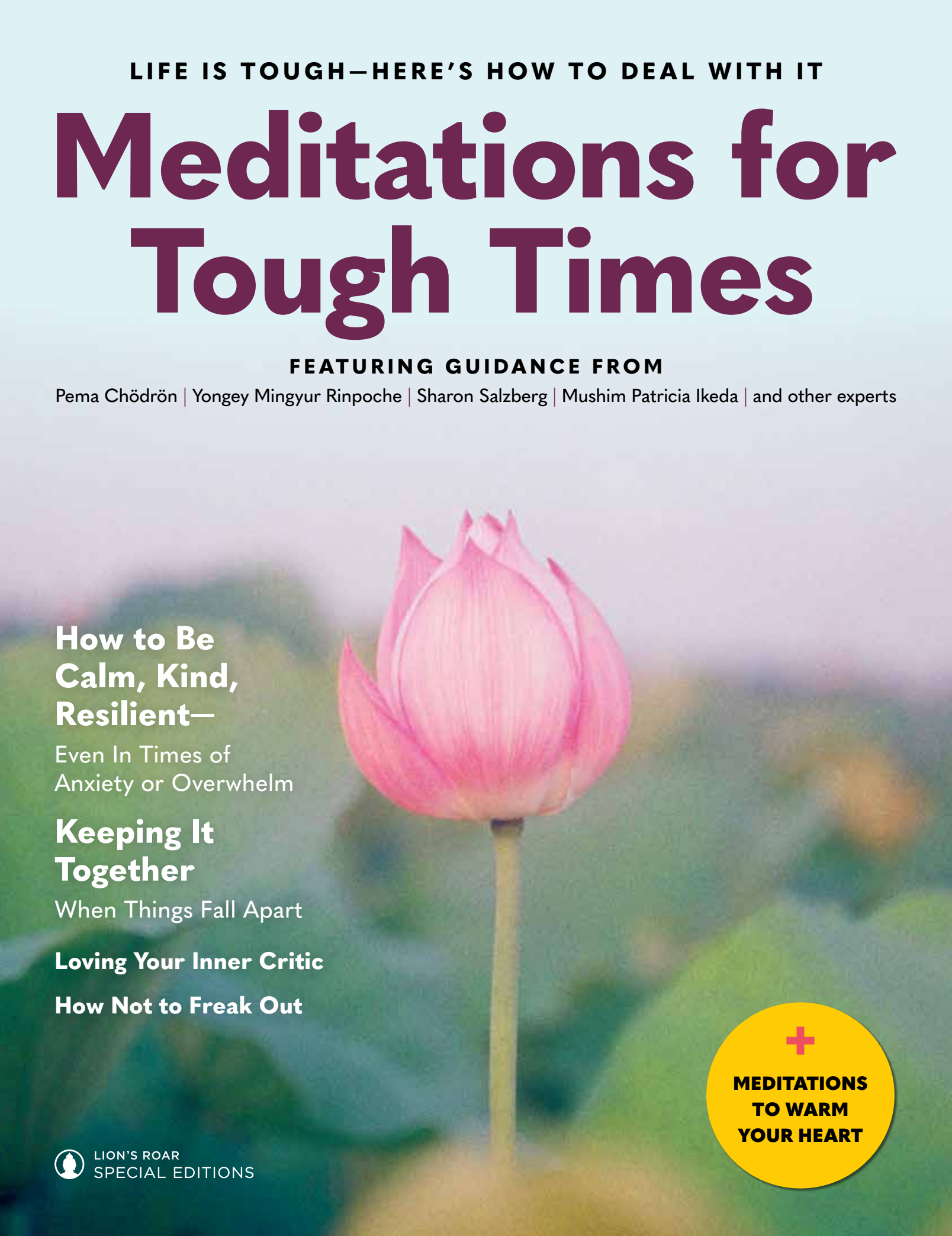
LIFE IS TOUGH—HERE'S HOW TO DEAL WITH IT

Meditations for Tough Times

FEATURING GUIDANCE FROM

Pema Chödrön | Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche | Sharon Salzberg | Mushim Patricia Ikeda | and other experts



How to Be Calm, Kind, Resilient—
Even In Times of Anxiety or Overwhelm

Keeping It Together
When Things Fall Apart

Loving Your Inner Critic

How Not to Freak Out

\+ MEDITATIONS TO WARM YOUR HEART

LION'S ROAR
SPECIAL EDITIONS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Meditations for Tough Times*



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ONE WINTER NIGHT almost a decade ago, I sat on a city bus full of passengers. But we weren't going anywhere. This bus had been sent by the fire department to keep us warm.

Outside the bus window, our apartment building was on fire. Many of my fellow passengers were sobbing into cell phones or crying in each other's arms. I watched the fire with cold hands shoved in my pockets—somewhere in apartment 107, my winter gloves were burning. Each window of the building was a cataract of orange flames chasing black smoke into the sky, and the cloud this smoke created overhead was flashing blue and red with the lights of the fire trucks.

I felt like I was floating, and my feet would not touch the ground for months to come.

This freak electrical fire taught me a vital but difficult lesson: worlds fall apart. It's really what our fragile worlds do better than almost anything else. Something as seemingly permanent as a big brick apartment building *is* impermanent.

At the time, I was not very familiar with Buddhist teachings. This special edition, a sort of meditation toolkit for when our world falls apart, would have helped me. I would've recognized the "groundlessness" that Pema Chödrön describes, and the "shock, withdrawal, and numbness" that Arisika Razak details.

And perhaps, as Cecilia Mitra and Bonnie Nadzam write, I would have seen the grief and rage I felt in the weeks and months following the fire as a unique opportunity, and implementing the practices in these pages would have helped. I might have become familiar with the part of myself that is naturally caring, as Mingyur Rinpoche outlines, or experienced *shikantaza* meditation, as taught by Roshi Pat Enkyo O'Hara, to relax my sense of suffering.

This has been a time when so many of us have seen our worlds fall apart. Illness and death, racial inequity, the loss of jobs and relationships: we've all been living in tough times. May the wisdom in this special issue help you get your feet back on the ground.

—ROSS NERVIG
LION'S ROAR SPECIAL EDITIONS

Meditations for Tough Times

CONTENTS

1 | Introduction
WELCOME!
ROSS NERVIG

PART 1: LOCATING CALM

4 | Unraveling Anxiety
JUDY LIEF

8 | Get Curious About Your Anxiety
DR. PILAR JENNINGS

12 | How I Stopped My Panic Attacks
MINGYUR RINPOCHE

16 | Open, Awake & Truly Safe: Keeping It Together When Things Fall Apart
MELVIN MCLEOD, CECILIA MITRA, IRA SUKRUNGRUANG, GENINE LENTINE, SETH GREENLAND, BONNIE NADZAM, PEMA CHÖDRÖN, ROSHI PAT ENKYO O'HARA, ARISIKA RAZAK, MINGYUR RINPOCHE, CYNDI LEE

30 | Conquer Anxiety with Kindness
SYLVIA BOORSTEIN

31 | Manage Anxiety Mindfully
MELVIN ESCOBAR

32 | Overworked & Overwhelmed
FURYU NANCY SCHROEDER

PART 2: WISDOM TO GET YOU THROUGH

34 | How Not to Freak Out
JUDY LIEF

39 | Connect With Your Breath
KAMILAH MAJIED

40 | How to Welcome The End of The World
JOHN TARRANT

44 | Buddhist Wisdom to Get Us Through—How to Be Calm, Kind, Resilient: Teachings and Meditations to Get Us Through These Tough Times
PEMA CHÖDRÖN, JACK KORNFIELD, AMANA BREMBRY JOHNSON, BONNIE MYOTAI TREACE, ROSHI JOAN HALIFAX, TONI BERNHARD, CYNDI LEE, MUSHIM PATRICIA IKEDA, SPENCER SHERMAN, DR. CHRISTIANE WOLF

58 | Everything Dies
SALLIE JIKO TISDALE

62 | How Not to Lose Heart
SYLVIA BOORSTEIN

64 | 6 Meditations to Warm Your Heart
MELVIN ESCOBAR, SHAUNA SHAPIRO, THUBTEN CHODRON, CAMILLE HAMILTON PATING, JUDY LIEF, LAMA PALDEN DOLMA

PART 3: SUSTAINING PEACE

76 | Finding A Better Balance
DR. CHRISTIANE WOLF

79 | 3 Steps to Compassion
CHRIS GERMEER

80 | How to Have the World—And the Life—We Want
SHARON SALZBERG

85 | How to Feed Your Demons
LAMA TSULTRIM ALLIONE

88 | You Are the Great Perfection
MINGYUR RINPOCHE

92 | Help When Your Heart Breaks
ROSHI JOAN HALIFAX

96 | One Last Thought

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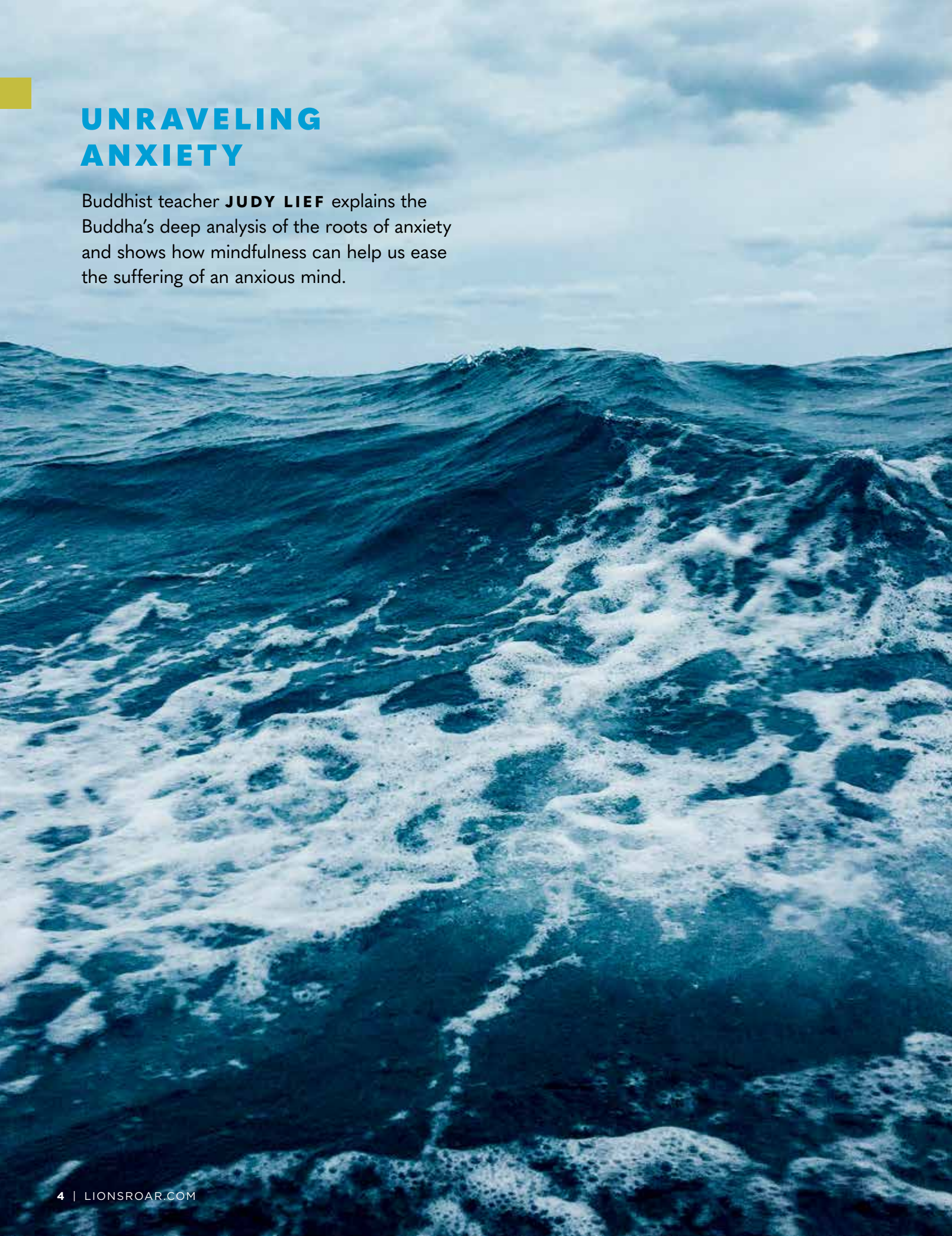
UNRAVELING ANXIETY

Buddhist teacher **JUDY LIEF** explains the Buddha's deep analysis of the roots of anxiety and shows how mindfulness can help us ease the suffering of an anxious mind.



