## From Roshi Joan Halifax

## Meditation: Introductory Practice Emphasizing Attention, (Positive) Affect; Intention, Insight; Embodiment, Engagement

(This guided meditation engages the A/A axis, I/I axis, and E/E axis, as described in the heuristic model of compassion developed by Halifax (see paper). From the point of view of this model, compassion is an emergent process from a system of interconnected dynamical features. The guided meditation below engages all axes in an attempt to prime the emergence of authentic compassion.)

Welcome.

Thank you for participating in this program exploring the cultivation of compassion.

Please sit comfortably in a chair.

Take a few moments to get settled in your chair.

Allow your eyes to close gently.

(pause)

Notice the sensation of your back where it meets the back of the chair.

(pause)

Sense the support of the chair and allow yourself to relax into it.

(slightly longer pause)

Relax your legs, keeping both feet flat on the floor.

Notice the sensation of the soles of your feet on the floor.

Be present to a sense of connectedness with the earth.

Notice if there is a sense of stability and confidence in the body, as you are getting more grounded by bringing attention gently to your feet on the floor.

(longer pause)

Now gently shift your attention to your spine.

Sense your spine, without evaluating or judging.

(pause)

Your back is a physical metaphor that points toward your natural capacity to uphold yourself in the midst of difficulties.

This is called equanimity, your ability to be grounded and present for whatever is happening in the present moment.

Breathe into your back a sense of energy, and breathe out an unnecessary tension.

Appreciate this body, knowing that equanimity supports you in the experience of opening to the suffering of others .

(pause)

You can remind yourself of the value of equanimity by silently saying, “Strong back….”

(longer pause)

Now let your attention go to your belly.

Breathe into your belly.

Notice the natural course of your breath, as your belly rises and falls.

(pause)

Begin by just noticing the feeling of the breath as you breathe in and breathe out. The breath will find its own natural rhythm. You don’t need to force it in any way. Just allow yourself to breathe in, gently, and breathe out gently, in this moment.

On your outbreath, let go of any hesitation, any tension, any concerns that might be present.

Release tension around the face, neck and shoulders, hands and legs with every outbreath.

(longish pause)

Feel your natural courage and openness as you breathe naturally into your belly.

(longer pause)

Now, please, gently and firmly shift your attention to your chest.

Sense the tender, open space of your heart.

Rest in this openness, this space of compassion, this willingness to be with the suffering of others and yourself, and the wish to alleviate it.

(long pause)

Notice the sensations in the belly and heart as you open to compassion.

(pause)

Strong back, soft front…….. Equanimity and compassion……….

(longer pause)

For the next breaths, let yourself be present to the fact that, like everyone else, you also have had difficulties.

Be specific and recall a time which was somewhat challenging for you.

(longish pause)

As you recall this event, return to that sense of strength in the spine, keeping in touch with the sensations of your back against the chair.

(pause)

Be with the sense of groundedness by gently and briefly bringing your attention to your feet on the floor.

This way you can have a felt-sense of solidity and stability supporting you.

(longer pause)

Recall the memory again, and notice what the body experiences as you sit with this memory.

Please don’t judge your experience. Whatever you are feeling is ok.

Just let yourself track whatever the body senses as you sit with this memory.

(long pause)

Now imagine, for a moment, being free of all difficulties and the causes of these difficulties.

(Pause)

And imagine dedicating yourself to helping others be free of suffering.

As you breathe in, feel the strength of your resolve rising up from your belly to your heart.

As you breathe out, release any tension you might feel around your heart or in your belly.

(pause)

Remind yourself of your own tenderness and your capacity for caring and compassion by internally saying, once again: “Strong back, soft front. Equanimity, compassion…..”

(long pause)

At this point, the whole front of your body can feel open, receptive, and permeable.

Your open heart allows you to perceive and be touched by the suffering of others.

Sit with this sense of openness, tenderness and caring toward others.

(pause)

Through your strong back, which lends you equanimity, you have the strength to be with suffering.

Let these felt qualities of equanimity, compassion, and strength mix together.

Let them nourish your genuine presence.

Strong back, soft front…..

(long pause)

As you continue, it’s important to touch in with your intention.

Why are you engaging in this practice?

(pause)

Can you sense that all things are connected to one another? Taking the time to do this practice is a gift to yourself and others, opening your heart and mind bringing compassion to yourself and others.

Explore this possibility for some moments…..

(longer pause)

Recall someone to whom you feel especially close and who has experienced some difficulty. This is someone dear to you, whom you deeply wish to be free of suffering, whether the suffering is physical, social, mental, or spiritual.

(longish pause)

As you bring this person to mind, breathe deeply into your belly, and pay attention to what you are feeling in the body.

