

LOVING KINDNESS

teachings by

Sonia Moriceau

2004 - 2009

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LOVING KINDNESS

The Practice of Loving-Kindness, *Metta*

to contemplate:

Sentient beings are numberless,

I vow to meet them with kindness and interest.

Make contact with the spine, make contact with its uprightness, alertness, gentle and tender. Feel the spine upright, and softening in the hips and pelvis. Being upright doesn't mean being rigid, also be soft. Like a bamboo, upright and soft. Take a moment to adjust your motivation. We are here to practise for the benefit of beings. May our practice be of support to the many sentient beings.

Chanting of the Four Divine Abidings

So you first imagine your body hollow, empty from the top of your head down to your toes, only space. Establish this feeling of space inside your body. Now notice the movement of your belly. Notice the rising and the falling and be with that, simply noticing rising, falling. Rising, falling within space, within emptiness. If you become too distracted go back to the spaciousness, the hollowness of the body. Establish again the space within the body, then return to the belly.

As the *Brahma Viharas*, for chanting, in *Pali*, three times:

*Aham avero homi, abyapajjho homi, anigho homi,
sukhi attanam pariharami.*

Aham viya sabbe satta avera hontu, abayapajjha hontu, anigha hontu, sukhi attananam pariharantu.

And for contemplation, the Four Divine Abidings spoken once in English:

*May I be friendly, calm and free from ill-will and may I live in happiness.
As I am, so may all beings be friendly, calm and free from ill-will
and may they live in happiness.*

In the *Brahma Viharas*, 'homi' means self, so have good feelings towards yourself, shower yourself with loving-kindness. 'Hontu' means others, so do that to each one in the room, you are radiating good feelings towards others. There is a pulsation, 'as I am... may others be...'. When you do the chanting imagine a flower in your heart, it grows and grows to fill the whole room. It is the shape of a

flower, you are all sitting together in the shape of a flower, and I am the stem. And in the sitting we can experience the attention of the mind rising above the crown of the head, then feel the energy fields of everyone in the room joined together above our heads, like a girdle around the room. So we are turning the mind to awakening, with *holi* thoughts: ‘Reflections to turn the mind to awakening’, thoughts that take the mind further.

Guided meditation on metta

Short text on metta based on the *Metta Sutra*

My mind is temporarily pure – free from lust, hatred and ignorance.

I charge my pure heart and mind with thoughts of Loving-Kindness.

May I be free from suffering, troubles and worries.

May I be free from anger, jealousy, envy and malice.

Now I charge every particle of my system with thoughts of Loving-Kindness. My whole body is saturated with Loving-Kindness. I am the embodiment of Loving-Kindness.

Mentally I create a happy and healthy aura of Loving-Kindness around me. By means of this aura I cut off all negative thoughts, all hostile vibrations. I am not affected by the negative thoughts of others.

I am fortified by my own thoughts of Loving-Kindness. I radiate these loving thoughts of boundless goodwill towards all beings – above, below and around.

May I be able to identify myself with all without any distinction.

May all beings be well and happy!

May all be free from suffering, troubles and worries!

May they be free from anger, jealousy, envy and malice!

May all live in peace and harmony!

Instructions for guided meditation

The first line is very important, total letting go; do it by body work. It is asking us to empty, true letting go and emptying. Without this first step you cannot begin the meditation. Settle the body, the breath; be calm, free from your usual numbers. Free from your ‘stuff’, for one moment! – temporarily naked. This ‘stuff’ is lodged in the body, so you need to find a body technique to drop it, for a moment. You cannot do the practice without getting rid of the ‘stuff’, obscurations, anxieties – like in *Vajrayana* practice: *Om svabhava suddha sarva dharma, svabhava suddho hum*. Emptying, the hollow body; and slow down, don’t just plant yourself on your cushion, in busyness, do it mindfully.

The second line: now you have emptied the anger, jealousy, envy, malice you can let in the loving-kindness. Start in the *hara*, the warmth rises to the heart and becomes a beautiful flower, an orange flower. Feel the auric field as a cushion of loving kindness, a warm peachy glow. In the third line (*May I be free...malice*) put in whatever negative you are doing, maybe competition. In the fourth line (*Now I charge...embodiment of Loving-Kindness*) rather than charging every particle of my system, make it every cell in the body. Stay with it until you really feel charged throughout the body – the embodiment of loving-kindness. In line five (*Mentally I create...thoughts of others*) feel the auric field as a cushion of loving-kindness, a warm peachy glow. ‘Cut off’ is too harsh, ‘remove’ is better. If you

are full of loving kindness, negativity from others will bounce off; don't ignore it, rather it will just bounce off you. In line six (*I am fortified ... above, below and around*) you don't send out loving-kindness, it spontaneously overflows, flows out. And in a state of loving-kindness you are self-sufficient – feeling you have not got enough so cannot give it out is the false 'self' again. For radiating loving-kindness, use the ten directions. In the seventh line (*May I be able...in peace and harmony*). Identifying with all without distinction – this is equanimity, no separation, union with all, having no sense of sending loving-kindness to others. Loving-kindness is identifying yourself with the pain, joy, suffering of others – so how can you hurt another? It would be like hurting yourself. When you are in a state of loving-kindness your mind is single – no differences, separateness or distinction. It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness.

The Metta Sutra

The Metta Sutra

This is what should be done by the man who is wise, who seeks the good, and who know the meaning of the place of peace.

Let him be strenuous, upright, and truly straight, without conceit of self, easily contented and joyous, free of cares; let him not be submerged by the things of the world; let him not take upon himself the burden of worldly goods; let his senses be controlled; let him be wise, but not puffed up, and let him not desire great possessions even for his family.

Let him do nothing that is mean or that the wise would reprove.

May all beings be happy and at their ease! May they be joyous and live in safety.

All beings, whether weak or strong - omitting none - in high, middle or low realms of existence, small or great, visible or invisible, near or far away, born or to be born – may all beings be happy and at their ease.

Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state.

Let none by anger or ill-will wish to harm another.

Even as a mother watches over and protects her child, her only child, so with a boundless mind should one cherish all living beings, radiating friendliness over the entire world, above, below and all around without limit. So let him cultivate a boundless good will towards the entire world, un-cramped, free of ill-will or enmity.

Standing or walking, sitting or lying down, during all his waking hours, let him establish this mindfulness of good will, which men call the highest state.

Abandoning vain discussions, having a clear vision, free from sense appetites, he who is made perfect will never again know rebirth.

(for contemplation, sometimes to say it with 'she' instead of 'he')

Explanation

*Sentient beings are numberless,
I vow to meet them with kindness and interest.*

That is the first *Bodhisattva* Vow - it applies to all beings, not just the ones you love or like. Interest (*vicaya*) is the second of seven Factors of Awakening: the aspect is its focus, attention, investigating; this reduces focus on self, to have an interest outside self, in other beings, reduces dualism.

May I be generous and helpful

This is the first *Parami* (*dana*) the quality of openness, offering. *Dana* is not just about giving something, it is the practice of opening up, of interest. When we are more open we are more generous with our mind, our thoughts. The practice of opening up not just to what we know, what is familiar, but also to something we are maybe not comfortable with, what we don't know: the practice of interest. When things are going well, we are fantastic; but when we meet obstacles, how do we react: do we meet them with aggression, rejection, contraction? The numberless beings include your own; there are numerous beings within you. The being that woke up this morning is not the same as the being that is now in this room. All beings within you – a being that is fearful within you, in pain; a being that is forceful. During the day, meet yourself; can you choose to stop and meet this moment with kindness and interest? Interest involves investigating, come close to whatever arises, have a good look at it, be still with it. What is the mind state for example during pain? Give it mindfulness and interest, going right into it. If we can do this with ourselves, with all phenomena going on in the body, it will overflow to others. Have interest, investigate, then kindness will come out of that. Use every opportunity to apply this view; not just with external things – food, the weather - but internally.

So, choose an event in your life that you feel good about: maybe feeling 'I did this all by myself'. Then recall the numberless beings who have helped bring this to fruition, to create this successful story; even people that you don't like or don't know. Be really thorough, write down the names of the people; this is the motivation behind the practice of loving-kindness. 'All by myself' is a wrong view, you cannot have done this – anything – all by yourself. There are beings directly involved, but also indirectly: an article you have read, something on TV. We are connected with so very many other beings; and they are connected to many others – it is limitless, feel the vastness of how inter-connected we are. You have to think subtly. In all practices that we do here there is the external form; but there is also the motivation, the internal practice, and that is the strongest aspect. We practise loving-kindness and generosity together, they are connected. If you want to make progress in your practice, you have to strengthen the *parami* of *dana*, of generosity, opening – it is not just a matter of putting some money in the pot. *Dana* is opening the heart, opening the mind; for example with someone you don't like, or with something on the inside of you, a pain in your body.