THE MIND IS A TRICKY, stubborn thing. When we try to force it to behave, it resists. Sometimes it seems as if it's an external force taking us over, out of our control, in our face. This is definitely the case with anxiety.

Anxiety lodges in our mind and freaks out our body. Once there, it convinces us why it has every reason to move in. There are the big logics: The world is going to hell. We're all going to die. There are the personal variations: I'm going to get fired. What if I fail my test? What if she leaves me? I can't find a job.

Anxiety makes the case it is inevitable. How can you not be anxious, given how messed up the world seems to be? How else could you respond, if you're paying attention to what's going on? What else could you feel, given the pressures you're under? Anxiety seems to be the only realistic option.

Widespread anxiety is the dark side of modernization. It is like a collective psychic revolt against the dehumanizing nature of modern capitalism with its shallowness and greed, and there is insight there, the visceral knowledge that something is off. But every era has its own form of anxiety. Let's face it, life is stressful. So, do we just hunker down and get through it, or can we find ways to face stressful situations without being overcome by our anxiety and fears?

Buddhism is filled with investigations into the nature of suffering, such as the suffering of anxiety. After all, that was how the whole thing started—with the question of suffering, its causes, and how it can be alleviated. This is not an investigation that was done long ago by Gautama Buddha and is over and done with. It is a continual, living process each of us goes through. It is not philosophical or merely theoretical. It is deeply personal.

In talking about suffering and its many forms, the Buddha brought his analysis to a deeper level with the concept of dukkha. Dukkha is often translated as "suffering," but it points to a fundamental disease, a fundamental anxiety, that is ongoing and ever-present. In Indian music, there are delightful melodies of happiness and sorrow in intricately interwoven patterns. Underlying the melodies of our human drama is the steady, buzzing drone of the tanpura, almost like the buzzing of an electric current. Dukkha is that steady drone, sometimes apparent and other times hidden in the beauty of the tune. It is a subtle type of anxiety, the sense that, no matter what, something is not quite right.

You could call this ground-level anxiety the mother lode, the root problem. It is the inescapable anxiety fed by the false sense of self called ego, which is inherently insecure about its own existence. As long as this is not dealt with, there will be no end to our discontent. The actual world will never be enough to satisfy us; it will never fulfill our endless needs or desires. As long as we don't confront the fundamental anxiety at the core of our being, our experience of life will be split, dualistic, and we will be forever restless. A residue of anxiety will trail our every thought and action.

The Buddha said that we ourselves create this anxiety through our ignorance and neediness. So there is hope, for that implies we have the potential to stop feeding it. So dukkha is good/bad. This steady drone of deep-rooted anxiety is our biggest problem, but it is also what spurs us to pursue the spiritual path.

The Buddha recognized that a certain amount of suffering is simply a fact of life, our inheritance

PHOTO © DARREN SEAMARK / STOCKSY UNITED

"It is not so easy to be with pain or uncertainty, and that's what meditation is all about. Mindfulness is our primary tool for unraveling anxiety."

as humans. He also saw that ironically, the more we struggle to avoid that reality, the more suffering we create. Anxiety is definitely a part of life, like sickness, aging, and death, but we take a bad situation and make it worse by how we respond. We may or may not be able to change what is coming at us, but we can definitely change how we deal with it.

So in accord with Buddha's insights on basic suffering and the additional suffering we add on, we could look directly at the experience of anxiety as it arises in us. However, our tendency of avoidance is so strong and so quick that before we can even begin to let ourselves really feel what is going on, we get entangled in our thoughts and opinions about it. Rather than accepting our situation and dealing with it, we stew about things not going our way, get angry about not getting what we want, mad at not being in control, envious of those in happier circumstances, and on and on. When anxiety takes over, the what-ifs are so powerful we lose track of what actually is. All that just adds on more suffering.

It is tempting to pile on more thoughts about anxiety in an attempt to get rid of our anxiety. Anxiety is not pleasant, we don't want to feel that way, so can't we make ourselves feel something better instead? Where is our "happy place" when we need it? Is there something wrong with us?

When a bad feeling like anxiety arises, the thought bubbles up that we should not be feeling that way, that there's something wrong. We would prefer to be feeling something else instead. This is what I call "the world according to me" approach. In the "world according to me," this would not be happening. But it is.

So let's start there. Let's feel it. What is it like? Can we be still for a moment and simply be with this experience? It is not so easy to be with pain or uncertainty, and that's what meditation is all about. Mindfulness is our primary tool for unraveling anxiety.

Anxiety thrives on compulsive thinking, entranced and powered by thoughts of failure and disaster; meditation is based on taming the mind and freeing ourselves from the domination of these kinds of thought. Meditation is based on present moment experience; anxiety is all about the future. Meditation cuts speculation and brings us back to simple bodily experience; anxiety keeps us spinning so fast that we lose touch with our body.

Mindfulness of the breath is especially helpful in working with anxiety. Through meditation practice we learn about our own breath patterns—how our breathing changes from fast to slow, shallow to deeper, from tight to free-flowing, depending on our thoughts and emotional state. As we become familiar with these variations, we are able to work with the breath as a healing force. If we feel anxious, we can deliberately regulate our breathing until it is slow and steady. We can drop the habit of holding and tightening our breathing.

Mindfulness is about learning to slow down. When we are hit with something stressful, often our first response is to panic and speed up. But if we inject even a tiny disruption into that pattern, even a tiny little pause, we can regain our bearings. We can reestablish our ground.

Mindfulness practice can also help us cut through the loops of anxious thinking, changing our relationship to the uncertainty that feeds that process. We can see that our thoughts and spec-

ulations about what might happen are just that—thoughts. We never know for sure whether the things we are afraid of will happen or not, and our speculation won't make a bit of difference.

In meditation practice, we learn to be with uncertainty rather than cover it up in a panic of anxious thoughts. Simply recognizing what thoughts are up to begins to disempower them. In meditation practice, one technique for doing that is to label whatever arises in the mind as "thinking"—in a very matter-of-fact way, with no judgment—and just return to awareness of the breath.

This may sound strange, but when anxiety builds, I talk with it. I say to my anxiety: What will happen, will happen. I will fail or I will succeed. Things will work out or they will not. In the meantime, will my worry or anxiety change anything? No. Will it help in any way? No. My anxiety won't make a bit of difference, except for making me suffer for no reason. I don't try to avoid what I am feeling, but I try to put it in its place.

The fact is that anxiety is an ineffective way of dealing with life's uncertainties and harshness. We should be anxious, up to a point. If we didn't worry about the possibility of very real disasters, that would be stupid. But once something has got our attention, our anxiety gets in the way. It doesn't help us find ways to prevent such disasters, and it doesn't help us figure out how to deal with matters we cannot fix. The Indian master Shantideva advised a clean and simple approach: If you face a problem you can do something about, do it. Why worry? And if there is nothing you can do about it, so be it. Why worry?

Emotions like anxiety have two sides. They are messengers—they have something to teach us—but they quickly gather strength and take us over, and we lose it.

There is a certain point where excitement or nervousness slips into anxiety. That is a point to notice. Excitement or nervousness can be a good thing. As a writer and teacher, my life is a cycle of deadlines. As I approach the due date for an article or the start of a class, the experience heightens and intensifies. Once I finish, that energy quiets down and relaxes. I think we benefit from that kind of stress–relaxation cycle. It gives us an edge.

But anxiety itself does not benefit us. The more anxious and cautious we become, the more we attract disaster. If you have ever got a ride with a nervous driver, you know how scary anxiety can be. When Simone Biles experienced extreme anxiety during her Olympic performance, she realized how dangerous it would be to continue in that state.

So here we are. We each have our particular sources of anxiety. And along with those, we can't help but be affected by broader threats on a national and global scale. There are frightening and disturbing realities in our world, scary things out there, but the resulting anxiety is ours. It is not out there but in us. It is a habit reaction, an unhelpful and painful one, and it is ours to deal with.

Meditation is not a frontal assault on anxiety. While meditative techniques like breathing can be very helpful in calming an uprising of anxiety, meditation is not really about fixing, getting rid of, or denying anything. It is about how to find sanity and calm in the midst of the world as it is. What else can we do?

JUDY LIEF is a Buddhist teacher in the Vajrayana tradition and author of *Making Friends with Death*.

GET CURIOUS ABOUT YOUR ANXIETY

Buddhism and psychoanalysis take the same approach to calming the anxious mind, says **DR. PILAR JENNINGS**—look with friendly curiosity at your anxiety and what causes it.

NOT LONG AFTER MY FATHER DIED suddenly from a cardiovascular procedure, I was sitting in a local café admiring the beautiful foam heart the barista had created on the surface of my latte. After taking a few sips, I noticed an ache in my arm but carried on enjoying the drink. After a few more sips, my breath grew shallow. It dawned on me that arm pain is a symptom of a heart attack.

Tossing my books in my bag, I walked around the corner to the local Urgent Care. After explaining my symptoms, the kindly doctor attached the various EKG electrodes and ran the test. A few minutes later she returned, looked me in the eye, saying: "Your heart is rock normal."

I sighed, and we giggled, sensing anxiety had been the real culprit.

The problem with anxiety is that everyone feels it, and no one wants to. Like a gnat on a summer night buzzing around you, waking you up again and again as you keep swatting at it, anxiety causes endless agitation even when you're determined to sleep it off.

The great masters of the human condition, starting with the historical Buddha, encouraged us to be curious about the causes of anxiety. Deciding to look at what's causing our distress might shake things up—our most valued relationships might change, even our very sense of self. But then, at long last, relief will come.

We're complex creatures, and for this reason, anything can be fertile ground for anxiety. It's even worse when crisis looms, which is why many of us have suffered a lot of anxiety these past several years. It's interesting that some people have experienced anxiety, while others have felt fear. Let's look at how these feelings differ and overlap.

Both fear and anxiety have a protective function. They signal the presence of a danger or threat and help us prepare for challenges with increased chances of survival. Whether we're anxious or frightened, the body responds—blood is sent from the brain to the outer extremities to prepare for action, stress hormones are released, and the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system kicks into gear, preparing us to fight or flee.

The primary difference between fear and anxiety is what triggers them. Fear is a logical response to a known threat, proportionate to the reality one faces. When a news flash announces an incoming tornado, fear is the appropriate response. It can help you when you most need to respond swiftly.

Anxiety, in contrast, usually involves a discrepancy between the external threat and internal response. The sense of danger is active, but when and how this danger will manifest is unknown. A murky feeling of distress and agitation hovers, with "free-floating" anxiety interacting with all possible sources of danger.

