**From Roshi Joan Halifax: Meditation Four (this practice is called “Giving and Receiving”)**

Meditation:

Welcome back to our program on cultivating compassion.

Please sit comfortably in a chair.

Take a few moments to get settled and gently close your eyes.

(Longish pause)

Notice the sensation of your back where it meets the back of the chair and sense the support of the chair, letting yourself relax into it.

(Long pause)

The practice you will be doing is called Sending and Receiving.

It is done to develop our compassion for ourselves and others, strengthening our ability to be present for our own suffering and the suffering of others.

It is a practice of great kindness that can open up our whole being to the presence of suffering. Where we may have disconnected or distanced from our own or others’ suffering in the past, this practice can give us strength and willingness to meet suffering with the energy of kindness and openness.

This practice is one of the richest and bravest practices that we can do.

We begin the practice by connecting to the heart and connecting to an openness to help others and to work openly with our own situation.

When we look deeply, we see that to help others, we must relate with kindness toward our own suffering, our helplessness, and frustration, our doubt and fear.

Through our own experience with suffering and opening to our own suffering, we can begin to accept and be with others and ourselves in a more open, kind and understanding way.

Our own difficult personal experiences then become the bridge that leads us to compassion.

Many of us have learned to respond to our own suffering by pushing it away, avoiding it, fighting against it.

In order for us to really feel compassion, we must first touch our own suffering instead of pushing it away.

Some courage and kindness is what it takes to be present for our own suffering, without trying to change or fix it.

Only when we are able to be present for our own suffering are we able to be present for the suffering of others.

The practice of Sending and Receiving develops our ability to be present for suffering and offers us a way to cultivate compassion.

It trains us to use the energy of kindness to open our hearts to suffering and transform it into well-being.

It asks us to invite suffering into our being and let it break open the armor of our heart.

The tender spaciousness that arises awakens selfless warmth and compassion.

We cannot help but send our love and kindness to the one who is suffering, be it others or ourselves.

(Pause)

To begin, gently close your eyes and let your body and mind settle.

You want to feel relaxed and open.

Take the time you need to allow your body to settle.

(pause)

Breathe in whatever you are feeling—calm, fear, agitation, anger, resistance—and allow it all to be there. It’s ok.

On the exhalation breathe out well-being.

Clear your mind by bringing awareness to anything that may be agitating you and breathing it in, accepting it with kindness.

Then, as you exhale, release any agitation or tension that is there with your breath. Let this release bring yourself some spaciousness.

Do this breath practice until you are settled and alert.

(Long pause)

When you feel settled, begin the second stage of the practice, which is establishing a rhythm of breathing.

On your inbreath imagine that you are inhaling heavy, hot air.

On your outbreath visualize exhaling cool, light air.

Continue with this pattern—breathing in heaviness and breathing out lightness—until it is familiar to you.

The heaviness is suffering; the lightness is well-being.

(Long pause)

Now imagine that you are breathing through all the pores of your body.

On the inbreath heavy, hot air enters every pore.

On the outbreath, cool light flows from every pore.

(Long pause)

Now visualize a metal cover or case around your heart.

This metal case is everything about you that is difficult for you to accept: all the things that you don’t like or criticize or judge about yourself, all the ways you get caught in worry or fear or anger or protection of yourself.

It is the band that hardens your heart.

(Short pause)

The practice invites you to dissolve this metal case and open your heart to its natural nonjudgmental state of warmth, kindness, and spaciousness.

You can do this by visualizing the metal case melting when the inbreath of suffering touches it.

When the heart opens, the hot, heavy air of suffering vanishes into the vast inner space of the heart.

What arises is natural compassion.

It is this quality of a free heart, released from its armor, that allows you to be with suffering, even when it is intense.

As you continue this practice, it can be strengthened by focusing on the reason you are doing this practice, bringing to mind the wish with all your heart that all beings can be free from suffering.

It helps to make this wish specific, personal, and sincere.

It helps to touch in with another person or event that evokes this wish.

(Short pause)

Bring to your mind someone, dead or alive, with whom you feel a deep connection: a parent, child, your grandmother, your dearest friend, your beloved teacher, it can even be a pet—someone who is suffering or who suffered.

You would do anything to help this one.

Be with this one and feel what he or she is experiencing.

Let your whole being turn toward this one’s suffering and your wish that it be relieved.

See how vulnerable she or he is.

Like a mother who will do anything to help her child, you will do anything to help this one who is dear to you.

Visualize the suffering of this dear one as polluted, hot smoke and breathe it in through your whole body. Breathe it in through every pore.

Visualize, and perhaps feel directly, the way that breathing in this one’s suffering touches the metal case around your heart, and breaks it open, opening your heart fully to the suffering.