Methods of generating and radiating loving-kindness

I am sure that as you step into the Zendo you are stepping into the Zendo with the intention of benefiting all beings. Did you do that? Honest? In the future think about it, you are not just coming into the space, you are coming here to benefit all beings.

I want you to write your own text about loving-kindness – your own aspiration, prayer, whatever, for loving-kindness. Like a contemplation. Do walking meditation and body work and see what comes out for you – when you feel really inspired, in a good calm state; whatever arises, springs out of you.

In walking meditation, see each step as a sharing of loving-kindness. If a disturbing thought, a negative arises – immediately flood it with goodwill, an open heart.

Strengthening the fire in the belly

How to get there quickly? We need to activate warmth, strengthen the fire in the belly, then it can rise to the heart; through body work. Lie on your back, both knees up, thumbs touching at the navel, index fingers touching on the belly to make a triangle. Imagine embers in that triangle in the belly, fan them with the out-breath, rekindling heat. This is done with the mind (imagination), breathing (out-breath) and location (belly).

Alternatively, or additionally, you can work with a visual image of what fire in the belly looks like. It is an image to trigger warmth in the kidney energy, like moxa. Place a lit incense stick in a plate of earth, or piece of bread, and focus on the glow, the fire; occasionally fan it with a hand movement or blow with the breath (do this outside), to keep the ember burning. Like fire, if you don't attend to it, it goes out. The incense stick is a device for concentration. When it burns out, take the glow inwards, into the belly. Outer experience leads to an inner experience. The external incense stick is preparation, eventually you don't need it, you can contact warmth in the belly direct. You have to start with warmth in the belly; it rises to the heart centre, turns into a flower, then fills your whole being, every cell in the body. Waves of loving-kindness, every cell is beaming with loving-kindness. It overflows into the auric field, take time to cultivate a bubble of protection, an aura of loving-kindness around you. Only then, from the auric field, when it is filled with loving-kindness, can it overflow to other beings, to all beings.

Deity puja's (Vajrayana)

Maitreya, the Buddha of Boundless Love

The preliminaries are for turning the mind towards the practice, following body work and contemplations as preparation for emptying, ready to drop the self – this is very important. The *sadhana* (text) starts and finishes with emptying (it ends with the dissolving dot), then you could restart again. There is a hormonal balancing through the format of the text. Imagine the *maim* syllable radiating orange light from the heart; first comes the offering and out of this comes back receiving. There is pulsation of light, offering orange light out to all the buddha's and *bodhisattva's*, and in return you receive energy and blessings. The *maim* syllable in the heart with rays of golden light going out – it dissolves negative thoughts, carries the essence of what the Maitreya meditation's teaching is, an open heart.

Mantra involves the speech centre, the energy centre, so you have to keep it actively going, so the mind doesn't drift. *Mantra* means tool of the mind – never stop saying it, even if this is sometimes silently, to keep the mind sharp and clear. *Mantra* is a breathing practice, to practice mantra on the out-breath. The mantra carries the vibration of Maitreya, use body, speech and mind in chanting the mantra.

Puja is a concentrated form of practice, all the senses are involved; the mind has only a short attention span, so we give it objects to move to, and around. This triggers experience – outer, inner, secret and most secret. Build the imagery, stay with it, maintain the *mantra* and visualisation begins to happen by itself; then some different dimension sensations start to happen and you know you are beginning to get the vibration of the deity, of the quality of loving-kindness. Engage body, speech and mind, don't let the mind drift away. The same with speech, it is energy moving, hormonal balance.

And then there comes experience in being: the texture changes, energy changes, transformation is happening. Sometimes beings come towards you in your mind, drawn by the loving-kindness. Continue with the *mala*. The moment of stopping, of emptying; emptiness, the dissolution of the dot, is what you want to cultivate when falling asleep and waking, and at the moment of dying.

Chenrezig, the bodhisattva of compassion

The story of Chenrezig is meant to evoke sentiment in the self, 'how can I change my life in order to help as many sentient beings as possible?' The practice is to give stamina, endurance, energy, concentration – in order to take this forward. Think of the deity as an energy, representing and radiating certain qualities. We human beings are in veils of ignorance, we cannot see anything unless there is a tangible body. Colour works at the depth level, activates our quality, our ability to be Chenrezig, which we all have in ourselves. The syllables of the *mantra* – *om ma ni pa me hum* - relate to the *parami*'s through colour, so *me* which is the perfection of generosity, the *parami* of *dana*, is red. *Parami*'s are strengths, something that helps us go beyond. The deerskin represents softness, loving-kindness, and protection; ability to subdue, to tame negative energy. Very soft and also resilient, it is a symbol of the kind and compassionate nature of the *bodhisattva*. The four arms of the deity represent the four 'immeasurables': loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity. Spend a lot of time on the body of the deity - and you start becoming the deity – you feel the 'pride of the deity'. First you let go, drop the ordinary sense of self (in the preparation), then 'how do I build myself now?' – and that is in the deity practice. It is a very concentrated form of meditation because it engages you, you can't stay outside it.

Richness

If beings knew as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared, if there were someone to receive their gift.

The Buddha

Recollect - remember – moments, events, situations when you experienced loving-kindness, either as a giver or as a receiver. Loving-kindness is friendliness, care. Imagine yourself back in that situation, with the people involved, and how did it feel in the body. What we are doing, we are borrowing from our memories, our experience, and bring it into the present. Don't discuss, have a dialogue with it, just 'how does it feel in the body?' – the physical body or the auric body – and your body will tell you 'this is loving-kindness'.

Take some time to consider the many gifts you have received from each person in this room, and wider, in these few days together; and what gift, source of strength and support did you receive from these beings? How were they supporting your practice? They are part of your backup. Everything involves other beings, so how can you not practise for their benefit? What gifts? – a question from someone, an emotion from someone, can be gifts for someone else. Someone bursting into tears and making a mess of themselves, is a gift. The being who has taken responsibility for bringing beautiful fresh flowers into the Zendo – does that support your practice? – then it is a gift. The plumber who

came to fix the central heating – that was a welcome gift! The milkman who leaves milk on the doorstep. Whoever brought and laid the stone flags outside the Zendo door. It goes on and on.....

Exercise on richness

I want you to think of all the gifts you have ever received – material, emotional, mental. I want you to feel that you are very rich, you have a lot to give. This is the practice I was given years ago by my first teacher John Garrie Roshi – to write down every gift ever given to me. I want you to feel that you are swimming in abundance, like a feast. So if you have to work in the Zendo all night, that is fine. I want you to get the feeling of being so full that you want to overflow; you are already full but you don't know it because there is a tendency to focus on what is wrong. Imagine gathering all the gifts in one place. It will be an all-night work. *Do we write down the gifts or just imagine them?* It would be better to write them down. So focus on all the riches you have received and if, in the midst of this, quite spontaneously you wish to take in the suffering of some being; some being comes into mind and you take in the suffering and give out some of the riches. Not forced, you want to give out peacefully.

- *My dearest friend, I've known him since I was seven; the special gifts I've received from him, he never wanted anything from me except my friendship. Almost feeling guilty about how much I've been given.* That's right, you want to be in a position of being overwhelmed by the richness of gifts you have been given. That is how you can be in a position to start to give out.

There is no doubt that we have potential for enlightenment, for full loving-kindness, but we need techniques to help us towards that. You can't do it just by yourself, because you are full of ill will, you have to get the self out of the way and allow loving-kindness to take over.

Spontaneous

There are different techniques for overflow – start with people in the room, then in the Orchard, then Lower Maescoed then beyond, beyond – to Hay, Hereford, the whole world! When you are sending a wave of loving-kindness out, whoever comes into your mind will receive it, don't get into thinking about it. You are not sending out loving-kindness to others, that is patronising and one-sided. It spontaneously overflows, flows out. Watch the boundaries: from loving-kindness to the 'near enemies' sentimentality, or attachment, wanting something back. Be clear where you are coming from; then it is up to others how they receive it. Be careful in your practice that loving-kindness doesn't turn into wanting, check attachment. If you feel that happening stop – bowing, emptying. The barometer is 'how does it feel in your body?', to read the body. Is this wholesome or unwholesome, conducive to growing or not? Reading the messages quicker in the body leads to stability. The main message is in the breathing, and posture; also in facial expression, gesture. Sometimes loving-kindness can involve saying 'no' – back to 'how does it feel in the body?', and 'where am I coming from?'. From a state of loving-kindness, not anger; we all experience suffering, in different ways. When we are in a state of mindfulness, bare attention you are in a condition, a state of loving-kindness.