(longish pause)

Recall their humanness, bring to mind their positive qualities, and also the fact that he or she has been having a hard time or has gone through a lot.

Now internally repeat these simple phrases of compassion toward the person you have recalled, as you imagine that this is so.

With your breath, silently say to him or her:

“May you be free from suffering…

May you be free from the causes of suffering….

May you be safe…

May you find peace.”

(longer pause)

Continue to recall this person and their suffering, and silently, as best you can, with your full heart and attention, say to him or her:

“May you be free from this suffering…

May you be free of the causes of suffering….

May you be safe…

May you find peace.”

(short pause)

And for a final time, imagining this person you are close to, silently and with all your heart say to him or her:

“May you be free from this suffering…

May you be free from the causes of suffering…

May you be safe…

May you find peace.”

(short pause)

Imagine this potential as actual.

(long pause)

Let your wholehearted wish for this one’s well-being help strengthen your resolve to help others.

(long pause)

**Compassion for target (charity recipient):**

Each day will have a randomly selected charity recipient from a set of 12 possible recipients, and so each target will appear 2 or 3 times over the course of four weeks

Please open your eyes and look at the person on the iPod in front of you.

*For thirty seconds, this person’s biography plays over audio*

Notice whatever sensations are present in your heart and your body as you gaze at this person…

What are you experiencing?...

(longish pause)

As you see the face of this person, what sensations are you experiencing in your body,…. in your heart?

(pause)

Are there other sensations that you are aware of, perhaps an aching sensation, or a sense of concern, felt as tightness in the throat or tension in the belly, as pressure behind the eyes, or weight on the shoulders?

(pause)

Scan your body, and notice whatever is present as you gaze at this person’s face. And don’t judge what you are experiening; just notice it.

(long pause)

Really sense into this person’s situation, and with your inbreath, draw in the felt-sense of their situation.

Imagine it as your own.

(long pause)

Consider that he or she has been through so much, and wants to have a better life.

(long pause)

Really allow yourself to feel tenderness and a connection with this person, as though he or she is very dear to you.

(pause)

And now, with your next outbreath, imagine that you are filling this person with warmth, kindness, and healing from your limitless heart, and let the exhale carry this feeling to him or her.

(longish pause)

Breathing in, sense in your body that there is relief for this person, greater ease and healing.

With each breath, imagine it so.

(pause)

With your next exhale, let the sense of kindness continue to ease his or her suffering and bring this person to well-being and even joy.

Please do this with the strong heartfelt wish that he or she will be free from suffering. ……This is caring and compassion.

(long pause)

Please close and relax your eyes.

Let’s explore this felt-sense of compassion in another way.

Continue to imagine this person and as you inhale naturally, bring in the truth that this person has really been through so much. Sense into her or his situation as genuinely as possible, and really draw it in on the inbreath. Feel the sense of the other’s difficulty in your body, in your heart, while, at the same time, being really grounded. ….Strong back, soft front……..

(pause)

As you exhale, send him or her relief from suffering, while silently and kindly saying:

“May you be free from this suffering…

May you be free from the causes of suffering…

May you be safe…

May you find peace.”

(pause)

Continue to silently say, with all your heart:

“May you be free from this suffering…

May you be free from the causes of suffering…

May you be safe…

May you find peace.”

(pause)

And for this third and last time, internally and with your whole heart say:

“May you be free from this suffering…

May you be free from the causes of suffering…

May you be safe…

May you find peace.”

(long pause)

Without judgment, notice the sensations around your heart.

(pause)

What are you experiencing?

Put your attention into the space around your heart. What do you notice?

(pause)

Do you notice sensations of warmth, openness and tenderness?

(pause)

Is there a felt sense of aching or relief in the heart or belly?

(pause)

Notice how your belly feels? Your guts?

(pause)

Are there other sensations that you can track right now in relation to your sensing of this person’s suffering and his or her relief from suffering?

(pause)

Whatever you are sensing physically, did you have the wish to take away this person’s suffering? Again, it’s ok to feel whatever you are feeling. Just notice it.

(pause for at least 10 seconds)

Completing your practice, please offer to this person whatever good that has arisen for you in the thirty minutes of this session.

Wish for him or her the best, saying to yourself: May you find peace and well-being….. (pause)

Let that sense of tenderness, kindness and goodness flow from you to him or her.

(pause)

Recall the elements of the practice that you are bringing into your life—including equanimity, stability, kindness, courage, and compassion.

Remind yourself often to bring the spirit of this practice into your everyday life in order to benefit others and yourself.

(pause)

Thank you for engaging in this process with us; may your day go well.