Psychoanalytic theory offers this insight: our anxiety carries something deeply personal within it, usually from prior experience that over-

PHOTO © DARREN SEAMARK / STOCKSY UNITED



PILAR JENNINGS is a psychoanalyst practicing in New York City, a lecturer at Union Theological Seminary, and author of *Mixing Minds: The Power of Relationship in Psychoanalysis and Buddhism*.

whelmed us before we had the resources to cope. So unlike fear, it's laden with personal history that gets linked to current situations.

Having lived through the pandemic, we see many examples of this difference. Let's start with the fear many have experienced and move on to anxiety.

This was a potentially lethal virus we didn't know much about. Anyone paying attention would understandably have been afraid. Because of fear, we changed our behavior, protecting ourselves and others. We bought masks, hand sanitizer, and kept our distance.

While most of us rightly felt anxious at some point—worried about a trip to the grocery store or concerned about a vulnerable loved one—some people became locked into anxiety with no obvious way out. Why were they so vulnerable?

Lurking in anxiety is usually some prior trauma or experience that overwhelmed our ability to sustain feelings of relative safety. For people who've lived through sudden and shocking change—war, natural disasters, a tragic death—current stressors reawaken the terror of too much loss too soon.

But there are also traumatic experiences that are harder to identify—a family system that feels chaotic for reasons a young child cannot understand, or a parent's resentment toward their child's ever-present need for care and love. These experiences can cause beliefs to form before we're verbal, creating an early roadmap for how to be in the world and survive. A toddler picking up their parent's unconscious hostility might believe, "I'm too much," or "I don't matter."

In the throes of a sudden pandemic, these beliefs might be reawakened—by a boss or company that seems similarly unconcerned about their employee's well-being, or resentful that personal safety efforts are interfering with the organization's needs. Anxiety emerges, like a signaling system announcing: I'm in danger and nobody cares!

When responding to these difficult experiences, the Buddha encouraged friendly curiosity. Freud and his cohort encouraged a similar practice: a willingness to lift into awareness the beliefs and prior experiences that may have been unconscious until awakened by a current difficulty. But anxiety is so unpleasant, we simply want it to go away instead of doing this work. When the proverbial gnat in our mind starts buzzing, it's tempting to start swatting with our eyes closed.

For many of us, this involves distraction: food, alcohol, Netflix, sleep, etc. Anything to get the comfort and relief we long for. Others might cope by avoiding anything that seems to awaken the anxiety. If being out in the world stirs anxiety, we'll stay home. If intimacy stirs anxiety, we'll keep our relationships contained and tepid. If new opportunities stir anxiety, we'll cling to what we know, even if we're clinging to conditions that are painful.

These safety measures are understandable. We reach for what has worked in the past when feeling threatened, until we find new ways of coping that prove trustworthy. Everyone wants relief and comfort when the suffering is strong. But life narrows when withdrawal and distraction are our primary ways to cope.

In Buddhism, we learn methods for looking closely at our suffering, including the suffering of anxiety. This was the Buddha's first psychological gift to us—to affirm that suffering is human, normal, and worth our respectful curiosity. This teaching goes a long way toward reducing the shame so many feel when anxious. As a clinician, I've heard many patients over the years lament that other people cope just fine when they cannot.



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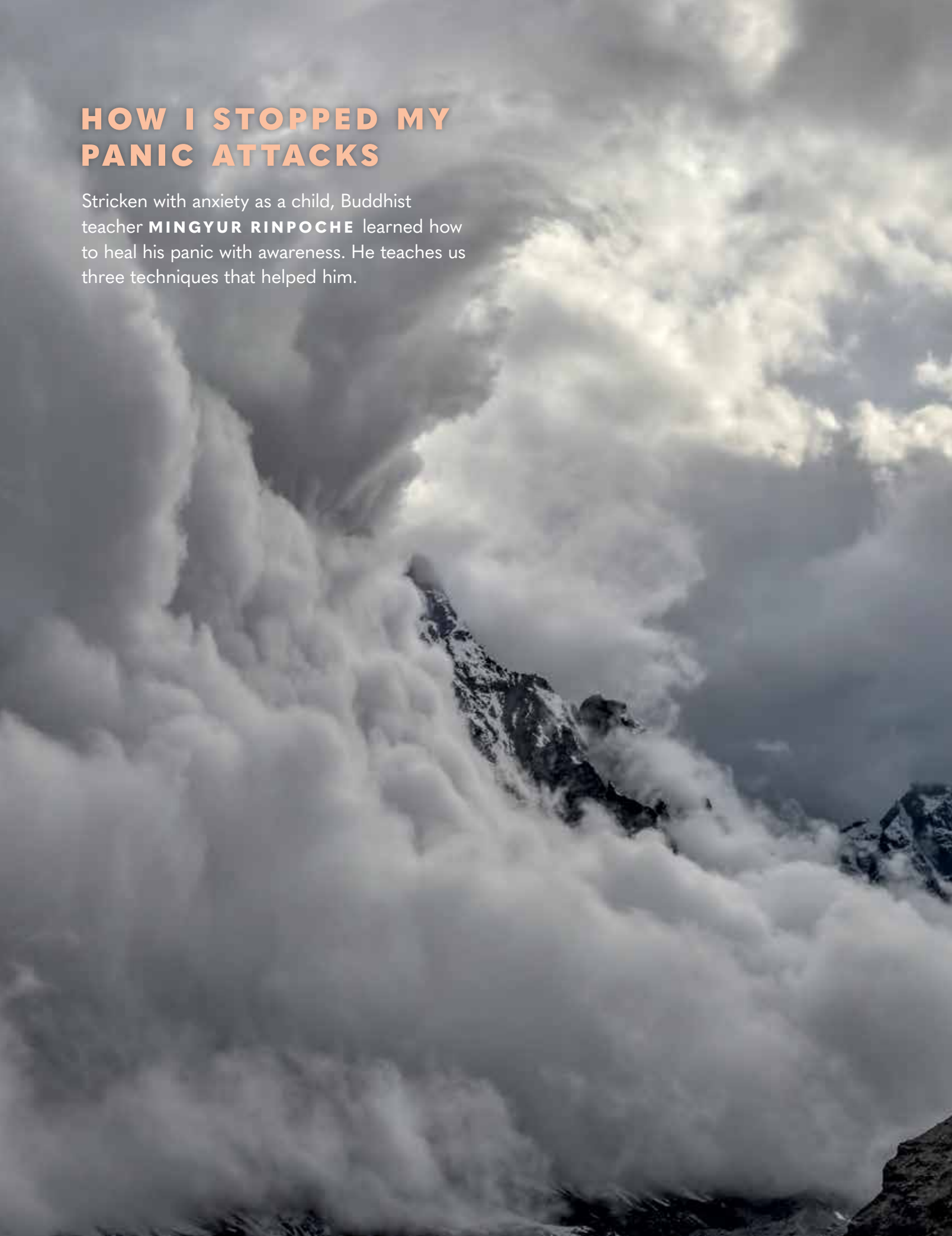
"I'm a nervous wreck, while others confidently enjoy life!"

Often, we fixate on the symptoms of our suffering and distract ourselves from the causes. Again, this is a natural human tendency: getting mental distance from the suffering itself. Yet I've found, both as a clinician and a Buddhist, that when we risk turning toward the causes of our anxiety, we'll have a much better chance of getting the relief we need and deserve.

In our spiritual practice, we do this by cultivating the ability to observe what's happening in our minds with as little judgment as possible. By developing a feeling of friendly curiosity even about our neuroses. By noticing where we feel anxiety in the body. Especially by noting any powerful narratives that cause its arising. When we're heading into whatever stirs our particular fears, do we hear ourselves proclaim: "You never get things right!" or, "You can't be seen"? The noticing itself is the first step toward the willingness to care for the ways we've come to suffer.

In psychotherapy, we explore prior experiences that contribute to painful narratives about ourselves and others. We also investigate contradictory beliefs that invariably cause anxiety—the belief you should be your neighbor's keeper, but also look out for number one. Or that you should be safely dependent on a loved one, but also take care of yourself without help.

These conflicting feelings and beliefs make life feel treacherous. Feelings of aloneness take over when our problems seem insoluble. But in both the Buddhist and psychotherapeutic traditions, we come to realize that suffering, like anxiety, is our road into the human family. What may feel like a signal of unique inadequacy is actually an opportunity to appreciate that our particular suffering reflects the suffering of us all. Others may look just fine—wearing stylish outfits with a bounce in their step!—but they too are working hard to turn toward their distress, usher out anxiety, and enjoy the blessings of a good life.



HOW I STOPPED MY PANIC ATTACKS

Stricken with anxiety as a child, Buddhist teacher **MINGYUR RINPOCHE** learned how to heal his panic with awareness. He teaches us three techniques that helped him.

I **SUFFERED TERRIBLE ANXIETY** in my childhood. I desperately wanted to run away from it or fight it off. I don't know exactly what the true cause of my panic was, but it manifested in many ways.

I was terrified of snowstorms. In my hometown in the Himalayas, winter brings many snowstorms. I remember one in particular. The wind was so intense it shook the house, and my mother found me holding fast to the house's central beam. "What are you doing?" she asked. I said, "I have to save us from this wind!" Mom found this very funny.

I found no relief in the summer, either, with its rainstorms full of thunder and lightning. Sometimes, too, we would go down to Kathmandu Valley, and I was really scared of the public transportation there. We would ride the bus, and with each bump my heart would be bumping too. The sound of fireworks going off was a nightmare for me.

I tried so many ways to deal with my anxiety: running, playing, escaping into the nearby caves to hide. But nothing worked. In fact, I learned that aversion only makes anxiety bigger, stronger, and more solid.

Knowing how I struggled, my father, a famed meditation teacher, advised me to welcome my panic. So I dutifully began to greet each panic episode with, "Oh, hello, anxiety, welcome!" It did help somewhat, but because my motivation hadn't actually changed, I was not handling it much differently. My basic attitude was still aversion. Now I was just trying to outsmart the fear, thinking that if I welcomed the panic it would go away and not come back. You could almost say I was faking it. Even this fake welcoming helped somewhat, but it didn't resolve the issue. I was still going in circles—experiencing anxiety and being anxious to be rid of it, which would in turn reinforce it.

At thirteen, I started a three-year retreat at Sherab Ling Monastery, which was the main seat of one of my most important teachers, Tai Situ Rinpoche. I was hoping that in this structured environment, I could escape my laziness, but after a good start, it began to creep back in. Eventually, even in the structured meditations, my mind was all over the place. Then my panic returned, and got even worse—my laziness and my panic got together and became good friends!

The worse I felt about this, the stronger the panic got. Daily we met together in the great hall, sometimes doing traditional ritual practices with drums and the long, loud horns called dungchens. My throat would tighten, I couldn't breathe, I'd get dizzy. I would have to leave in the middle of the prayers. And I had two more years to go!

"What should I do?" I asked myself. "Spend another two miserable years like this? Or should I truly welcome my panic?" I decided to really let go of wanting to block, get rid of, or fight it. I would finally learn how to live with it, and to use it as support for my meditation and awareness. I welcomed it for real.

What began to happen was that the panic was suspended in awareness. On the surface level was panic, but beneath it was awareness, holding it. This is because the vital first step to breaking the cycle of the anxious mind is to connect to awareness.

In meditation, we have different ways to achieve this. One of the most basic and essential steps is to bring our awareness to the breath. Just gently rest our attention on the inhale and exhale, without trying to change it in any way. And here are three other meditations you can do to work with feelings of anxiety, fear, or panic.

MEDITATE ON SOUND

Begin by sitting in a comfortable posture, letting the body be relaxed and at ease. Take a few moments to let awareness settle in the body, just noticing any sensations that are present.

