

SUNLIGHT ON SHADOWS: Embracing Great Compassion

Meditation 33

Generating Compassion for Those We Feel Aversion Toward

Now we think of somebody we feel aversion toward—to the person themselves, to their choices, or to the role they're playing in our life or the lives of others. We try to put ourselves in their place and imagine their experience. Maybe they're not suffering in the moment but are causing harm to others and planting seeds of future suffering. We imagine what it's like to be that person and try to conceive of the world as they do. We imagine that what they choose to do is the only choice they believe they have to get what they want for themselves and those they love. We imagine what life is like from their perspective. Due to the causes and conditions that created their personal karma, they can't conceive of different choices or behavior. It could be that, even if they have exposure to the idea there could be a different way, they don't believe it's possible. They couldn't imagine getting support for doing things differently, or they don't know how else to behave. Maybe it's the power of habit, maybe it's the power of the environment, but all they know to do is to continue to plant seeds of suffering for themselves and others.

We ask ourselves, what would it be like to experience the world as offering no choices other than to hate or kill or destroy or overpower? What would it be like to have no sense there are windows that can be opened and that all our choices are informed by illusion? And what would it be like to have no sense of refuge or safety, inwardly or outwardly, other than in causes of future misery, and no recognition of how profoundly our choices are perpetuating that misery?

We imagine this is our experience—with no possibility of positivity, no possibility of receiving or expressing kindness or even believing that was possible. All we can see is more and more negativity. What would that level of despair or overwhelm feel like?

And then, we rest the mind.

We think of everybody we can imagine who has this experience of reality. The only options they're aware of are options that involve hurting others. Whether this is due to their culture, their habit, their beliefs, their psychology, or their brain chemistry, it's all they know. In their effort to find relief from pain, all they know to do is create more of it. Think of how many beings this is true for.

Once more, rest the mind.

Then the compassionate insight we've awakened wants to express itself. This expression may emerge as a determination to no longer judge, reject, demonize, or ignore that person but rather to try to help them, to do what we can to protect them from themselves and their own harmful actions, or

whatever commitment we're inspired to make.

Again, we rest the mind.

We then pray that we can help them, help those they're harming, and help uproot not only the immediate experience of suffering but the deeper causes and perpetuation of that suffering. We pray we might find our way through so we can help them find their way through in a different way than they have been. Then we rest the mind.

Keep expanding the meditation, adding different objects of compassion to include more and more beings. We start with those we feel a more accessible compassion for, so we can develop confidence, and then we keep extending the practice outward to include even those we feel the most negative connection with until, ultimately, it includes all beings. Then we dedicate the merit.