They might have their own needs that need to be addressed separately from the meditation.

But also, to see what gets in the way of them is also to understand maybe that the focus of attention in compassion meditation is in the wrong direction, an unhelpful direction. It's easy with compassion, where the focus is somehow on suffering, to go into thoughts, into stories, into frightening futures, what this means, where this is going, this is going to be too difficult. Right. They can go quickly into deep-seated beliefs and also attitudes of I can't manage, or attitudes of responsibility. I have to do, I have to respond.

Sometimes what gets in the way of simple, simple compassion is somehow the idea that there's an obligation, or there's people who's watching us, expecting us, wanting us to go all out to address the suffering of the world. So the orientation that helps with this is to realize that this is not the direction that this meditation is going. The direction is a radical simplicity of care, a radical simplicity where we can settle the thinking mind, the story-making mind, the agitated mind. We can quiet ourselves, quiet the mind, so that as a *samādhi*, we're really deeply connected to our body. And it's through the body that the Buddha taught that *samādhi* grows and gets expansive.

Some people will complain that this means abandoning the world to just be simple and just be present for ourselves. The opposite is true, that cultivating a powerful *samādhi* of compassion is something we can then bring with us into the world to support our friends, our family, our communities, the world itself. So the focus on today is embodiment of compassion, and letting the body be the receptacle, the container, the field in which compassion has a chance to grow and develop.

So, to assume a meditation posture, and to gently close your eyes, and to begin in seeing inside of yourself, in your body, your heart, your mind, what my words, my introduction this morning, has awakened in you? What response do you have? Is it welcome? Is it unwelcome? Does it raise challenges? Is it supportive? And any response is okay.

The idea is to not be living in the response so much as knowing it. Knowing yourself through your body, feeling and sensing. What is your body's experience of yourself right now? And can you experience yourself without thinking about it, as if you'll have a deeper connection to yourself in a silent sensing of body, breathing, gently, taking some fuller breaths so you feel your body more from the inside, from the inside out, the expansion of the rib cage, maybe the expansion of the belly.

And as you exhale, let's see if you can relax the body, letting there be a settling, a releasing downward places of tension, letting your breathing return to normal. And on the inhale, feel the thinking mind. And on the exhale, relax, settle the thinking mind. And then settling into your breathing again, feeling how different it's been. It is the experience of breathing in and the experience of breathing out. Feeling it more than thinking about it.

And then as you breathe, is there any place in your body that you most associate with compassion, with a warm-hearted care for others or for yourself? And if there is such a place, even if you don't feel it right now, for two or three breaths, breathe through, breathe with that place in your body. And then bring to mind some person, some situation the person's experiencing, where it's easy for you to have a simple ordinary compassion. Compassion that maybe

doesn't require a response, a responsibility. It could be an animal, could be yourself.

Someone whom, maybe ordinarily, you're ready to feel friendly for, have goodwill or a good-hearted attitude towards, in thinking of their suffering, maybe considering how you would like them not to suffer, and how there's a goodness, rightness, deep inside of wishing them not to suffer. And for now, no need to be concerned of how to do it, just to feel the care, compassion, desire to help, to support, desire for them not to suffer, almost as an opening of your own heart. Keeping this person in mind, maybe very softly saying, may you be free of suffering.

Feel the place where that compassion lives in you, some aspect of it that feels has a rightness to it, a pleasure, a sweetness or goodness. And let that be the receptacle, the receiving end of all that's going on for you. Let that be the resting place for your awareness, the sensations of compassion, and to stay calmly with it, gently breathe through that place, with those sensations. And if there's a place within of compassion where a warmth, a pleasure, a sweetness of compassion lives for you, remember to put aside the stories and reactions, resistance you have, to let go into those sensations, maybe allowing them to spread as you breathe in, expanding with the expanding torso, chest, settling and spreading outwards and downwards as you exhale.

As if breathing is a gentle wind that fans the flames of compassion. Spreading through your body. Spreading the warmth of compassion. Imagining that warmth is relaxing the body, outwards, upwards, downwards, throughout your body. And as it spreads, if it spreads, to let that be a quieting of the thinking mind.

And as we come to the end of the sitting, whatever abilities you have for spatial awareness, to sense or imagine the space around you, open up that sense to be aware of the room you're in, place you're in, with your memory of what it was like and what space around you is like. And as you breathe in, to let the warmth or goodness of compassion, the sensation, the feeling, spread out into that space around you as if it's a warmth or a light. And this involves a little bit of imagination. Imagining your compassion filling the space around you, and from there out into the world, in a way that also represents you and your heart being open, to receive and sense the suffering of this world, to feel it and know it in an uncomplicated way, for a few moments, nothing to do, nothing to be concerned with, simple compassion, open, spreading into the whole world.

And may it be that we stay open, thoughtful and considerate of the suffering of all beings.  
May we be open and available to wish compassion to any being in this world that we

encounter. May all beings be free of suffering. May all beings be free of loneliness and fear. May all beings be free of insecurity of all types. May they feel safe. May they be safe. May all beings be free of their own clinging and self-criticism. May they be filled with the goodness of goodwill, compassion, peace. May all beings be free.

Thank you.