To body parts

Work in pairs, the receiver lying down on their right side. The reader/ giver goes through the list of body parts, internal organs: 'You are giving loving-kindness to your right eye...'; so the one lying does that and the reader does the same to them. Start with right eye, left eye; then ears, nostrils, jaws, whole throat, lungs, whole heart, blood circulatory system, stomach, intestines, liver, kidneys, bladder, reproductive organs. Once thoroughly, then a couple of times as a waterfall. The reader, the

giver sends loving-kindness, but no big deal – send light, warmth, daffodils. For thirty minutes per person, once through the list of body parts and two scans.

Ten directions

1. The first four directions make the foundation, the ‘cross of stability’: in front of you, to the right, behind and to the left (clockwise); going just a bit beyond the auric field.
2. The four intermediate directions - diagonally to the left, right, behind right, behind left (clockwise again) - make the ‘cross of creativity’, going beyond as far as the mind can go, representing movement. Observe any differences; if you can only go a limited distance in one direction, this is information.
3. Down through the body and into the earth. Then above into the sky, into space. As far as you want. Up and down, as far as the mind can go, is the central axis.

You can practise the ten directions coming from the heart or from the third eye in the forehead. Some angles may feel more difficult because of your own imbalances in the body. If you have had a trauma on one side, there can be no ‘going’ there, a shadow on that side. Be relaxed, at ease; loving-kindness is already in you, we just need a device to trigger the feeling, it needs to be woken up. It is also a healing meditation, from the third eye you can heal any shadow in the body, any trauma in the brain. When you are in a state of loving-kindness the eye, the state of seeing, the perceiving, is single. Normally it’s dual, caught in attachment and aversion: ‘I like’ / ‘I don’t like’, which leads to mistrust and anger. Imagine an orange glow in the heart. With each direction, in sequence, on the in-breath take in the pain, suffering, hurt of all beings in that direction; and on the out-breath send loving-kindness as a glow of orange light. While saying *Om Maitreya svaha* (the short mantra of Maitreya Buddha, the Buddha of Boundless Love). Be spontaneous, it may take longer or less time in some directions. Take around forty-five minutes. It is balancing, a realignment of energy; energetically re-balancing the body. Orange is a combination of red and yellow, energy and spontaneity, fire and earth. Have warmth (red) and share it spontaneously (yellow). Work with different shades of orange, the balance between the red and yellow elements. Before going to sleep at night, scan the body for areas that feel warm and comfortable, so fall asleep in positivity; do it when you wake too.

Mother, father, all beings, radiant beings

Once you have cultivated warmth in the auric field, and the heart and the whole being are filled with loving-kindness, try this. Imagine that on the right side is your father and radiate, overflow loving-kindness to your father on the right. On the left side is your mother, do the same. Behind are all beings that have been involved in creating what and where you are now; people who you may like or dislike, or they may dislike you: all beings who have shaped you. In front is a radiant being that you aspire to, your spiritual guide. A radiant being is your full awakened potential, work with the energy field rather than with particular teachers (because stories may come up). It is the potential of energy, which can change at any time. This is another cross, which do you feel more pulled to? All these beings are manifesting in you, we embody the father principle and the mother principle, and all those beings that have shaped us. If you radiate to the right, the left and become caught up in stories about your father, mother – drop it, you are no longer in loving kindness but in duality: anger, prejudice. Unhook, go back to the heart. This is a very powerful healing practice; it can heal your relationship with parents, friends, even if they are no longer in this world, it can heal your hook with them.

Self, dear one, stranger, enemy

You can do loving-kindness practices in any posture, as classically taught (standing, walking, sitting, lying down). Imagine a being sitting in front of you that is a replica of yourself, start with first yourself (you are impartial, gentle, tender and upright); radiate loving-kindness to this being from your auric field. Then to a being for whom you have deep love, deep respect, it is easy to generate loving-kindness for that being (but not someone for whom you have a sexual relationship, because you will go into something else). The text says someone who is older than you and still alive (so it's easier for you to generate loving-kindness). Then to someone you don't know, with whom you have no special bond; maybe who you have caught sight of in a crowd, it can be just a shape. Then a being with whom you have difficulty, or who has difficulty with you. If the beings fade, you replace them. Then bring back all four together in front of you and radiate loving-kindness to all equally, and watch how they change places – maybe the being for whom you have deep respect becomes yourself, or the being with whom you have difficulty becomes the being for whom you have deep respect. Eventually there is no distinction, you become all these beings; that is a moment of true loving-kindness, when there is no separation between 'them' and 'me', 'me' and 'them'.

In walking meditation: each step is a gift of loving-kindness to: loved ones; people to whom you are indifferent or don't know; 'enemies', people you dislike or who dislike you. Say *me-tte-ya* (Maitreya in *Pali*) with each step (one syllable per step) - unless it's too complicated. This is to aid concentration, stop the mind wandering.

By categories

Send to specific categories of people: to people in gaol, women who have been raped, children wounded in war, to a foetus being aborted – whatever your understanding is of suffering in the world. You will find it becomes endless. Walking around this little village where we live, I realised that in each house there had been a tragedy: the death of a baby, cancer, someone in hospital, someone lost their job, suicide. You may not like those people but you can open the heart; they too are in suffering, it takes away the distinction of 'I' and 'others'.

This is a life-long practice, by itself loving-kindness practice leads you to a state of full enlightenment (the *sutra* text says 'no rebirth', which has the same meaning). It is more than just being kind to people, it is when your seeing becomes single. At the beginning you can have just glimpses of full loving-kindness, but eventually it is your full potential. You can stay with one technique till you feel you know it; or others may prefer to move from one to another, needing more variation. For now, still at the beginning – every time you catch sight of another being, even in your head (there are lots of beings popping up in our heads), extend loving-kindness to them. Including past beings within you, beings from your past. If you start thinking 'But I don't want to send to that person', say the 'Sharing the Merit' text to yourself, or *sabbe satta sukhita hontu*. If you are very threatened by a particular being, chant '*Aham avero homi*' (the *Brahma Viharas*) and they will disappear.

If you move into a new house and there is bad energy in a room, light an incense stick and do some chanting, or recite 'Peace to All Beings'; change the ambiance with this aura of loving-kindness. If you can do this to a room where some violent action may have taken place, we can do it to our own memories. Place it in everyday life, send loving-kindness to food before eating; it is also good protection when travelling. When walking towards someone, some situation, think loving-kindness, may this person be well and happy. Consciously opening the heart, softening, not pushing away; there is no fear with loving-kindness, no me and mine, no you nor I. In everyday life, look at people,

how they walk, contact their suffering and open your heart to them. If you really do this, you will have radiance, a glow about you. You will have more inner strength.

Guided Meditations

Recollection of ten moments

Go back into your life and recollect, remember ten moments, events, situations (or they select you) when you experienced loving-kindness, either as a giver or as a receiver. Loving-kindness is friendliness, care. List them, write them down numbered 1 to 10. Then take each one in turn and see how it feels in the body, compare the subtle difference in feeling in the body with each one of them. It doesn't have to be a precise moment, it can be just a general feeling, the ambiance, having different textures. It can involve animals – cats, dogs, birds, nature. Take your time to choose the ten. What we are doing is we are borrowing from our memories, our experience, and bring it into the present. Settle yourself, be centred, don't discuss or have a dialogue with or about it; just 'how does it feel in the body?' - the physical body or the auric body - and your body will tell you 'this is loving-kindness'. This is a preparation for a deeper journey.

Instructions for guided meditation

This is a practice to help you become an embodiment of loving-kindness, not just an idea; to feel it in every cell in your body, so it's not an effort to emanate loving-kindness.