Next, be aware of any sounds that are present. These might be pleasant, like birds singing outside; something we ordinarily think of as "noise," like a neighbor's dog barking; or sounds we find neutral. But whatever sounds you hear, just be with them. Notice how sounds arise, remain for a moment, and then disappear. There is no need to try to hang on to any specific sounds or disregard others. Simply embrace the sounds with a gentle touch of awareness.

PHOTO BY MICHAL KNITL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

When images, thoughts, or emotions occur in the mind, there is no need to block them; instead, allow them to accompany the sound, noticing how they can be present in awareness along with the sounds.

There is no need to focus strongly on a particular sound, but simply know that you are hearing—the knowing is meditation. Notice how awareness can accommodate any sound, without your having to do anything.

It is normal for your mind to wander off. Whenever you get lost, simply come back to being aware of the sounds in your surroundings.

Before ending the practice, take a moment to appreciate that you are capable of hearing. Appreciate that you have awareness, and that you are taking time to familiarize yourself with this ever-present awareness.

CHANGE THE CHANNEL

Ordinarily, the anxious mind focuses on the negative and magnifies it. We can "change the channel" by doing the opposite. We can bring our awareness to the positive instead, perhaps by having gratitude and appreciation for the various types of good fortune we enjoy.

Traditionally in Buddhism, we rejoice in having been born into a human body, in having the five senses, in being born in that place of freedom. And of course, everybody has awareness, love, compassion, and wisdom. These are some simple things about being alive that we might appreciate.

Something else we should understand is that an anxious mind is always talking. *Blah blah blah! Yadda yadda yadda!* Yet, it is not the essential self that is anxious—it is merely the mind, having a lot of opinions. You are not your thoughts. This is a very important perspective to remember.

BREAK YOUR ANXIETY INTO PIECES

We can bring awareness to any tactile sensations we're experiencing in the body that are associated with anxiety. Once we tune in to the many sensations we are experiencing, we realize that anxiety has many facets or pieces.

Without trying to change anything, observe all those pieces of your experience. In doing so, you will find that you have physical sensations—for instance, the pulse racing, or a feeling of constriction. There will be an audio component, if nothing else the sound of your own breath. There will be visual images inside the mind.

And there will be beliefs, or what is traditionally called view. "Oh, this is right, this is wrong, this is dangerous." Especially nowadays, in a world with so many competing views and forces bombarding us with projections and labels, we have all internalized specific views.

Now notice that what you were thinking of as one thing—anxiety—is actually made of four pieces. This multiplicity of pieces is always changing—there is nothing permanent there. At the same time, they're all dependent on one another to create this experience of panic: without sensation, images, sound, and beliefs, there's no anxiety. All of these parts are interdependent, impermanent, and changing, going up and down, up and down.

Once you break it down this way, panic loses its power. When you look at the deeper level of each piece and see there is nothing solid there, nothing permanent, the anxious mind loses power over you. At that moment, there's openness. Awareness is there, yet there is no grasping. Rest with that.

When we are out in the world living our lives, we should practice appreciation consistently. Be aware of all the gifts you have. No matter what our circumstances, there is always much to be grateful for. If you begin to feel fear, remember it is merely thought, just a bunch of opinions. And if a powerfully anxious mind arises, recall that in reality there are many different pieces of this experience, and that they are all changing, all interdependent. There is nothing singular, solid, or permanent about anxiety. Let the mind rest in this awareness.

YONGEY MINGYUR RINPOCHE is a teacher in the Kagyu and the Nyingma traditions of Tibetan Buddhism and founder of Tergar Meditation Community. His most recent book is *In Love with the World*.

PHOTO BY LAMA TASHI



Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, son of the famous Dzogchen teacher Tulku Urgyen, suffered from intense panic attacks as a child.

Open, Awake and Truly Safe





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INTRODUCTION

ALL MEETING ENDS in parting, said the Buddha. This is an inescapable—and heartbreaking—fact of life. Whether it is someone we love, a good situation, how we define ourselves, or life itself, there is nothing we can hold onto forever. Everything eventually changes, ends, falls apart, breaks, dies.

How we react when things fall apart is the single greatest challenge in life—and its greatest opportunity. In it is the choice between suffering and awakening.

According to Buddhism, fundamental ignorance is what causes our suffering. This ignorance is a kind of solidification—the way we create a false reality that we and our world are separate, enduring, and solid things. In fact, we could say that the entirety of samsara, this whole existence marked by suffering, is nothing more than this solidification.

So when things are falling apart, when we feel groundless and uncertain, we only create more suffering when we try to put them back together—to make them solid again. We suffer because that is, of course, impossible—even if we succeed it will only be temporary. And think of the suffering we cause ourselves and others when we hold onto a relationship we should let go of, try to rebuild our ego when it's suffered a blow, or fight to take society back to the past. All this suffering, personal and collective, comes from trying to make things secure, solid, and familiar again.

We choose suffering by rebuilding samsara when things fall apart. We choose awakening when we have the courage to rest in the space of groundlessness and not try to escape its discomfort. There, in the open space of reality, we glimpse enlightened mind. We are open. We are awake. And because our true nature is beyond the ups and downs of life, we are ultimately safe.

Enlightenment is a big word for a very ordinary thing. Every time it feels like life is falling apart, it's right there.

—MELVIN MCLEOD

STREAM OF TEARS

Grief offers a unique opportunity, says bereaved mother **CECILIA MITRA**, but only if we're not afraid to discover its primal source.

ON AN OTHERWISE ordinary Monday morning, I found my thirty-year-old son dead on his bed, for no apparent reason. No illness, no explanations, no goodbyes—just dead. Although I was stunned and paralyzed with grief, I guided my beloved son by repeating, like a mantra, "May you have the best rebirth possible." It was my last duty as his mother.

In the days and months that followed, it felt like part of my body had been cruelly ripped off. There are no words to adequately describe what the sudden loss of a child feels like, especially if you're unsure as to the cause of death. Even when later I found out that he had died of natural causes, my suffering was still unbearable. As if on a rollercoaster, I circled round and round through the emotions of grief.

Grief, however, offers a unique opportunity, but only if we're not afraid to cut it open and discover its primal source. Once the source is exposed, healing happens naturally. To a Buddhist, this process of investigation is the essence of what practice is all about. For me, reading the suttas on death, contemplating the Buddha's advice, spending time in solitude, and meditating were all important tools.

I needed meditation—to be quiet and calm my mind—at least three times a day. I was having flashbacks of my son lying dead on his bed, and well-meaning people were concerned. I thought to myself, of course I'm having flashbacks! I just found my son dead! It would be unnatural not to process this deeply. When I was able to meditate enough, my flashbacks disappeared.

Instead of numbing my pain, I wanted to gain understanding of it—to observe and investigate the causes. The Buddha said, "The stream of tears that you have shed through countless lives in samsara, through meeting misfortune, is more than the waters in the oceans." Healing starts with understanding suffering at its root and moving toward rather than running away from the suffering. Mindfulness meditation was my method. I just had to be brave enough to sit through it.

We perpetually lug around with us two metaphorical bags—one contains our past and the other contains our future. The past is full of regrets and sadness and the future is full of fears, worries, and fantasies. Unless we're mindful, we're never in the present moment where we can lay down these two burdens.

Meditation gave me clarity of mind. It made me more relaxed and able to release the tension from my body, which was stiff with pain. It gave me the freedom to pause from clinging to any identity, even the persona of a grieving mother. Experiencing this freedom for even a short time helped me tremendously. The more I meditated, the more I learned to be mindful in observing the grief and the pauses. When there were more pauses than grief, I knew I was moving forward.

The death of a child is the most traumatic experience for any parent. For any person. Although we'll never get over the death, we can let go of the pain and trauma and move forward with right understanding.

CECILIA MITRA is the author of *Opens Like a Flower, Cut it With a Knife: A Buddhist Mother's Journey Through Grief* and former president of the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils.

PHOTO BY SIMON MIGAJ



JOLLY RANCHERS FOR BUDDHA

In the wake of divorce, **IRA SUKRUNGRUANG** needs his Buddha to smile more—and candy makes everyone smile.

AFTER THE DIVORCE, I found myself living in a home too big for one person, a home with a pool and hot tub turning green from neglect and a one-acre lot I didn't have the energy to mow. I sat in an oversized bean bag, a bronze Buddha above me, constantly praying. I suffered, but my suffering was self-induced. It was born from a voice, which is in all of us—the one that says we're weak.

Years before, when my father left, my mother too found herself in front of Buddha, asking for guidance. Each morning, she'd light incense and give an offering of coffee.

But I did not light incense because it played havoc with my sinuses, and instead of coffee, I put a Jolly Rancher in a shot glass for my Buddha. I don't know why I thought this was a good idea. Perhaps I needed my Buddha to smile more, and candy makes everyone smile.

My mother and I both felt alone and abandoned. Our sadness oozed out in self-loathing, which turned to anger and then self-pity. There's been so much written about the detriments of feeling sorry for yourself, but I believe you're allowed it. Eat your ice cream. Binge watch your Korean dramas. Think the world has done you wrong, or you can't do anything right, or you deserve to suffer. Life sucks. You suck.

Staying in this state for too long, however, begins to rot the core of you. With self-pity, everything revolves around you, you, you. It did for me, me, me. Pity eviscerates compassion, and compassion is the light we need to get us out of the hole we've dug ourselves.

At some point—I don't know when—I had to find some outlet for my sorrow. For my mother it was playing golf in the early morning after her night shift at the hospital. For me it was writing.

I let pity happen on the page, too. Pity was there, a petulant child screaming for attention. I was doing the thing I tell my writing students to avoid. I wrote without "emotional distance," the necessary amount of time to gain perspective on an experience. My writing came from a place of hurt. It relived the marriage, the best and worst of it. But the more I wrote, the more perspective I gained. Compassion blossomed on the page. Understanding, too. And forgiveness.

For five years, I wrote. At the end of those five years, I had a book, but I had also found what I wanted and needed, things that my marriage couldn't have provided.

When my mother played golf those many years ago, I saw her sadness in the elegance of her swing. I saw something else too: her steadfast concentration in hitting this small ball as far as she could, sending it soaring through the air and toward a hole in the distance. I saw her find herself again. It took time, and a whole lot of early morning rounds, but she swung her way into her new life.

IRA SUKRUNGRUANG is a professor of creative writing at Kenyon College. His most recent book is a memoir about his divorce, *This Jade World*.

BETTER WITH BUTTER

Laid off, **GENINE LENTINE** finds solace in an exquisitely buttery meditation practice.

IN MARCH 2019, just after San Francisco started sheltering in place, my teaching position came to an abrupt halt. The school would finish the spring semester, but there'd be no fall 2020 incoming class. The adjunct faculty? We were all being laid off.

I loved my job, and it was wrenching to hold those final classes of what was now the last semester. Holding this heartbreak as an open inquiry, I gravitated toward practices that called me off screen and into my body. They were practices that encouraged a mindset of not just sufficiency, but of plenty, and of stability within the cascading emergencies unfolding that spring.

I found particularly visceral solace in a practice, which I'd learned decades ago from Roshi Enkyo O'Hara, found in the autobiographical writings of the great eighteenth-century Zen master Hakuin. He described being

in a state of extreme imbalance rooted in an exaggerated emphasis on emptiness in his practice. "Zen Sickness," he called it. My Zoom fatigue wasn't quite as nuanced as his rarefied malaise, but I could identify with his sense of depletion.

Hakuin's zazen funk (zazennui?) sent him "clambering over jagged rocks, pushing through heavy vines and clinging underbrush" to the door of Hakuyu, a hyperbolically ancient hermit who dwelled in a mountain cave, almost in the clouds, above Kyoto.

