

SUNLIGHT ON SHADOWS: Embracing Great Compassion

Meditation 32

Expanding the Alternating Meditation on Compassion

For some of us, our compassion may be more easily awakened by something closer to home, so we start there—with our family members, friends, neighbors, or coworkers who are dealing with unemployment or food scarcity or other challenges. Or with somebody we know and care about who's seriously ill, perhaps without health insurance. Maybe they're in the hospital and connected to machines. Maybe they're at home, bedridden, and their body is wracked with unstoppable pain. We imagine what that would feel like. They had a life. They had work they did in the world to support and nurture themselves and their family. They felt active and engaged. They believed they could contribute, make a difference, and express what was important to them through their body and speech. Now they're no longer able to do any of this. They're no longer able to follow their intentions with action, because illness has overcome them. They may be unable to express what's in their hearts. They can't support themselves or take care of their family. Everything they associated with a meaningful life they're unable to do anymore.

Imagine no longer being able to live the life we know, because the connection between body and mind has changed. There's the loss of identity, the loss of hope, and the loss of the sense of belonging to a community. There's the despair and hopelessness of not knowing what to do with the mind without the body being available.

Imagine how it feels to be so powerless, to feel so isolated, disconnected, desperate, and to not know who we are anymore. Maybe we have a terminal diagnosis, and there's no basis for optimism—only more powerlessness and more pain. We imagine what that would feel like if we didn't have a spiritual path that offered tools to deal with it.

And then we rest the mind.

Next, generate compassion for others in similar situations—in hospitals, in hospice, or who are alone on the street—homeless, jobless, no family, without dignity, promise, or dreams. Then, we let go of trying, and rest in our heart of compassion.

Again, we let the dynamic energy of that compassion express itself as a commitment. It may be a commitment we make to ourself never to forget the suffering of beings and/or to be responsive in whatever way we can, inwardly and outwardly—whatever it is that arises as an expression of our compassion.

Then, again, we rest the mind and let the power of that intention settle deeply into our mind and heart.

Finally, we pray that our capacity to be responsive, to uphold and express that commitment, be sustained and increase until the causes and conditions of the suffering of every being have been completely uprooted. Then, we rest the mind.