1. First establish good posture in the body and you state your intention for yourself.
2. Then you bring up your ten events or situations where you have experienced loving kindness and you take some time to touch on each situation and 'how does it feel in the body?'. Take some time to do that, then of the ten you choose four: four moments, four situations. Then take a bit longer with each one of them; again, 'how does it feel in my body?'.
3. Then you choose one, and with this one you're going to go deeper into the sensation in your body. You want to come to a 'body in the body' experience, so there is no separation between you and the experience, it's not an idea.
4. As you go deeper into your body sensation, you might find a word that describes what you are feeling. You choose this word and you repeat it with the breathing, silently; this is to help you to go deeper and deeper. A word that describes what you are feeling, use it to go deeper, to describe the texture that we call loving-kindness, to get to the essence of it. It is important to use the word with the breathing, as you breathe out. Come to a full 'body in the body' experience so the mind is very quiet, no chatter.
5. When you go very deep, then you are going to ask a question; at this moment it is very important, so ask as if you are dropping a stone in the water. Ask the question then let go, and remain open with all of your senses open, because the answer may come through a smell, taste, image, body sensation, or maybe a sentence. Ask the question when you feel very still, calm; you ask the question into your depth, into the very depth of your being. And the question is, 'where does this feeling go, where does it take me next?'. Say the question three times silently, calmly.
6. And after that you spend some time (ten minutes) in nature, because the answer may not come straight away; maybe it will come in nature, or later in your dreams.

The important thing is to ask the question from a state of calm, from the depth of your being, to be in a place where you can ask the question. Having the experience once is not enough, you have to cultivate it more. So ask yourself, 'What do I need to do to cultivate this state of loving-kindness, and what do I need to avoid?'. Listen to what you need to maintain this quality that you have now; we all

have it, it is tangible. Daring not to pick up your busy self, daring to stay in that gap. What you do with your body, speech and mind. Consider what would be the most conducive activity of your body, speech and mind to maintain this quality.

Guided meditation in the ten directions

Prepare with body work and walking meditation.

1. Establish the posture, the right hand supported by the left: the left is the intuitive side, the right is discursive, intellectual reasoning. Imagine the hands are in the belly, either small and inside, or the belly extending around them.
2. From a flower in the hands in the centre of the belly, warmth and light and pulsating energy fills the whole body (colour is as it comes). Then you are so full it overflows outside the body, into an egg-shaped cushion around the body (which may by now have no edges) into the auric field and beyond in ten directions. Pay attention to where you feel weaker, where light doesn't go or not so strongly. You are using the concept as a key to trigger an experience, once you get the experience the concept can fall away, so the flower may turn into a warm fire.
3. Then extend loving-kindness, warmth to others in the room, to those who you like, are indifferent to, and dislike. With practice the flow is equal to all three groups, this is equanimity. First it starts with yourself, warmth and loving-kindness to fill yourself - with all your weaknesses, criticisms, tendencies – then it can overflow and awareness of your own negatives helps in spreading equanimity to others.

Four directions

1. First notice the posture of your body, the support from your back – this is contact with your ancestors, water energy.
2. Focus on the rise and fall of the belly at the navel, to put you in touch with your earth.
3. Imagine an ember in the *hara* (three fingers width below the navel), each out-breath fans the ember, feel some kind of warmth or presence (if you can't get this, keep going with the meditation anyway – it will come). Make this image very stable – of the ember in the belly and the out-breath fanning the ember.
4. Allow warmth (not fire) to rise up the central channel to the heart – imagine a flower, an energy field of warmth. Use images simply to have the mind stay with what you are doing. The flower is slowly unfolding. Allow the flower and the colour (orange, peach, pink or soft red) to rise spontaneously. Positive energy has a tendency to expand, so the warmth radiates outwards into the body and out into the auric field – it's important to define the auric field, don't leave any part unattended (the actual width can vary).
5. Then you feel strong, 'well and happy and free from fear', and you can radiate out and send warmth to your father / the male principle, on your right. Train the mind not to go with the story line of the father, or the mother (on the left). Stay with the male principle, female principle, in yourself, and sneak it in again when you are feeling stable. You can return to the body, the ember, the flower, then allow expansion to come again.
6. Then radiate the warmth behind, to the ancestors, and feel the loving-kindness coming back. It is a natural expression (in your heart) towards others, and it returns – like being surrounded by warmth, in a big armchair. You are not sending out loving-kindness to others, that is patronising and one-sided.

7. You spend time and energy nurturing friendships and enmity, so really those qualities are in yourself. There is a part of you that is closing down when you're feeling 'enemy', so come back and make your auric field whole again. So you are beautifully 'held' – then radiate to the front. Watch your attitude to want to see something – open all the senses, not just the seeing or a word; to catch a glimpse you have to use all the senses. (All the other people – right, left, back – are in you, so they have to come with you.) If there is even an impression of what's in front, just notice it. Don't be caught up in expectation and wanting something to happen, no preconception, fabrication. Stay a short time with the sensation of the being you are yet to become – the seeds are already in you now, all they need is the right conditions, good nurturing. Repeat: the seeds of change are already in you now and all they want is to grow – preconception, fear, impatience, gets in the way. So come back to loving-kindness, to the moment, The loving-kindness and warmth is in you, just make it stronger, more obvious, more conscious. Once you have a glimpse of the being you are yet to become, come back to the present and close the session with the *Brahma Viharas*, Peace to All Beings, sharing the merit.

Opening the Heart

As I smile, may your being receive warmth and comfort.
 As I breathe, may your pain and hurt dissolve into emptiness.
 As I walk, may my steps lighten up your heart and give you life.
 As long as I live, may I see my face in yours and
 may I hear your voice in mine.
 (Sonia)

Openness of the heart and mind that includes ourselves and that extends to all beings is our natural capacity. This practice offers the means to cultivate that state of being. Open your heart to whatever is happening in the world. That is the practice we are doing. Do it with the little things then with the big things it will happen naturally. The key is opening the heart, no matter what, no exception. I am sure your mind will have some objection – that's OK, meet the objection with an open heart. Explore the practice of opening the heart in everything you do – in washing up, thinking, eating, going to the toilet. What I want is for you to know if the heart is open or is it closed, it is quite subtle. You either have an open heart or not, there is no in-between. No 'but...'

Instructions for guided meditation

For this practice you can be sitting or lying down, whichever is most comfortable for you.

1. First establish the hollow body. From the top of your head down to your toes, you are empty. Imagine, experience space within; including your head. Now within that space you notice the movement of the belly. Rising, falling. Settle your attention at the belly. Just stay with the belly, without expectation.
2. And now, within the ease and calm of your body, allow a happy memory to come to the surface. See yourself back in that situation. What do you notice in your body – a change in breathing, a change in temperature? Allow yourself to embody these happy feelings. Notice what happens in your chest, and turn your attention at the chest. You may feel a spark of

lightness, of warmth, of softening, or expansion. Stay with the feeling that you have now, in your chest.

3. Imagine at your heart a flower, barely open, a beautiful flower. Allow this flower to gently, slowly open. The flower in your heart wants to open, wants to grow more and more – allow it to do so. See the flower in three dimensions – opening sideways, back to front, up and down. The movement of expansion of your heart, of the flower opening, is spontaneous, it doesn't take any effort – what takes effort is maintaining a closed heart. So take your time, familiarise yourself with the feeling of opening the heart. The image of the flower is a support. Now I would like you to talk to your heart, to your flower – to say words of appreciation, of respect. To talk to your flower, to your heart, as a friend, as a dear friend. Come to a feeling of no separation between you and your heart, of no disconnection. You and your heart are in union. The flower is your heart, the heart is a flower. You create with your imagination this flower, then come the feeling, the experience.
4. And now, if you like, you can imagine someone that you feel safe with, someone that you trust. Imagine that person holding your heart, touching it gently, one hand on your front one on the back, not pressing, just holding it gently. Someone you have deep trust in, someone you feel safe with. Imagine that person holding your heart, to make you aware of this part of your body.
5. Now find in the body a place of discomfort, of tension. Don't push it away, just meet it. And you and your heart open to embrace the discomfort. The discomfort is like a child, the open heart is like a parent, holding the child. Or you can use the image of the flower, placing the discomfort at the centre of the flower. So you meet your discomfort plus you open the heart, and see what happens to the discomfort. The petals of the flower are hugging the discomfort; your heart is hugging the discomfort; your whole body is hugging the discomfort. So you are trying to stay with two things, the discomfort and the opening of the heart, and you see what happens to the discomfort. Where is the discomfort now? The practice is to maintain an open heart no matter what is happening in your body, maintain this open flower. When you work with the mind you work with the intention. The intention is to keep the heart wide open, to embrace everything that comes into it. Open your heart to the discomfort, open the heart and feel the discomfort – holding with the warmth, the kindness of the heart. Like a mother would do to a child. What happens to the discomfort that is held by the mother, by the heart? You open your heart bigger than the discomfort, you don't push away the discomfort; you invite the discomfort, you see it, you inspect it. You don't treat it as an enemy but as a friend.
6. So now contact again a happy event, another one. Feel the response in your chest, in your heart, and allow this feeling to grow. Feel your heart as a flower, a flower that is opening, opening – gently, softly. Bring to mind a situation in your life that creates some agitation. Don't choose something too big, choose something you can manage. Contact the agitation in your mind, in your body. And open your heart, embrace the agitation with an open heart. Or place the agitation in the centre of your flower and see the flower hugging the agitation. What happens to the agitation now?
7. Choose a second example of agitation of mind and body, and meet it with an open heart, an open flower. You need to open the heart wider, bigger than the discomfort of the body and mind. The heart is wishing to open, it doesn't ask why, it just opens. Where there is pain, where there is suffering, the heart is willing to open to embrace it. Our stories, our ideas of who we are, get in the way of opening the heart.
8. Now say some words of thanks to your heart for this practice.