Hakuin peered into the cave to see a figure seated on a grass mat and was dazzled by Hakuyu's "wonderful head of black hair flecked with bits of white," and his "fine, youthful complexion." Hakuyu carefully sized Hakuin up and prescribed the soft butter meditation.

"Imagine that a lump of soft butter, pure in color and fragrance and the size and shape of a duck egg, is suddenly placed on the top of your head," Hakuin writes.

You visualize your body heat slowly melting the butter, letting it permeate your whole being. That the mind alone—no actual butter is required—can impart such an exquisite sensation, is itself of far-reaching encouragement.

Recently I texted my friend Jason Protass, a scholar of Chinese Buddhism at Brown University, and asked him about the soft butter meditation. He wrote back, "Hakuin's butter meditation moves *qi*, energy, down through the body. The 'soft butter pill' is an elixir and has inner alchemy vibes."

Jason also pointed out that, like ours, Hakuin's was an age of inequality, unemployment, famines, and suffering. It's worth remembering, he suggested, that the butter meditation emerged in such an environment.

Hakuin wrote in a journal almost three centuries ago, and I can read his insights when I need them now. For me, that's the most encouraging thing as I refresh my work life: there's a sangha that stretches across time, across space, and we manage to communicate, "warm hand to warm hand," Zoom screen to Zoom screen, DM to DM, six feet apart, and even—may it be so—face-to-face.

In whatever form, we carry each other with us, whether we're in a room together or not. That is the butter. It permeates us. It warms us. Its sustaining force, as Hakuyu told Hakuin, is "a secret you could not use up in a whole lifetime." Not even close.

GENINE LENTINE is a poet and interdisciplinary artist. As artist-in-residence at the San Francisco Zen Center, she curated a celebration of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.

MARRIED WITH CHILDREN —AND CANCER

In the face of a terrying diagnosis, **SETH GREENLAND** learns that the only moment that truly exists is the one he's currently living.

WHEN I WAS THIRTY-SEVEN years old I was diagnosed with stage four cancer. My wife was pregnant and we already had a two-year-old.

The situation was suboptimal, not to mention highly stressful. And it wasn't the kind of stress you experience stuck in a traffic jam when you're late to a meeting. This was the kind that occurs when you think you might actually die. After the shock of the initial diagnosis wore off, I maintained a mostly placid exterior, but a brain scan would have revealed an image of "The Scream" by Edvard Munch. That level of anxiety and tension does not allow your body to most efficiently begin to heal. What to do?

These were the years before meditation and mindfulness were practices even your dog groomer did, and my exposure to Asian philosophy was mostly courtesy of the television show Kung Fu. But I had seen images of Buddhist monks from the time of the Vietnam War and they always struck me as preternaturally calm. How could I access their tranquil state? We lived in New York at that time, so I announced to my wife that the two of us were going to the Zen center to learn how to meditate.

There, we received our instructions from the roshi, parked ourselves on our zafus, and dutifully attempted to meditate. It was not easy for either of us, but that's another story. The point is, we kept at it and my wife became a recognized expert and teacher. I became whatever the opposite of an expert is.

So, my session at the Zen center did not turn me into a zafu jockey. If I'm being honest (and why not?), the daily practices I eventually engaged in when dealing with cancer were tai chi and chi gong. But where Buddhism helped me was in the area of awareness, which was not something I had really thought about until then.

To paint you a picture: I was young and ambitious and largely oriented toward the future. Did I taste each bite of delicious New York City pizza, inhale the scent of Cen-



tral Park after every rainfall? Of course not. Did I appreciate every sunset? Not if I had to pick up a takeout dinner from Chirping Chicken before hurrying home to return a late phone call.

When I got sick, my focus on the future did not immediately shift; only its quality did. Ambition was subsumed by near-constant dread, visions of triumph by portents of disaster. What the idea of awareness taught me was this: the only moment that exists is the one we currently find ourselves in. The challenge of attention is to fully experience it. Meditative practices enabled me to still the voices howling within and find a calmness that allowed me, when my ordeal was over, to move through the world in a different way.

SETH GREENLAND's books include the memoir *A Kingdom of Tender Colors* and the novel *The Hazards of Good Fortune*.

A DRAGON AT EACH BREAST

BONNIE NADZAM was warned, "When you're holding that baby, you're holding the dragon." Even so, she had no idea how hard it would be.

THE TWINS WERE A WEEK OLD when my partner made the grave mistake of getting dressed to go for a run. Can you imagine? *A run*. Who did he think he was?

I couldn't get to the bathroom without my guts spilling out. My abdominal muscles had split open down the middle to such a degree that I could see the wriggly shape of my intestines—the extent of it had shocked even my nurse. If I twisted or moved or walked a certain way, I herniated. But I had to maintain my posture because I was holding and/or nursing two babies.

My body was a sore, leaking, broken mess—to say nothing of my mind. Once something like a flame, it had turned cold and clammy, something like clay, something like the soft poop in a diaper. Could I start my SSRIs again? No. How about a coffee? No.

So...a run? Did my partner want a divorce? Since there were twins, how about two divorces? In truth, he was as exhausted and disoriented as me; he needed and deserved that run.

We were new in town. No family, no friends. We couldn't afford a nurse or nanny. I had no maternity leave, so I was working from home (lucky, I know!) while my partner was back at the office. It was winter—there was no going outside—and there was, of course, no sleep. We both had to pull all-nighters over and over...

Being parents was exactly what we'd wanted, dreamed of, prayed for, and we were so grateful our babies were healthy. But the difficulty took our breath away. How did everyone else do this?

Just before delivery, I'd participated in Rohatsu, the commemoration of the Buddha's enlightenment, at Great Plains Zen Center. Myoyu Roshi—herself a mother and grandmother—welled up as she explained that as a new mother, a practitioner might break down, desperate for time to sit. "But," she said, tears on her face, "when you're holding that baby, *you're holding the dragon*."

I found this beautiful, even profound, but it didn't apply to me. Of course, I'd be doing zazen. I was forever calculating how to do everything I'd once done—and more—with babies. The calculating was ceaseless, panicked, determined, delusional. And the parade of fantasies only intensified as I sat in place with a dragon at each breast.

Years before, during sesshin at Zen Center of Los Angeles, an intense, days-long stretch of zazen meditation, I'd told Egyoku Roshi I was feeling "like a trapped rat." It was a reference to the *Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness* by Dongshan Liangjie, the founder of the Caodong (Soto Zen) school of Buddhism. What I meant was that I'd reached the point (it comes every sesshin) when I realized—again!—that there's nowhere to go. There's no meal to cook in my mind, no sexual fantasy, not even an important to-do list, that's anything but passing delusion. Egyoku's response came at me in a smiling roar: "GOOD!"

Eventually, I realized the same truth the winter I was fixed in place with two infant boys. There was nowhere to go; there was no other zazen to practice on my zafu across the room or in a temple somewhere. There was just the rocking chair and those warm, wiggly creatures. However I felt about being a new mother—and I felt the full spectrum from misery and rage to blissed-out gratitude—every second of it was an opportunity.

BONNIE NADZAM is a poet, essayist, and novelist (*Lamb* and *Lion*). She is coauthor of *Love in the Anthropocene*.

PHOTO © COSMA ANDREI / STOCKSY UNITED

SMILE AT FEAR

If you can smile at your fear, says **PEMA CHÖDRÖN**, the things that make you feel anxious and inadequate lose their power over you.

WHEN WE LOOK at the world around us—our immediate world and the world beyond—we see a lot of difficulty and dysfunction. The news we hear is mostly bad news, and that makes us afraid.

The fear these days seems so palpable, so atmospheric. You can almost smell the fear around you. The polarization, fundamentalism, aggression, violence, and unkindness that are happening everywhere on the planet bring out our fear and nervousness and make us feel that we are on shaky ground. The truth is that the ground has always been shaky, forever. But in times when fear is prevalent, that truth is more obvious.

Scientific tests have proved that people are more afraid of uncertainty than they are of physical pain. The basic queasiness that leads us to all kinds of self-destructive and other-destructive habits emerges from our fear of uncertainty, of not knowing what in the world is happening or what is going to happen.

My late teacher, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, taught that our fear of underlying, fundamental uncertainty is based on doubting ourselves, not trusting ourselves. You could also say it is not loving ourselves, not respecting ourselves. In a nutshell, we feel bad about who we are.

So the very first step in working with uncertainty and fear, and perhaps the hardest, is developing an unconditional friendship with oneself.

Developing unconditional friendship means taking the very scary step of getting to know yourself. It means being willing to look at yourself clearly and to stay with yourself when you want to shut down. It means keeping your heart open when you feel that what you see in yourself is just too embarrassing, too painful, too unpleasant, too hateful.

This whole mess the human race is in—the fact that we don't take care of the planet and we don't take care of each other, the wars, the hatred, the fundamentalism—all actually come from running away from who we are. Individually, collectively, we are trying to avoid feeling bad about ourselves.

Once you start to look at it this way, once you start to smile a bit about this fear instead of letting it escalate, you realize that going about things this way is crazy. Wait a minute here, you might think, what's going on? Seemingly, it's just me. But me seems to be being pretty hard on me. What's up with that? When I start to see behind it all, a smile crosses my face. When I allow myself to look at what hurts, I find a genuine, open heart. The business of avoiding who we are is a game that never needed to begin in the first place. That's worth a smile.

It's not so easy to do, but fortunately we have a method that can help us discover the courage to smile at fear. Meditation practice is a way to be with ourselves fully and completely, allowing the time and space to see it all with gentleness, kindness, and dead honesty. It is the safest environment within which to undertake this mission impossible.

And when meditation practice has helped us to be honest and courageous enough to know ourselves in a deep way, we can begin to extend out and help others, because the things outside of us that appear threatening can be worked with far more sanely and humanely when we've started to make an honest relationship with the fear within. The things that unnerve us, that make us feel we can't handle the groundlessness and uncertainty of life, that trigger feelings of inadequacy, lose their power over us when we learn to smile at fear.

PEMA CHÖDRÖN is one of America's leading Buddhist teachers, a fully ordained nun, and author of such classics as *When Things Fall Apart* and *The Wisdom of No Escape*.

DISCOVER THE JOY OF DOING NOTHING

Zen teacher **PAT ENKYO O'HARA** teaches us the practice of *Shikantaza*. Doing nothing but sitting and breathing, we rest in flowing awareness beyond the ups and downs of life.

SOMETIMES IT FEELS as if we have nowhere to turn. Maybe it's a sudden loss, or an ongoing struggle we have been trying to manage for too long. This last year seems to have intensified the personal suffering we experience. It is as if the outside world is mirrored in our own hearts, in our feelings, and in our minds.

Many of us are challenged with the most searing of concerns, the losses that seem to come all at once: of jobs, and friendships, and most poignantly, the loss of life of dear ones. At times like this, we may turn to a meditation practice to help us, to ground us, and to loosen the sense of suffering we are feeling.

These days there are many meditation instructions available, and it's no wonder that we may want to find ease and relief by following them. But sometimes, that effort can, unfortunately, become yet another struggle with ourselves. We worry, "Am I doing it right?" "What's the second step?" and so forth.

Let me tell you about the Zen practice of *Shikantaza*.

It's about doing nothing—intentionally.

We can translate *Shikantaza* as "just sitting," and it is usually practiced sitting cross-legged on a cushion on the floor or upright in a chair. The idea of the posture is to be structurally coherent and allow you to breathe easily, limiting distractions. Not too tight, not too loose.

And then—we simply sit and breathe.

