

## SUNLIGHT ON SHADOWS: Embracing Great Compassion

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### Meditation 1

#### *Reflecting on Our Lives*

Take a few moments to review your life choices and see if you find a connection between what was in your mind and heart at various times and the outcomes.

Think back through your life—the months, years, and decades—and recall how often you've ignored the needs of others when you've been gripped by negative emotions. Recall times when your mind was filled with toxic emotions—self-centeredness, self-protection, attachment to what you wanted, or anger and aversion—that clouded a genuine concern for others. Attachment includes a wide range of emotions ranging from the slightest fanciful inclination to full-blown obsession, all of which stem from wanting what we think will bring us happiness.

Aversion refers to the feeling of not wanting what we think will bring us suffering or prevent our happiness, and it ranges from the slightest irritation to full-blown rage. Maybe you stormed out of an argument and slammed the door, or you yelled insults that later you realized you didn't really mean. What were the immediate consequences of your actions in those relationships? What were the longer-term consequences? If you look back over the years, what happened to those relationships? Are you still in the same job or community? Do you have a good relationship with those people?

Next, think back on the times when your heart was open and filled with concern for others, when your motivation was truly pure, and you had no agenda other than to love someone and let them know they were loved. Maybe you were able to see things from an opposing point of view and recognize another person's fear, for example, and maybe you didn't condemn them. Maybe it was in a family or other challenging situation, but you were able to break through and put their needs before your own. Reflect on the outer and inner consequences of your actions over time. Which choices gave you confidence, nourished you, and allowed you to keep trying to benefit others?

Which choices caused you to feel resentful or shut down or disappointed? What was your motivation at the time? When your negative emotions took over, did you have some kind of attachment or ulterior or mixed motivation?

When you think about situations in which your motivation wasn't so positive, consider what might have happened in those circumstances if you'd focused instead on pure motivation. What would have happened if you'd checked your mind and heart and asked yourself how you could be of greater benefit to everyone equally? How could you have balanced not just the short-term but the long-term benefit of everyone involved? If you'd brought that kind of thought process to your planning or activity, how might the outcome have been different?