It is a simple practice but not so easy. Our heart is either open or closed, there is no in-between, no 'but'. The practice asks us to maintain an open heart no matter what – when you are tired, putting your shoes on, in the shower. Is my heart open? Challenging, eh? For the rest of the day everything you meet, like the weather, anything to disturb your mind or your body, you open your heart. And if you have some time you can draw a flower, the flower that you saw in you heart. Remember it is less effort to open your heart than to keep it closed. And don't avoid situations that upset you – on the contrary seek them out, then you have a golden opportunity to practise opening the heart. If you can do that with yourself, you will be able to do it with other beings. So seek out the people that upset you most. And if suddenly you are surrounded by a crowd of people, don't take it personally. Think that you are giving them an opportunity to practise opening the heart. Don't forget the deeper aspiration to practise for the benefit of all beings.

Question and answer

So what happened when you tried to maintain an open heart?

- *The open heart is very warming, expansion. When thinking of a difficulty, a wave of contraction went through it. I was able to feel the warmth again, but why do we keep doing it, contracting? It's so simple, so powerful. Yet we constantly want to close off.*

It is a choice of intention, remember this, a choice of intention. Sometimes the intention by habit is very subtle, that is why we need to create new habits. There is no half-way, not 'maybe my heart is open', it is either open or it's not. That is why we maintain the image of the flower, that will support the feeling of opening the heart. You have many moments in the day to notice when your heart spontaneously opens - flowers, sunshine, good soup - *to the cook* - your soup yesterday evening was very good, I had two helpings, it is rare for me to have two helpings of soup! If you notice how often the heart is opening, you will be amazed how many moments in the day. And of course if you have negative thoughts, agitation, you can use it to open the heart.

- *Negative emotions? Maybe a feeling of pride coming up, you don't push it away, you maintain the emotion, the physical pain, and you open your heart. Of course there will be suffering, negative space, and in response to this you open your heart. *I get caught up in a story, and it leaks.* Don't push away the story, you know the story is there, notice it, and you open your heart.*
- *If your heart is open, it's impossible to succumb to the negativity? There is no more separation with the open heart. I find it hard to open the heart and open the mind – the mind can be joyful, the heart still cut off. Outside there was a choice, opening the heart or movement, and movement seemed to be more joyful.* It is a choice of intention, the intention to be more strong. You have to come to a decision, a conclusion, if opening the heart is more healthy for you. *I'm trying to open my heart.* Your trying is pushing, the open heart is not. Go looking for trouble, another example! You don't like bare feet? Walk bare-foot and open your heart.
- *Some emotions are more difficult than others, with big emotion it can be heavy to open your heart. Somehow the pain in my knee is easier.* Start with small things and then go to big things. Having an open heart is being upright, not pushing nor pulling away. You can give anything to an open heart, it is bigger than all your fears.
- *Interruption by noisy lorry outside.* Look at what happens when you open your heart to it. *It goes away?* If you're lucky! You let go of it physically and emotionally, your attachment to it goes away.

- In walking practice, did you get feeling of the heart opening? *The feeling was of the chest opening, really widely.* This is what I want you to do. When you get the feeling of the heart opening spontaneously, say 'thank you' (internally) – at the sight of a bird, a flower, a memory. *What if when feeling the heart opening, tears come?* Say 'thank you', say 'I'm a lucky girl, I have lots of pain in my body, I can open my heart'. First thing in the morning, go into nature, find something that opens your heart, say 'thank you'.

What is the difference when meeting with an open heart and not? You have your difficulty, that's OK and to open your heart to it, ask the heart what to do about this. Don't try to fix it, don't push it away. Meet both joy and sorrow with an open heart, not to shut the heart to the sorrow. An image of your heart holding, for instance, an irritation like holding a child. Whatever happens you don't push it away, you include it in your big heart, the pleasant and the unpleasant: 'I open my heart to this', embrace it. It is changing a habit – instead of holding an irritation, closing in - embrace it. Catch yourself going into your tendency and instead of playing it out, ask yourself 'Can I open my heart to this? Can I embrace it?' Mindfulness is not difficult, it's just we keep forgetting! To pause, not to act - be quicker and quicker to catch it. When you really and truly have a big heart there is no sense of my heart, no more separation of 'I, me, mine', you are the big heart. When you have an open heart, there is a knowing, a merging with what is happening; you lose the sense of 'I, me, mine'. When we are not in a state of open heart we are fighting for 'my' corner, 'I, me, mine', it will always be limited, being partial. So you can use the open heart as an antidote for anger, irritation, but it is much more than this. It is forgetting yourself. *I kept hearing a voice saying 'it's not you', and I understand now.* So any time you get in a position of strong opinion, 'I know what's right', check yourself, notice what you are trying to put across and open your heart. It is loosening attachment of the idea of 'I, me, mine'. So at the moment you are having to remember to open your heart, but eventually your heart stays open. The Zen master said:

*To study Bodi Dhama is to study the self
To study the self is to forget the self
To forget the self is to be realised by myriad things*

...by the wings of the bird, by people, by emotion, by everything. There are different ways to forget the self, I chose opening the heart to represent it.

I am so far from it, I am trying to understand it. First you have to open the heart! *By myriad things?* By everything!

The idea is to give you time to practise it in everyday life, you meet it, you embrace it – look for trouble! I mean it actually. If you have a tendency to be quiet, look for noise. If you have a tendency to look for sunshine, look for rain. If someone annoys you, look for their company. Expose yourself and open your heart. Don't try too big things, look for small things.

A short practice for opening the heart

First we adjust our motivation.

1. There is a flower at your heart. Allow it to open, till your whole being is contained in that flower. There is a flower at your heart that continues to open to include the person that sits next to you. Open the flower until the person next to you is contained in the centre of the

flower. The flower at your heart continues to open even wider to embrace and contain all the beings sitting in the Zendo.

2. As you breathe out you send out kindness, understanding, acceptance to all those beings in your flower. As you breathe in you take in all their pain, their confusion, their fear. All this is happening within your heart, within the flower at your heart.
3. Now let the image of the flower, of the beings, fade away. And return to the rise and fall of your belly.

So this is a short practice, not too long, for opening the heart. When you are so busy in your life, you need something short to do. All teachers now give the long practice and the short practice. If every day you did this short practice for ten minutes you would see some big changes. Better to do the short practice several times a day than the long practice, if you find the long practice too difficult. It is important to touch on this practice daily, so I wanted to give you something you can do quickly. The long practice, you put it on the shelf and think 'one day I will do it'. The short practice, you can do it quickly: ten minutes, three times a day – it is your medicine, take your medicine! It comes down always to intention, to motivation.

Opening the Heart in Pairs

The receiver is lying down, the giver sitting at their head. The receiver, bring to mind a small concern in your life, not too big a concern. Name it and allow the agitation to arise; study the agitation. The giver you open your heart, and make your heart bigger than their concern. So establish the connection with your heart and expand the feeling in your heart to contain their concern, their agitation. Find a way of doing this for yourself – through imagining, through feeling. You want to wrap their being with your open heart without touching, without speaking. You want to open your heart wide so they feel safe to explore their agitation. I come back to the receiver - don't escape your agitation, study it, meet it, feel it in your body. When you feel you have had a good view of your agitation then bring your open heart. Make the agitation the child, the open heart the parent that is holding the child. And see what happens to the agitation. Concern, agitation are natural, are normal. The point is how do we meet them, how do we receive them. We can choose to close our heart, we can choose to open the heart. Open the heart bigger, bigger than your concern.