Or, as Dogen, the thirteenth-century Zen teacher who adapted the Chinese teacher Hongzhi's "Silent Illumination" method, wrote, "Think of not-thinking. How do you think of not-thinking? Beyond thinking."

The magic of this way of meditative practice is that it is so intimate, so anchored in our own minds and bodies. As Dogen says, this practice "is not step-by-step meditation. It is simply the dharma gate of peace and comfort. It is the practice-enlightenment of the ultimate Way."

Following this "method-less" method, we become free of thoughts and instead enter a flowing awareness. Here is an instruction I sometimes offer for Shikantaza practice:

This is an impossible thing to do, so just settle body, breath, and mind.
Drop quietly into your body. Is there tension? Release.
Let the breath come easily, freely. Just the breath, right now.
A recurring feeling? Ahh, yes... But just allow, let it, don't hold it.
It is just another changing, flowing, fleeting aspect of this moment.
Allowing, releasing, letting go—breathing.
When thoughts arise, they too rise and fall, like the breath.
Thoughts have no form. Like clouds they float by and float away.
They become lighter, losing form, until that cloud, that thought, has disappeared, and just the vast and boundless sky remains. Not separate from you yourself in this moment.
After thirty minutes, bow to yourself, in gratitude.

ROSHI PAT ENKYO O'HARA is abbot of the Village Zendo in New York City and author of *A Little Bit of Zen: An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* and *Most Intimate: A Zen Approach to Life's Challenges*.

HEAL IN COMMUNITY

Come together with others, says **ARISIKA RAZAK**, to grieve, heal, and fight for a better world.

EVERYONE, no matter how privileged, has moments when their world falls apart. Fear, despair, and grief can overwhelm us as we struggle with debilitating illness, economic insecurity, or the death of a beloved spouse or child. If we are members of a marginalized group, we may find ourselves or our kin the random—or not so random—targets of violence. And some of us have experienced deep betrayals at the hands of a partner, close friend, or spiritual teacher.

What can we do when our world, our community, and our hearts are broken? How do we handle the reactivation of intergenerational trauma, when our physical safety, emotional well-being, and mental health are shattered by simultaneously occurring global health crises, pandemics of violence, and seriously escalating environmental disasters?

I believe we begin by recognizing and accepting the depth of our experiences. Our initial shock, withdrawal, and numbness may be our bodies' way of protecting us. We may choose to pause, or to reach out to an experienced counselor or circle of friends. After the initial shock, the practice of RAIN, which asks us to 1) recognize 2) allow 3) investigate and 4) non-identify/nurture, is a good way to investigate states that provoke emotional destabilization.

In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, Kisa Gotami approaches the Buddha and asks him to bring her dead child back to life. The Buddha doesn't simply tell her life is impermanent. Instead, he sends her on a journey, asking her to gather a mustard seed from every house that has never known death.

I imagine—although the suttas don't state this—that when she visited some households, people wept for the loss of those who had died, and she joined them. Even though grief and lamentation are viewed as dukkha, suffering, the Buddha gave Kisa time to grieve and lament with others. Once that occurred, she could relinquish her overwhelming grief.

I believe this story exemplifies the power of collective healing practices, especially in times of profound individual loss and great social trauma. For some of us, the candlelight vigils, community protests, and creative artistic collaborations that emerged alongside the Black Lives Matter movement provided deep refuge in times of great suffering. My own contemplation of the numerous altars, murals, and music videos created over the last few years has provided a welcome antidote to the brutal images of Black death and unworthiness.

While not every protest is a spiritual event, community efforts that honor the dead and affirm the preciousness of every sentient life-form are powerful sites for healing and transformation. I believe that embodied ritual practices, including chanting, prayers, testimony, and crying, were part of the great Buddhist teacher and peace activist Maha Gosananda's walks across Cambodia, leading people home who had lost everything except their lives during decades of war. I *know* from my own experience that embodied communal practices supported our bodies-minds-hearts during the 1960s Civil Rights struggles in the United States, encouraging us to peacefully resist violence and commit to the ending of social injustice.

One of my students shared recently that as their participation in protest rallies decreased, their despair about the state of the world increased. While activism without compassion, self-reflection, and ethical guidance can create situations of great harm, let's acknowledge the power of activist sanghas to transform, heal, and mend our brokenness.

ARISIKA RAZAK, MPH, leads movement, healing, and empowerment workshops and is a core teacher at Oakland, California's East Bay Meditation Center.

PHOTO BY JOHN SALVINO



REST IN YOUR BUDDHANATURE

Your true nature is like the sky, says **MINGYUR RINPOCHE**, its love and wisdom unaffected by the clouds of life. You can access it with this awareness meditation.

HUMANITY IS CURRENTLY FACING some of the greatest challenges in its history, including climate change and a global pandemic. Many of us face difficult challenges and uncertainty in our own lives, from illness to job loss to traumatic relationships.

People are desperate for methods to ease their suffering in uncertain times. While many Buddhist meditation practices are helpful, none surpasses recognizing and resting in awareness itself. The reason for this is that the true nature of awareness is a source of lasting strength and resilience. Awareness is beyond conditions like pain and pleasure, suffering and ease. It is that which allows any and all experiences to arise, and yet is unchanged by them.

I spent a number of years in a wandering retreat—moving from place to place, following in the footsteps of the great masters of our Buddhist tradition. This experience brought into focus many core aspects of the teachings, particularly impermanence and the transience of life.

As I wandered through the Himalayas, everything changed. I went from having whatever I needed to being without food, shelter, family, friends, students, and teachers. Amidst this constant change, there was something that remained, always: awareness. It provided me with an internal stability regardless of circumstances. Trusting in this awareness, the fundamental nature of our mind, was what allowed me to overcome the challenges I faced.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates this. A few weeks after I began my retreat, I fell terribly ill. I had unrelenting diarrhea and I vomited over and over, probably due to food poisoning. My illness got so bad I was brought to the precipice of death. I lost my ability to see and hear, and I felt as if my life force was like a lamp going out.

Yet, even when my body was collapsing, my senses lost, and the conceptual mind dissolved, awareness remained with me, unchanging. I saw that awareness was beyond the pain and suffering I was experiencing—beyond life or death. Trusting in awareness is what got me through and allowed me to keep going.

This experience echoed what I had always heard from my father, the great Dzogchen master Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. "Whatever arises—concepts, feelings, your body, subject and object, everything—is like clouds in the sky," he said. "They come and they go. Your true nature, awareness imbued with love, compassion, and wisdom, is like the sky itself."

We can train ourselves to experience this through awareness meditation. The important part of this practice is the recognition of awareness itself. No matter what object we choose as a support for our meditation, whether we focus on the breath, sensations, or a visualization, the important part is recognizing and resting in the aware and knowing quality of the mind.

AWARENESS MEDITATION PRACTICE

Begin by finding a comfortable posture, upright yet relaxed. Bring your attention to the breath. Notice the sensations that you experience as the breath comes in and out. There is no need to control the breath in any way. Simply observe it, and see if you can notice the simple knowing quality of mind.

After a few minutes, expand your awareness to include sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and physical sensations that you experience. Again, simply observe them. Throughout all of these experiences, notice that there is a knowing quality of mind that remains unchanged.

When you feel comfortable, allow your awareness to extend beyond any particular experience. Rest in the knowing quality of mind itself. No matter what comes or goes, this knowing quality remains.

Although everything falls apart, our true nature—awareness itself—cannot fall apart. It cannot die. It cannot be stopped. It cannot be destroyed, because it is unborn. Awareness is always with us. Trust in this. This is your true nature and ultimate refuge.

PRACTICE SELF-CARING

Caring for yourself isn't a one-shot deal, says **CYNDI LEE**. Here's how you can make it a lifelong practice.

AS ZEN TEACHER Reb Anderson writes in *Being Upright*, "All suffering is worthy of compassion." That means that our own suffering too, the kind we experience when life is challenging and uncertain, is worthy of our compassion.

Self-caring is not a one-off event, but a living, lifelong practice that allows our innate capacity for caring to emerge, ripen, and increase. The Tibetan word for meditation is *gom,* which means "getting familiar." The practice of self-caring is about getting familiar with the part of us that is naturally caring, and getting familiar with what it feels like to apply that tenderness to ourselves.

Here are four self-caring practices that help you touch into your capacity for caring and develop a sense of genuine closeness with yourself.

SAVASANA

In the yogic tradition, *savasana* is a way to let your body and mind rest. Lie down on your back on your bed or on the floor. Place a small pillow or folded blanket under your head and neck, but not under your shoulders. Your legs are straight, feet as wide apart as your hips. Position your arms about twelve inches out from your sides, palms up. You can also place a pillow or blanket on top of your thighs. Close your eyes and rest for five to ten minutes.

LOVING-KINDNESS

Sit comfortably. Place your palms on the center of your chest. Close your eyes. Take a few moments to feel your natural breathing and the feeling of your hands on your body. Then say each of these expressions of loving-kindness toward yourself: *May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be safe. May I live with ease*. After you recite each phrase notice what comes up in your mind. Whatever you notice is fine and interesting. This is another way of getting familiar with yourself, but it doesn't mean every thought is true. If you get way off track, repeat the phrase.

GATHERING AND GROUNDING BREATH

This is way to get out of your head and into your body. Sitting or standing, find an upright posture. Close your eyes and tune into the feeling of your natural breath coming in and out. Slowly begin to lengthen your inhalation and extend your exhalation, just a little bit at a time. When you breathe in, imagine all the scattered parts of your mind collecting together in one spot at the edge of your nostrils. As you exhale, let that soft ball of energy drop down into your body, giving you a feeling of earthiness and stability. You can also do this during a challenging conversation or meeting or even while you are walking down the street.

Each of these practices can be done in less than five minutes. All of them integrate body, breath, and mind; they feel good while you are doing them; and when you finish, you will feel better than when you started. As you naturally become more familiar with what is actually nourishing for you, because it's easy and it feels good, your self-caring practice will grow.

CYNDI LEE is the author of *May I Be Happy: A Memoir of Love, Yoga, and Changing My Mind* and *Yoga Body, Buddha Mind*, an ordained lay Buddhist chaplain, and has been teaching yoga and meditation for more than thirty-five years.



CONQUER ANXIETY WITH KINDNESS

SYLVIA BOORSTEIN on the loving-kindness meditation she uses to care for herself, calm down, and carry on.

EVERYONE IS ANXIOUS these days, with good cause. The world is imperiled. Workers are quitting jobs at a higher than usual rate and wondering, "Is this what I am supposed to be doing with my life?" Colleagues are reporting that they feel "Zoomed out" by the end of the day, and all the psychotherapists I know are reporting waitlists for people wanting to talk to them. Even before the pandemic, when last I was teaching in-person retreats, I was noticing that many people had listed SSRIs (anxiety and depression drugs) on their registration sheets.

And, of course, people already prone to anxiety are worrying more. I'm one of those people. Worrying—"fretting" as it is called in classical Buddhist texts—is my principal reaction to stress. When that happens, I note to myself, "Worrying is arising," and, "This is excess energy in the mind, and it will pass," and that's helpful. Or I try to ease the mind's tension by reminding myself, "This is my mind's particular habit of catastrophizing. Let's wait and see what happens."

Another technique is thinking, "This is just a story. If I take a break and breathe deeply for a few minutes, I'll remember I've done this dance a million times and it is always exhausting." Lately, I've been saying to myself, "Sweetheart, you're hurting yourself again with these stories." This last is the closest response to compassion, and so I think it is progress, because more and more my approach to the dharma is evolving toward kindness.

An instruction about anxiety I often see these days, on T-shirts and coffee cups, recalls a British response to World War II: "Keep Calm and Carry On." That would be the Buddhist response, indeed the best human response, to these times. I would just add: "Keep Calm and Carry On, and Be Kind."

A LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION FOR TIMES OF ANXIETY

Take time during the day to stop for a few minutes. Breathe. (My smartwatch tells me, "Stop and breathe" several times a day.)

While you are stopping and breathing, take that time to think of the people you love and wish that they are well, wherever they are. Look around at all the people in your view. Each one of them has a mind full of people they know and love and the hopes they hold for them, just like you. So much of our anxiety is about ourselves, and when your mind refocuses itself from "me and my troubles" to "everyone else and their troubles," it feels better. It feels connected, alive, and supported by that connection.

SYLVIA BOORSTEIN is a psychologist and leading teacher of Insight Meditation. Her many best-selling books include *Pay Attention, for Goodness' Sake* and *Happiness Is an Inside Job.*



MANAGE ANXIETY MINDFULLY

MELVIN ESCOBAR on how the four foundations of mindfulness ease the suffering of anxiety.

THE *SATIPATTHANA SUTRA* is said to be the Buddha's original mindfulness manual. In this sutra, the Buddha breaks the practice down into four contemplations that are known as the four foundations of mindfulness. Let's look at how we can use these four practices to help us mindfully approach, versus avoid, the *dukkha* of anxiety.

1. CONTEMPLATION OF BODY

To help understand anxiety, notice the physical phenomena you experience via your senses. Pay attention to the sensations in your body. Are you able to connect to your breath? If not, that's okay. Find another neutral body part to anchor your attention to.

Notice how your body is holding tension. Practice consciously relaxing these tensions, noting what happens to the anxiety.

2. CONTEMPLATION OF FEELING

Observing the quality of anxiety via feeling tones is another helpful tool. Start by classifying the feeling tones associated with anxiety as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Usually anxiety feels unpleasant—it bombards us with future-focused, what-if thoughts. But anxiety can also manifest as a pleasant feeling when we're working under pressure, using anxious energy to get things done. Do you ever notice the neutral feeling tone of nonanxiety? By identifying different feeling tones, you become aware of what's activating your anxiety.

3. CONTEMPLATION OF MIND

The mind is how we make sense of what our senses tell us about the world and ourselves. Practicing mindfulness helps us notice how thoughts are complicit in creating anxiety. The stories the anxious mind makes up create feedback loops, amplifying the anxiety.

Notice how thoughts add more fuel to the fire of anxiety. Cultivating spaciousness around these aspects of mind can interrupt even the most deep-seated patterns that overwhelm us and lead to overidentification with anxiety.

4. CONTEMPLATION OF THE DHAMMAS

Here the word *dhammas* refers to five categories of mental phenomena that bring together many of the things the Buddha taught. These are: the five hindrances, the five aggregates, the six sense spheres, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the four noble truths.

Anxiety is listed specifically as one of the five hindrances (it's usually translated as "restlessness and worry"). Understanding how mental phenomena like anxiety are reproduced helps liberate us from the *dukkha* they engender, including anxiety.

We can use these four foundations to make our experiences of anxiety part of our practice, developing trust in the benefits of approaching rather than avoiding it.

MELVIN ESCOBAR is a psychotherapist and core teacher at the East Bay Meditation Center in Oakland, California.

PHOTOGRRAPH BY MIGAJ

overworked & overwhelmed

QUESTION:

My work and family responsibilities are demanding these days, and it's not an option to drop any of them. I'm not able to do anything as well as I'd like to and I feel stressed, exhausted, and frustrated. How can I survive this?

FURYU NANCY SCHROEDER:

Reflecting on this very real-world koan, I'm struck by the words, "It's not an option to drop any of them." Of course, there's an option to drop them, all of them—the children, the spouse, the job, the practice—to run away, change our names, and start a new life, elsewhere.

And yet this simple realization, embedded in this question, that running away is not an option, is the true heart of our human life. Not having options is the same as making commitments, of taking vows, of being loyal and trustworthy. For like-hearted people, world round, "It's not an option" to abandon anyone, anywhere, is what we Buddhists call the bodhisattva vow.

But, though simple to say, it's not easy to do. It's a lot of work to keep our vows. Some days, some years, are much harder and seemingly more thankless than others. When we're facing a crisis, such as the one this pandemic has brought to us all, the feeling of being overwhelmed comes naturally.

The Buddha taught those overwhelmed by life to tune into the body and breath and look deeply into the present moment. So we watch closely for tightening in the belly, the shoulders, and the jaw; we relax as we move from task to task; and we cease the judgments of ourselves in the face of the inviolable assignments of dishes, laundry, paperwork, sickness, aging, and death. Now more than ever, we take comfort in the teachings, in the community of others, and in the awakening of our hearts to the unceasing work of it all. Together.

Then, as time allows, we settle ourselves onto a single spot of earth, with an upright posture and a way-seeking heart, and we question ourselves as Siddhartha once questioned himself: "Might this be the way to enlightenment?" At last, even the question melts away.



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HOW NOT TO FREAK OUT

It's so easy these days to despair about the present and fear for the future. If you find all the bad news overwhelming, Buddhist teacher **JUDY LIEF** has some meditations to help you relieve your political pain.

HOW CAN BUDDHIST PRACTICE help us when we face troubled times, both collectively and individually?

It's not as if times of fear and despair are anything new. People have fought wars, struggled to survive, faced injustice, experienced loss, dealt with violence and greed, and been caught up in historical movements beyond their control pretty much forever.

Life has never been that easy.

In Buddhist practice, you learn never to shy away from facing the pain of the human condition. At the same time, you also learn not to shy away from the beauty and value of life in all its forms.

By clearly seeing the extremes of experience, you learn to scout a middle way.

It is easy to become so consumed by your fears for this world that you lose your balance. It is hard to think about the challenges facing our planet and not feel overwhelmed.

It seems as if we humans never learn. Instead, we keep perpetuating the same dysfunctional behavior in every generation. Only now, we have the capacity to create havoc on a global scale, to the extent of threatening the continuation of life on this planet. We not only continue to rely on age-old habits of violence, greed, and deception, but we have put these habits on steroids.

On an individual level, we can't seem to stretch beyond the narrow bounds of self-interest and looking out for number one. This focus on ourselves feeds our fear and makes us susceptible to manipulation. It feels as if the worse things get, the more frantically we apply approaches that have never worked.

Because these times happen to be our times, for us they seem uniquely difficult. But it is hard to imagine any time that has not seemed troubled to the people who were experiencing it.

The Buddhist notion of samsara implies that all times are troubled. Not only that, but the troubles we complain about are the very troubles we ourselves create and perpetuate. So to the extent that our world is dominated by hatred, greed, and ignorance, known in Buddhism as the three poisons, it is because we have collectively made it so.

The idea of samsara could be taken as an extremely pessimistic view of things. But it could also be a quite liberating message.

It is liberating to drop the fantasy of there being a more perfect world, somehow, somewhere, and instead accept that we need to engage with the world as it is. It is our world, it is messy, but it is fertile ground for awakening. It is the same world, after all, that gave birth to the Buddha.

IT IS EASY TO BE OVERWHELMED by all the problems in this world. You may already be overwhelmed by the problems in your own life. On

The Scream after Edvard Munch, 1984 (silk screen on canvas) Andy Warhol

top of that, you are continually bombarded with news about political, humanitarian, and environmental problems.

There seems to be no end of problems. While you are worrying about human trafficking, you get an email about starving giraffes in Indonesia. When you are distressed about racial hatred, you hear about the latest famine. While you are learning about nuclear proliferation, a politician says something outrageous. It never lets up and it is hard to catch your breath. The continual bombardment of bad news can infiltrate so deeply that it subtly infuses everything you do.

Ironically, it is only this disappointment with the world—with human beings and their stupidity, and with ourselves—that provides a powerful enough motivation to change. Traditionally, reaching the point where you see through the futility of samsara is considered an essential breakthrough on the spiritual path.

For many people, it is the experience of disappointment in its many forms that leads them to the dharma and to the practice of meditation.

Disappointment is a great instigator. From it, positive seeds of change can emerge. When we feel genuine remorse about our own contribution to the samsara project, it strengthens our longing for an alternative and our determination to find a better way to live.

You could go on for years, drifting along in your complacency, not wanting to let the world's pain touch you. But when it does, you are primed for transformation. Your willingness to feel the suffering of samsara begins to draw out from you a bright stream of compassion for all beings.

You could pretend none of this is happening, that it has nothing to do with you. But because you are human, like it or not, you cannot help but care about such things.

You need to recognize your ability to care and appreciate it for the gift it is. You can actually care about something beyond yourself! You can care about others, you can care about our Mother Earth, you can care about structures of oppression. How amazing that you have not shut down, that you have not given up!

What about when you feel that the intensity of this world is just too much? When you're caught between freaking out and shutting down?

This is the moment when you need to step back and get some perspective. When you feel your mind/heart filled to the point of claustrophobia with thoughts of disaster, fear, and despair, it is good to bring to mind the many counter examples of human kindness and sanity, which are so easily overlooked.

If you think about it, the degree in which our world is stitched together with loving-kindness is extraordinary. To a surprising extent, accomplishing the simplest daily tasks requires that most people we encounter will be relatively decent, even kind. This network of decency is so close at hand, so mundane and ordinary, that it is mostly invisible to us. Even in the midst of the most dire conditions, there are countless examples of people who still manage to love, share, help one another, smile, and laugh.

WHEN YOU GET NEWS of something disturbing, it is good to pay attention to the shape of your reaction. If you hear about a suicide bombing in Lahore, for instance, what is your immediate response?

Most likely it is one of empathy. You imagine how horrible it must be to witness such a thing. You think about how painful it must be to be killed or injured or to lose a loved one so suddenly and violently. You imagine how it must feel

"You could go on for years, drifting along in your complacency, not wanting to let the world's pain touch you. But when it does, you are primed for transformation."

to be stuck in a country at war with no means to get out.

That natural response of human empathy and kindness is tender and raw, and at the same time, it is uplifted and beautiful.

If possible, notice and stay with your empathetic response and get to know it. It is simple and immediate, but it also tends to be fleeting and subtle. It is good to keep coming back to that natural compassionate response to suffering, for it is easily lost in the complexities that follow.

The plot thickens as our innocent and natural response to suffering is captured by ego's defense mechanisms. That tender response, with its rawness and vulnerability, gets taken over by our emotional habits and fixed views. We are fearful and we want the world to make sense. We are angry and we want revenge. We don't want to feel the pain of caring, so we feed our negativity as a way to deflect it outward.

This also unleashes our urge to fix things. We don't want to keep feeling this way. We want to act! "There's got to be something I can do to about this right now!" The problem is that often we are in no position to really help.

In response, you could let helplessness overwhelm you, but you don't have to do so.

You need to accept the fact that you can't fix everything, much as you would like to.

The world needs help, but our ability to contribute seems so miniscule compared to the many problems facing the planet. The challenges are so overwhelming that we see no way out. What do we do with that frustration?

If you stay with the energy of the impulse to act, you can see that it is a positive irritant. We need a little provocation or creative restlessness in order to connect with what underlies our impulse to act and open up to its message.

So you can take your urge to help as a good sign. But you need to take a clear look at what you really have to offer. You need to start with a self-assessment and a bit of humility.

The great Buddhist teacher Shantideva made the point that if you can do something about an issue, then go ahead and do it. But if you can't do anything, then acknowledge that and let it go. It doesn't help to dwell on everything that is going wrong or obsess about wishing you could do more.

It is better to do one small thing that you can actually pull off than to fantasize about all the great things you would like to be able to do but can't.