The hot smoke instantly vanishes into the great space of your heart, and from this space spontaneously arises an outbreath of care, compassion, and healing. Send this out with your exhale. Send this as a deep, cool, light, and spacious healing breath to your dear one.

Breathe it out through every pore of your body. Let the outbreath flow.

Then again, inhale this one’s suffering as dark smoke and exhale healing to this one as a cool healing breath.

(pause)

Continue at your own pace, breathing in this one’s suffering and breathing out care and healing to them, through every pore in your body.

(Long pause)

Now, let this one’s suffering remind you of the many others who find themselves suffering.

Your dear one is your connection to all of the others.

Breathe in their suffering.

Let your heart break open.

Send them healing with your outbreath.

Continue breathing in suffering, breathing out care and healing with each breath at your own pace.

(Long pause)

Bring the practice to your own life.

Remember a time when you were in a difficult situation.

A time that may still weigh on you.

You may have been hurt, angry, depressed, outraged, or afraid.

Remembering the feeling as vividly as possible, breathe it in as hot, heavy, polluted smoke.

(Pause)

Let go of any sense of blame, any sense of guilt.

Let go of the story of what happened or what didn’t happen.

Rather, breathe in the raw feeling directly as the hot smoke of suffering. Take it in through every pore of your body.

Feel the heat of it completely with each breathing in.

This practice takes a lot of courage.

You might find yourself pushing away, resisting breathing in the suffering.

If so, you can breathe in your resistance itself as hot, heavy smoke.

You can breathe in aloneness, boredom, arrogance, confusion, grief, or fear—whatever feeling your suffering of the moment takes.

Let the inbreath touch that place that guards your heart and melt it there. Opening for you your vast and spacious heart.

Breathe out the sense of spaciousness, openness, kindness, and surrender that arises, as a cool, healing exhalation.

Shower these qualities on yourself in a rain of cool, healing light.

Aerating your suffering in this way can be scary.

It’s ok. Be gentle.

(Pause)

Don’t analyze what you are doing.

Don’t try to figure it out.

Simply do the practice.

Breathe in the heavy, hot smoke of your suffering and breathe out the relief of kindness.

As you breathe in your hot, heavy, tar-like suffering, allow yourself to feel it, to take it in completely. Then breathe out clarity and surrender, relief and kindness.

(Long pause)

Now consider that at this very moment many others are experiencing the same kind of difficulties as you—anger or fear or grief, for example.

The details of their suffering may be different but that is ok.

The point is to connect with the truth that others are suffering just as you are.

Feeling your distress and their distress, breathe it in for others as well as for yourself and exhale a cool, healing breath to all.

Do this for several rounds of breath.

(Long pause)

This won’t increase your suffering; rather, it will open your heart to the truth that others are suffering as you are.

It will give you the opportunity to connect with them.

Let this connectedness open your heart even more toward yourself and them.

And as you breathe out clarity and kindness, let the breath go to all those who are suffering as you are.

(Long pause)

Breathing in universal suffering—your suffering and that of all beings—as heavy, hot smoke.

The hardness around your heart dissolves, and your great heart opens as the smoke of suffering vanishes into its vast space.

Through every pore of your body, breathe out care and kindess and healing as a cool, light breath.

(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.

Look with gentle and non-judgmental eyes at this person whose photograph is on the iPod and please listen to their story…….

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

Maintaining the rhythm of the hot, smoky inbreath and cool, light outbreath, consider how this one has suffered.

For a moment gaze into the eyes of this person.

(Short pause)

See his or her face.

See if you can allow yourself to be in touch with the difficulties that this one has had.

(Pause)

Now gaze at him or her in the iPod.

Breathing in the hot, heavy smoke of his or her suffering, let it dissolve any hardness around your heart so that your heart can absorb and transform that suffering.

On your outbreath send all your strength, understanding, caring, and love to this person, as a fresh and cool exhalation.

Do this for the next few inhalations and exhalations, breathing in the smoke of suffering, exhaling the cool breath of healing and sending it to this person.

(Long pause)

Now allow yourself to let go of the visualization of this person and keep the rhythm of the breathing steady, breathing in hot, heavy smoke, smoke that dissolves completely into the vastness of your heart.

Breathe out through every pore of your body coolness and healing.

Send it to the whole world.

(Longish pause)

Without judgment, notice whatever you are experiencing?

Put your attention into the space around your heart.

What do you notice?

(pause)

Bring your attention to your belly. How does it feel?

(Pause)

Are there other sensations that you can track right now in relation to your sensing of this person’s difficulties and his or her heart and their desire to get their life together?

(Longish pause)

Completing your practice, please offer to this person whatever good that has arisen for you in the twenty 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)

Throughout the day, remind yourself 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.