The giver, you maintain this same open heart holding their discomfort, their pain, as a child. You don't need to say anything, you don't need to touch. Your presence alone is beautiful. In opening your heart the agitation may disappear or you may view a new angle on your concern, a new solution. The giver – open your heart unconditionally to hold their concern, the child; you are the parent. You don't need to know what the concern is about, the concern that brings agitation to the body and the mind. And the receiver – if you have come to a change in your agitation, you may want to choose the second concern, the 'a bit more serious' concern. You have at the moment the support of the practice, the excellent practice you have done, your partner, the teacher. A beautiful opportunity to try to practise deeper, to come deeper into your fear, your concern. That is holding you back in your life. Name the concern, feel it in your body, feel how it brings agitation, and open the heart. You are being held by your partner and the practice, by the Zendo, by Sonia. You can open to your deep fear, an open heart. Try it.

For the receivers - if you feel you have come to satisfactory change, you can ease out of the posture, spend some time outside for five minutes. I want to talk to the givers. Come closer..... So, were you able to maintain an open heart? What device did you use? Because the mind is tricky you know, by

drifting, so you need to find an anchor and create something that you maintain an open heart. What did you use – an image, a *mantra*, a feeling? Sometimes we need a device to anchor the mind. And the devices can change, so I am curious to know what you did. The image, come back to the image of holding the child. The pain is the child, the open heart is the parent that is holding. But we all have a different way in. So for your work it will be very helpful. So you help them, they help you open your heart. That is why difficulties are our friend, they help us to open our heart. The difficulties are our teacher, if everything were easy it would be harder.

So, you are going to change over. What I find interesting in this practice is we are not asking you to sort out their problems, we are asking you simply to open your heart to give the conditions for them to see the solution; it is more powerful. So, receivers, focus on a small concern you have in your life and maintain contact. Name it, and feel the agitation in your body, in your breathing, in your energy; and allow the mind to become a little bit unsettled. Don't be afraid to feel this agitation – it is not bad to have the agitation. You are not a bad person or a bad student to have agitation, it is all right. The giver, open your heart. Find a device or a support to help you opening your heart. Open your heart wide to contain the agitation. Imagine the agitation being the child, the open heart being the parent. You are holding the child softly, tenderly, gently. You don't need to know the concern, you don't need to give them advice, they can find their own advice.

The receiver – now open the heart, embrace your agitation like a parent embracing their child. Softly, tenderly, caringly, patiently. And see what happens to the agitation when it is met with love. The giver - remember to stay soft, not to try too hard, just open your heart. You don't need to lean into their concern or pull away from it. Stay upright. The open heart is happy just to stay upright, not leaning into things or pushing away from things. With the receiver the change can be quite immediate, so if you feel ready to move onto the bigger concern you can do so. You name your concern, your fear, the scenario that you fear, you feel it in the body, that it is changing your breathing, unsettling the mind; study that. And open your heart to it. Make the heart bigger than your fear, much bigger. Much, much bigger. What happens when you make your heart much, much bigger than your fear? Watch what happens. You can meet all your fear with an open heart, the heart doesn't mind. The heart can open, open any time. If you remember to open the heart no matter what, you have found the key to happiness, no matter what. When your heart opens the change can be quite quick, quite immediate. The habit to close the heart may come back, open the heart again. Coming back to choice of intention, intention to maintain an open heart no matter what.

Tonglen: breathing in the suffering of others

In your heart, adjust your motivation for this sitting. We are sitting together to end the suffering of self and all beings; contact this in your heart.

Giving and receiving through Tonglen

*Having recognised the futility of my self-centredness and the great benefit of loving others,
may I bring all beings to joy.*

*May I send all my virtues and happiness to others through the strength of my practice, and may I
receive the suffering and difficulties of all beings in all realms.*

The practice we are just about to do is called *Tonglen*. *Tong* means sending out, or letting go, or giving out. *Len* is receiving, accepting, taking in. It is the main practice for the cultivation of relative *bodhicitta*. It is a very important practice. This is a practice for life.

Tree of gifts exercise

Take a big piece of drawing paper, to draw a tree with many branches. On the branches – you can guess what is coming? – you place a gift that you feel able to give, and you draw it as a jewel. It can be a quality, it can be something material, it can be something mental, it can be something emotional, it can be something spiritual. So I want you to approach it as a contemplation. You start with an empty tree, hopefully at the end you have a full tree with many colours, many jewels. The gifts that you give, you have to mean it. So you ponder on it, what you feel you want to give, to send out. All the gifts that you have received have shaped you, have made you the way you are now. You have the choice of keeping the gifts to yourself or letting them flow out to other beings.

I want you to make a journey into your ability to give, and be honest. The point is for you to meet yourself in the giving. To meet the point where you are able to give, and the point where you are not able to give. The point is not to have a beautiful tree, that would be easy to do. If there is something you are not able to give, that is fine; but know that in your heart. Eventually you feel that you can give even your most precious gift, but it is all right not to be at that point. In England we have the idea of ‘charity’, people give what they don’t want – that’s not what it is about. Ponder on the gifts you can give and go deeper. You come to a point where you are able to give your life. Think of the people in *Medicins Sans Frontieres*: they are in a dangerous position, knowing they can be killed at any time, but they feel it is important to give what is needed. *What if we can’t give without hurting ourselves – protection?* First of all it is money, clothes, food; then go deeper, go deeper. Do the exercise to the point you can do it, don’t judge yourself; if you feel you can only do it superficially that is fine. It is a process, of letting go of self. Don’t judge what you are not able to give. *So the exercise is to start us on a process?* Yes. I am sure you are going to find out that you are already giving a lot. Your life is based on giving. In the midst of this exercise, I want you to be in a place where you can take in the suffering of a loved one, of an enemy, of an indifferent. Just for a few moments. You understand the spirit of this work? You give out; in the midst of giving out, you are moved to take in the sufferings of other beings. It is a contemplation, so you need time to contemplate. Use the walking meditation, contemplating the gifts that you want to give. And possibly imagine that you want to give the gift to someone very dear to you, someone who you would do anything to relieve their suffering. It is to open you up, it is not real. You see how difficult it is, the idea of giving. The point is to open your heart and give, you have permission. As a support you can think of someone dear to you, to whom you can give the jewels. To unlock your fist, your closed heart. This being is your connection to all beings. Anything else is a game, you’re playing games with your resistance. Avoid playing your games, it is a waste of time. The practice is so simple, so joyful; you dilute it with your games, it is a shame.

I’ve been dabbling in a murky pond. Have I anything to give, willingly? There was a lot of distraction, resistance. Were you surprised? Disappointed. Take away the disappointment, see it as information.

The practice of ‘just sitting’ with attention to breathing is important to calm down from the other practice, it is a kind of levelling. You focus on the movement of your belly in and out or you can name ‘rising’ and ‘falling’, or you can say ‘here’ on the in-breath and ‘now’ on the out-breath. Just sitting.

Instructions for guided meditation

1. So first establish the hollow body. Now focus on the movement of the belly, in and out. As you breathe in, take in whatever you are feeling at the moment. Feeling of sadness, of fear, of resistance – breathe it in. On the out-breath, give it space. Continue like this until you are feeling calm and alert. Breathing in what you are feeling, breathing out giving it space.
2. Now as you breathe in, imagine taking in hot, heavy air. As you breathe out, imagine sending out light, cool air. Breathing in heaviness, breathing out lightness. The heaviness is suffering, the lightness is well-being. So focus on those two movements. Imagine breathing in through every pore of your body, this hot, heavy air. And breathing out through every pore of your body, this cool, light air.
3. Now remember a time in your life when you had difficulty. You may have been hurt, depressed, fearful. Remember the feeling vividly. Don't get involved in the story, just the feeling. And breathe in the feeling as hot, heavy air through every pore of your body. And breathe out a sense of spaciousness, kindness – like a rain of cool light. You take in your suffering as hot, heavy air; and you give out cool, fresh, healing air to your suffering. Practise in this way for a few more moments.
4. Now bring to mind a being with whom you have a deep connection, someone that is very dear to you. Allow your whole being to turn towards their suffering, to feel their suffering. Like a mother who will do anything to help her child, you want to do anything to help your friend (this is a very important part of the practice). So imagine the suffering of your friend as hot heavy air that you take in through every pore of your body. The moment that you take in the suffering, it touches your heart and your heart opens. Out of your open heart comes the out-breath. Let the out-breath flow through every pore of your body to your friend. Practise in this way. Just stay with the breathing; taking in, sending out. Your dear friend is your connection to the many beings who are also suffering. Imagine a group of people, suffering like your friend is suffering. Take in their suffering as hot, heavy air. Notice how your heart opens when you take in the suffering of others. Then you send out the cool light of healing with the out-breath. Practise in this way. Notice as you take in the pain of others that your heart is opening, is willing to embrace the pain of others through the in-breath. Out of that willingness comes the out-breath of cooling energy. You want to do anything to help relieve the suffering of your friend, and the suffering of the many beings that are supporting you. Beings that are known or unknown, visible or invisible.
5. Now let go of these beings and come back to just your belly. Then go outside in fresh air, with no coat. It is very important to have fresh air where you practise.

Question and answer

- *When I am breathing in hot, heavy air and out the cool light – what am I doing?* You are transforming it, you are making the switch.
- *Is it appropriate to think of a loved one who is dead?* Yes, you can choose someone who is dead.
- *I started focusing on a loved one then other people came along, people I hold anger with. Should I include them?* Of course, it means you are ready to forgive. Don't send them away and say 'not now'. Yes other beings will come into your mind, and that is meant to happen.

- *Questions about getting lost in the story; can't bring up the feeling unless I go into the story; without the story I feel nothing. Tonglen is a simple practice, it is challenging and that is why you are coming up with your stories. The answer is in your practice, not in your head.*

I would like to ask you to be gentle with yourself. If you feel, you can go even slower in your movements. It is very important to be gentle, not to stir more things. If in doubt, just practise skipping – all of you. You've done the work, now it is time to integrate the process. That's why you have to be gentle with yourselves. It is the practice that my teacher gave me to do in 2001, to take off the pressure. So I want you to do that practice, do some skipping, all of you.

- *I felt it really very intense and emotional, the Tonglen practice. The difficult part is making the switch. Don't try to transform it, just breathe out. That is the point of transformation, in the doing of it, doing something positive - it could be some words, 'may all beings be well and happy'. You are going to be touched, allow your heart to open, to soften and embrace all beings. You have to be careful not to turn this into an intellectual exercise; it is very direct, very simple, it is not intellectual.*
- *Taking in pain, it feels too much. When you are taking pain in, you must give out. The transformation is the point of intention, you give out the goodness, the qualities that you have. That is what some of you have been doing, taking in too much and not giving out sufficiently. You can even internally name, 'I give out my kindness, I give out my time, my patience'. To make it more concrete. The more you give out, the more strength you will have to take in. It is a cycle, of the in-breath and the out-breath, otherwise you miss out on the out-breath. The sending out is on the out-breath. Otherwise if you breathe in without breathing out, you make yourself sick.*
- *I was just taking it in, not out. Part of the pattern of trying too hard, thinking 'if I can't take it in there's nothing to send out'. So read the Tonglen short text: Giving is the first word, it is what you have to do first; so there is the order, why I asked you to read the text. You start by giving out, by breathing out. It is all the time about giving out first, the out-breath comes before the in-breath. *But I wanted to open so much.* So you found yourself a recipe to make yourself very unhappy! The practice is to give out your good qualities, sending out so that you can breathe in.*

Go for a long walk outside and see if the *Tonglen* happens spontaneously - if you see a sheep in distress.... Just act normal. Go for a long walk, enjoy yourself.

Tonglen practice with the three poisons

In your heart there is a soft, delicate flower open; with your mind's eye you look down into the centre of the flower at your heart. Now mentally say a few words of appreciation, of thanks, to your heart.

I want you to pay attention to your moments of desire, hatred and delusion – to notice them. How does the movement of desire manifest in the body? The movement is drawing towards you – the movement of wanting, possessing, bringing close to you. So I want you to notice not just big events of desire, but throughout the day there are many small movements of drawing towards you. And when you notice a moment of desire you say to it, 'ah, hello. I notice you', or you can say 'oh, I see you'. What is the movement of hatred? Pushing away, rejection, taking away from you. So you notice the impulse to reject and say hello to the movements away from you. Find a sentence that is kind: 'hello, nice to meet you', 'here you are again', or 'I see you'. To greet this moment of desire, of hatred – from a place of kindness. Without a story, a drama, and then walk on; don't enter into conversation with it. How do you think delusion manifests in the body? Push-pull, or pull-push, or the state of

being frozen. What is delusion? A state of dullness, not being interested, a state of not knowing, a state of ignorance, can't be bothered. It can seem quite peaceful but underneath it is based on confusion, ignorance. *The state of delusion is the hardest to recognise? - it's almost invisible, whereas desire and hatred is very obvious.* There is a danger in the practice when you become dull and cut off, just notice it without praise or blame. See it as a study, not drama; there is nothing wrong with them, don't take it so much to heart. Have more information about aversion, desire, delusion. So you just notice the movements of the body to draw towards you, to push away or to not know. So you just notice them, if you notice them they stop. *I've noticed a strong aversion to memories: 'oh, not that again, how much more practice do I have to do?'* You are in a state of aversion first and then delusion. Notice them first, and then walk on. Our desire, hatred, delusion are fuel for practice.

Instructions for guided meditation

So we first adjust our motivation.

1. Imagine your body hollow from the top of your head down to your toes. Feel the space within. And notice the movement of your belly, the rising and falling. Notice the physical sensation or tension in your body. If there is any discomfort, breathe out ease and lightness to that part of your body. And take in the discomfort as hot, heavy air. Sending out lightness and ease, taking in the heaviness.
2. Now bring to mind a being that you like, a friend. That friend evokes for you a feeling of wanting, of desire, of possessing. Feel that feeling of wanting, feeling it in your body, and take in this feeling as hot, heavy air. And send out cool, light, fresh air to this feeling of wanting. Practise in this way for a short time. You know in your body this feeling of wanting and you take it all in. And you send out an abundance of fresh, light air. Your practice is to focus on the feeling of wanting, not on the person that evokes this for you. So no need to get trapped in stories.
3. See your friend as a connection, a link to all the many beings that suffer from the same condition of wanting. So take in the want of all living beings as you breathe in hot, heavy air. Take it in willingly, happily, joyfully. And send out cooling energy, fresh air, like a shower of cool healing. Send out in abundance joyfully, unlimited. Like a gushing waterfall. Sending out, taking in with eagerness, all the wants of all the beings. Practise in this way for a short while.
4. Now bring to mind a being with whom you have difficulty. This being evokes for you the feeling of pushing away, aversion. Contact this feeling as vividly as you can in your body. Don't focus on the being, on the story. Just on the response in your body. Take in willingly this feeling of aversion as hot, heavy air. And send out in abundance the cool, fresh air like a cooling waterfall.
5. This being that evokes for you the response of aversion is your connection, your link to the many beings who also suffer from this condition. With an open heart you take in all the aversion, all the hate of the beings and send out pure friendly healing energy, in abundance. Like a gushing waterfall. Send out all the love, all the friendliness that you can possibly imagine to these beings. And take in joyfully their hatred. By the power of your practice you will free these beings from their hatred.
6. Now focus on a being that you do not know, a stranger, someone in the crowd, someone you feel indifferent towards. Experience that feeling of indifference in your body. Take it in as hot, heavy air and send out some cooling fresh air to this feeling. You take in all the indifference you have ever experienced towards people and send out abundance of lightness.

7. This unknown being is your connection to the many beings who suffer from the same condition of indifference. So in order to free all beings from the condition of indifference, take in all the indifference of all the beings as hot, heavy air. Send out joyful light energy.
8. Now simply return to the movement of your belly. And mentally say thank you to your heart for being able to do this practice for the benefit of all beings.

I would like you to spend twenty minutes outside to let the meditation settle.

Explanation of the practice

I want to say one more thing to you. Every time you experience hatred, desire, confusion it is your connection to all the many beings who experience the same, so it is an opportunity to practise taking in and sending out. So we said yesterday that these emotions are a fuel for your practice, you can use them in that way. This is a high practice, a deep practice. You are trying to attend to your own greed, hatred and delusion, it is more powerful than the first *Tonglen* practice. Did you begin to feel the connection with the other beings? *Yes, and there is a point when there is no other being, there is no being different from me, it comes in the heart together.* Practise this in your own time to find the switch in you. As you experience hatred, you switch to connect with all the beings who also experience hatred. And if you make that switch you can also practise taking in and sending out for a few breaths. So from now on your emotions are not just for the benefit of you, they are for the benefit of other beings. Does that make sense, at least intellectually? And from this practice you can pull out the root of your own hatred, desire and confusion, so you can become free. It is a simple practice but not easy. *I find it difficult to relate the feeling of desire to people, can it be to things that I want?* Yes, anything that will trigger that connection, that emotion. In the second stage, it is very important not to focus on the people because you are going to get into the story, but to focus on the emotion. So you take in all the hatred and send out loving-kindness. You can choose whatever you want to send out. I chose a few words, but you can choose other words. *I could connect with the desire but found it very difficult to identify with the hatred of others; I could feel my own hatred but not others'. Do I just do more practice?* There is no other trick. You could try to say 'Your pain is my pain, your distress is my distress'. If you can't take in for other beings, it is your way of protecting yourself. With more practice the separation will dissolve. *In the second stage, to many beings, it feels there is more emotion.* It is more, that is why you have to send out more. See it as starting the process, it is not about success or getting it right; you are looking for one moment of taking in and sending out, one moment that will transform your mind. It is very important not to make it too intense - to find the joy, the interest. So go for a walk, have a cup of tea, and let it come. Otherwise you are sitting on your cushion trying, falling asleep, making it very intense; you are pretending to do the practice. The main point is that you go through the three categories, formally. You have to become your own teacher, of how to do the practice; I can give you ideas, then it is for you to see what can work for you. *Tonglen* must be done in the context of *samatha* practice: the 'just sitting' meditation and the walking practice. Basically you have to come from the state of calm to do *Tonglen*. If in doubt, skip.

I have a question for you. It is a test on your practice, listen to the question carefully. When you own completely the emotion of anger, when you take it in completely, what happens to the object? From your experience, listen to yourself for the answer. For anger to exist there has to be an object. So listen to your experience. Basically it is impossible to take in fully your anger and to retain, hold onto, the object at the same time. The person doesn't disappear, it is your holding onto, your perception of it, disappears. When you take in fully any emotion, all your energy is directed at yourself; your

preoccupation with it disappears, you have no energy left to direct onto the object. You cannot hold onto anger (or any other emotion) just by itself, it needs the support of an object. The beauty of the *Tonglen* practice is that you take it all in, so there is no space for holding onto the object. If you still experience anger then you have not taken it in all, you have not done *Tonglen*. This is a very important point. You cannot take it in and hold onto the object at the same time; you have a choice. So your relationship to the object changes, it becomes more neutral, more indifferent, you lose interest in the object, you forget the object; the story is the object. So the *Tonglen* practice is practice of mindfulness again, mindful of the breath in and out, mindfulness of the mind content, and mind state – for example, anger is a mind state. The *Tonglen* practice comes directly from the Buddha.

A second question. So you take in fully the anger, the object of anger disappears, what happens to the feeling of anger? You are talking about a very quick process, it happens very quickly. It dissolves into emptiness before it transforms into something else. So I would like you to pay attention to those two aspects in everyday life. I don't want you to do formal practice, but keep the principle alive.

If you take in the emotion and drop the object, that will transform the intensity of the emotion. If you have a strong emotion you have intense holding onto the object. In the *Tonglen* practice we practise on ourselves – instead of going out to the object, you take it into yourself. That in itself is going to lessen the intensity. It is a question of movement. You cannot go out and in at the same time. To feed your anger you need to hold onto the object. You drop the story and take in the emotion. Instead of projecting, fantasising about the object you take in the emotion, into yourself completely. You can't go out and in at the same time. When you have anger you are fully committed to projecting your anger; you have lots of energy. So as you take it in, you have to drop the object, and plus you send out the positive. That is how you can eradicate the three poisons. The positive energy makes the switch, you reverse the sending out. So next time you have anger, you are projecting out – so stop, take it all back. The same with desire, delusion. When you have emotions, you see them as a movement – projecting, reaching – and stop, take it all back. Of course when you take it in, then you want to send out positivity; it is natural, it is not intellectual. For anger to exist there is a need for the support of an object. Turn away from the object and the anger disappears, your attachment disappears. If anger continues, you still have some attachment to the object. We don't take in the whole feeling, we take in and hold on at the same time.

So your first point of mindfulness is to realise that you have an object. As long as you hold onto the object the emotion will remain. You see your object of anger as a support for the anger, as a fuel for the anger. I keep repeating myself, till the penny drops. It is very important to be in a state of calm first. How do we come to a state of calm? Establish the breathing then do *Tonglen* practice. The idea of the practice is that it comes naturally to you. So you come to a state where there is no more meditation because you are the practice. Meditation can become an object, we do or don't do the practice. So first we train until we are the practice. I would say the word practice will drop away. *A quote from Star Wars: 'Try not, do or do not, there is no try'.* So as soon as you have an object it is outside you, not inside you. So you can play with the object outside for a short time. It has to come in, otherwise you have this duality – 'Am I it or not it? Am I doing it or not doing it?'. *When I'm going deeper, a little voice comes up and sabotages it. The little voice says, 'Oh, you're going deeper'.* Tell the little voice to mind its own business!

Signs in your practice

Do you know the signs when your practice is working, any practice? I give you a list. You know when your practice is working when, in the post-meditation state:

1. If in your everyday life you find yourself having more acts of generosity, this is a sign that your practice is working – when you are more generous in body, speech and mind. That means you are more generous to your mind states also. You are kinder.
2. Your ethics, morality will be tidied up.
3. You will have more patience, not so easily upset by things. At the moment sometimes you are very quickly upset, you have not enough patience.
4. You will have more energy to make effort, not so easily prone to giving up. So you'll have more energy to start something and to finish it.
5. This will improve your focus and your concentration, which you need to go deeper into your practice,
6. to gain wisdom.

These are the six *parami's*. *Parami* means virtues that help you go beyond. So if you want to check your practice you check the six *parami's*: generosity, ethics, patience, energy, concentration, wisdom.

So you see it is not about having fantastic experiences, it is about everyday life; how we conduct ourselves in everyday life. It is said that if you perfect one of the six *parami's* you perfect them all. And the first one is giving, it is not by chance that it is the first one – and the *Tonglen* practice is giving. My first teacher used to say 'I give you a bag of seeds'; the seeds have to be sown in your life, in your environment. And then you nurture the seeds. You could say that you have the seeds of the *parami's*; to perfect the *parami's* you have to take them into your life. So I trust that you have the seeds, that you are going to plant them in your life and that they will come up as beautiful jewels, beautiful gifts for the benefit of all beings. This is all you can do. And you know the seed wants to grow, it is destined to grow. There is no magic, no secrets; it's back to practice, back to doing it. Is that enough to go back into your life? Do you feel stronger?

Dedication

After each practice, to share the merit; this is one way we can benefit others. Place your hand on the heart, or have the hand open, and speak or chant the sharing the merit text:

*Idam te punna kammam
asavakkhayavaham hotu
sabbe satta sukita hontu*

By these wholesome actions,
may the emotional confusions of myself and others be removed

*Through the power of these wholesome activities,
may my life become rich with awakening.
Living thus, may I abandon all unwholesomeness.
Through the endless storm of birth, illness, old age and death,
may I help all beings to cross the ocean of the suffering of the worlds.*

This means that the practice we do doesn't stop with ourselves, doesn't 'dead-end' at ourselves. My aspiration for this practice, for the *sangha*, is joyful connection. A student, in 2000, his business went bankrupt – he was left with no car, no home, in a big depression. He came to a place of letting go completely – of self-image, self-importance, property, money – then motivation came back: 'If I set up another business, it will be for the benefit of all other beings'. And he did set up a new business and it is very successful, going from strength to strength. So if you want to be selfish, you have to give to others first and you will benefit from it (as the Dalai Lama has said). Opening the gate, and to maintain this motivation. That is the practice of loving-kindness, to share it with everyone, not just those you feel good with.

Sources

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Loving Kindness and Maitreya Buddha, December 07

Flowering the Mind of Compassion, November 07

Metta Text, September 06

Deity Meditation, June 05

Compassionate Involvement, April 05

Samatha, *Vipassana* and Deity Meditation, June 04

Notes

The intention has been to present Sonia's words as she spoke, to preserve the flavour and the spirit of her teaching. Anything else is in italics: contributions from students, texts, editing links, other languages (mainly *Pali*).

Only two significant aspects of the teaching have been omitted:

1. instructions for body work exercises / movements, which are learned from demonstration and experience;
2. the *sadhana* texts for deity practice (*vajrayana*), which traditionally are available only to those who were present during the practice and thus received direct transmission of energy from the teacher.

Acknowledgements

This text of teachings are based on notes taken by Gill Blair over the years of 2004-2009.

I would like to thank Gill Blair for her dedication in taking hours of notes over the past five years and for editing and seeing this project to completion for the benefit of the larger *sangha*.

I also would like to thank Jane Sethi, Marion Pahlen, Eleri Walters and Peter May for their valuable comments in the finishing phase of the editing.