Captured by powerful emotions and flurries of speculative thought, we can work ourselves into a frenzy by obsessing about events we have no direct connection with or control over. This is an important pattern to notice. We can see that we are mostly responding to what is in our own head, to our mental chorus of what-if's. How easily our tender little pebbles of empathy can get buried under a mountain of thoughts.

It is one thing to engage in analysis or try to read the handwriting on the wall so you can respond appropriately to developments in the world. But it is quite another to engage in mental cud chewing, which warps your initial tender response and makes it about yourself.

Notice how obsessive, what-if thinking can take you over, then bring yourself back to the here and now.

It may not seem like it, but when you are stuck in fearful and despairing thoughts, you do have a choice. You do not need to let your thoughts and reactions run wild. You can interrupt the pattern. You can slow down enough to investigate the cascade of thoughts, speculations, opinions, and emotions aroused by hearing about all the troubles in the world.

You can understand more clearly your own particular default patterns, with all their complexities, and bring yourself back to the simple natural arising of care and empathy.

IT IS POSSIBLE to walk a path between the extremes of pessimism and optimism.

In order to respond with skill and compassion, you do not need to come to a solid conclusion about the nature of the world. You do not need either to cling to your view of how bad things are, or to close yourself off from whatever disturbs your rosy view of things.

If you look at your own experience from day to day, you can see the shifty quality of such judgments. "I had a good day. It was warm and sunny and I felt great. But yesterday I had a crummy day. It was rainy, I got the flu, and I fell behind in my work."

In any individual life, there are easier and harder times. Circumstances are always changing. They change slowly and inexorably, and they change suddenly and unexpectedly. Often we see our own hand in the circumstances we experience, and sometimes we are blindsided by situations beyond our control.

When things are going relatively smoothly, it is easy to become complacent and assume that our good fortune will automatically continue. When things are not going well, we also assume that nothing will ever change, and we succumb to defeatism. In both cases we take whatever we are experiencing currently and project it into the future, selectively recalling past experiences that reinforce our view of the way things are.

Our struggle to pin down our living on-the-spot experience of life is futile. We may attempt to get a grasp on life, to pin it down or make it manageable in some way, but it is hard to see beyond the circumstances and mood of the moment.

There seem to be only two alternatives: the glass is half full or the glass is half empty. But a glass with water up to the midpoint is not making a statement either way. It is neither half full nor half empty. Neither is it both half full and half empty. Such a water glass is not elated by being half full, nor discouraged by being half empty. It just is: a glass with water in it.

The world just is. It is not a this-versus-that, good-versus-bad world. It is an interdependent world.

This interdependent world is the dancing ground of bodhisattvas, who thrive in the dynamism of life. By recognizing that every sorrow invites a fresh compassionate response, the bodhisattva path gives us a much broader perspective on our situation. Bodhisattvas are the ones who see the depth and breadth of suffering and confusion most clearly, yet they place themselves right in the midst of it.

I have often wondered: how can bodhisattvas sit there so elegantly and smile? It may be because they have learned that no matter how bad things become, it is possible to change one's attitude on the spot. The flow of compassion cannot be interrupted. In fact, with each new crisis, its flow is increased.

At any moment, as my teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche once told me, "You could just cheer up!"



CONNECT WITH YOUR BREATH

The breath is a powerful reminder of your anxiety-reducing connection with others, says **KAMILAH MAJIED**.

Though we tremble before uncertain futures / may we meet illness, death and adversity with strength / may we dance in the face of our fears.

—Gloria E. Anzaldúa, in *this bridge we call home*

THE PANDEMIC OFFERED a chance to reflect on the wisdom gleaned from challenging times. Notice the insights you've gained about how to be with yourself when you can't be with others. We have been learning how to manage the anxious loneliness that often occurs and accrues as we limit our physical contact with people.

We often associate loneliness with sadness, but loneliness also has an anxious quality. The yearning to be social, to see smiles, hold hands, and hug one another can grip us in a field of angst. A breath practice can help us hold, release, and transform that anxiety.

As we grieve our deceased loved ones, our separations from living beloveds, and the absence of festivities that celebrate our connections, we may also experience anticipatory grief. We might worry about ourselves and loved ones getting sick in the future. We may worry that this pandemic will never end and find ourselves premourning future Covid-related losses. Grief and anticipatory grief can generate as much anxiety as they do sorrow. We can use the breath to release and learn from all aspects of grief.

The wonder of breathing is even more clear to us now. The threat and possibility of this, our shared air, reveals the threat and possibility of interdependence itself. Our exhalation is someone's inhalation, and someone's out-breath is our in-breath. Our breath is a reminder that we are connected no matter how lonely we feel.

May this breath practice help you transmute the anxiety of separation and loss. Repeat these words as you focus on your breath.

Breathing in, I notice that I miss you.
Breathing out, I embrace you with an intention for all beings to be well.

Breathing in, I notice worry that I will not endure.
Breathing out, I notice that I am enduring.

Breathing in, I grieve for my losses.
Breathing out, I thank impermanence for connecting me to all of life.

DR. KAMILAH MAJIED is a mental health therapist, professor, and consultant on building inclusivity and equity using meditative practices.

PHOTOGRRAPH BY FABIAN MØLLER



PHOTO BY JULIAN AME

HOW TO WELCOME THE END OF THE WORLD

What is the best response to difficult and uncertain times? *Welcome*. **JOHN TARRANT, ROSHI** offers 10 Zen pointers on the practice of welcoming.

Old pirates, yes, they rob I;
Sold I to the merchant ships,
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pit.
—Bob Marley

BOB MARLEY'S VERSION of a rough patch is that pirates snatch you from the slave pit, and then they rob you and sell you to a merchant ship. "It's always something," as Gilda Radner said when she got her cancer diagnosis.

How to meet the times we are in is a real question, and everybody feels the force of it. It is an ancient question. It comes with being human.

Here is an ancient koan suitable for our time:

A student asked, "When times of great difficulty visit us, how should we meet them?"
The teacher said, "Welcome."

In hard times, we long to touch and feel the vastness and blessing of life. *Welcome* might open some blue sky in the heart.

How do you feel about losing the Twin Towers? How do you feel about losing the library of Alexandria, or Baghdad, or Chang An, the City of Perpetual Peace invaded during the An Lu Shan rebellion when two-thirds of the population of China died? And how do you feel about losing your parents, and about losing your dog?

In the U.S., even though our country is based on forgetting the dark karma of the old continents, and in some sense we disapprove of history as a jumble sale of old wrongs, we too are accumulating and being deepened by history. We suffer from wrongs done to our ancestors and done by our ancestors. Simultaneously, our efforts consciously and inadvertently repeat the past. So like other countries, we are going through a rough patch.

There are different kinds of hard times; sometimes we're poor and don't eat and get shot by the police. Sometimes gunmen burst into a church, or a movie theater, or a parade, and shoot us or the police. And beyond the violence coming to a city near you, the whole world is unavoidably connected to us. There's the gap between rich and poor, refugees throwing their children into boats, certainly a desperate measure, and did I mention Zika and climate change?

In difficult times, we disagree about reality. So we are drenched in false descriptions, verdicts, reasons that make no sense—we need to build a wall against Mexicans because, well, ISIS. Yes, that's what delusion is like.

If I'm outlining the obvious here, it's because I'm about to say that the inner life counts, and is the beginning of addressing our condition. The inner life is objective, and for that matter, more objective than the outer life. I say this with full awareness of all the aforementioned bad news.

So the first task of the inner life is not to amplify the delusions, not to add hatred to hatred but to head in a different direction, to be openhearted without being gullible.

The little story about welcoming the times we are in offers a path when we don't know what to do. It's not about drawing conclusions as a way to freedom. Instead, this koan is an environment. You can repeat it to yourself or just live in it and find out how you and the world change.

Our lives are full of loss, and also songs. Marley wrote the lyrics above while in pain from his cancer. Paying attention to the inner life is a practice that naturally rises to meet our actual world, the life we have now. I will die, those I love will die, bad people will get elected, diet plans will fail, I might be kidnapped or shot, strangers will certainly be kind, I will get a blessing from unexpected places, an apricot tree will be my friend.

Here's Bob Marley again:

Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery;
None but ourselves can free our minds.

It's worth noting that the lines about eman-cipation from mental slavery are quotes from Marcus Garvey, another Jamaican passionate about freedom.

What is a practice of welcoming? Here is a list of pointers:

1. EMPTINESS IS REAL

All the ways *welcome* appears are manifestations of the famous Zen idea of emptiness. This means that if you look, you'll find that welcome doesn't come from somewhere. It doesn't come from good intentions or desire. It doesn't come from impressing anyone. Welcome just appears, which makes it seem like a gift or a guest. But if you look inside, you'll find it's always been there.

We are inside the mysterious light of emptiness, which can't be described but is painting the world into being. We are never apart from that light. There's a tremendous peace in feeling that. Even if we're not okay, we'll be okay. We'll know what to do.

2. THE BODHISATTVA PATH

In Buddhism, the shape emptiness takes is sometimes called the bodhisattva path. This means, basically, we're in it together. We're concerned about others and, as far as we have a motive, it's to awaken alongside all beings. The effect is to make us helpful without having to feel virtuous or worthy, which are subtle ways to close things down.

We are often advised to be more armored, more paranoid, to take advantage of others. But finding openness in our own hearts—that changes most things about life. It's an exhilarating step into the unknown.

3. EMPATHY

Moment by moment, the imagination, dreams, and hopes of others press on us. By others I mean people, animals, and even trees and rivers. When people are suffering, we feel it. We may not know it, but we do. We may try to explain it away or even blame them, but it's just that we feel their suffering as our own.

Empathy is the most spectacular manifestation of the mysterious light in everything. The welcome practice is not to be mindful and attentive, though that could be a nice side effect.

Welcome is to see, to feel, to know the flavor of connection. To sing with others, your voice coming out of my mouth. It is the experience that we are already in love with others, and that we perceive others as ourselves. A loving quality appears by itself and is fundamental to being human.

4. BEING COMPANIONS TO EACH OTHER

Part of understanding that we are not living the wrong life is seeing that we are not living in the wrong time. Many things can't be changed; what we *can* do is accompany each other. That's the bodhisattva path again.

During the terrible ordeal of the Russian people during the twentieth century, poet Anna Akhmatova wrote of her decision to stay:

No, not under the vault of alien skies,
And not under the shelter of alien wings—
I was with my people then,
There, where my people, unfortunately, were.

A woman drives her SUV off the icy road, and her carefully buckled-in children drown in the river. On that day, what you can do is make sandwiches and coffee for the stricken people. It's important not to abandon those who have been hurt as somehow too damaged. Then we don't abandon ourselves either.

5. WE DON'T NEED TO KNOW HOW IT'S GOING TO COME OUT

Not knowing is what emptiness tastes like. It's also what welcome tastes like.

We never know what will arrive next. Dreadful events can lead to wonderful events, and the other way around. It's always too early to despair. Welcome means not reaching a verdict on our lives.

"We are often advised to be more armored, more paranoid, to take advantage of others. But finding openness in our own hearts—that changes most things about life."

It is intimate and beautiful not to know, to be vulnerable, not to be stronger than our situation. We can feel our way, we can grope along in the velvety dark, and each step will be true and ours.

6. A LITTLE NOTE ABOUT DELUSION

Everyone knows how to believe something. But as soon as you believe something, you have to defend it. When I look, though, I can never completely agree even with my own views.

Beliefs depend on being unexamined. I could just put them behind a no-trespassing sign, but when I do that, I live by them without finding out what is real. The discovery of emptiness implies skepticism about the use of my own views, an inkling that they are a prison rather than a shelter.

When I was a child working with men, they would play tricks on the very young apprentices. They would send them to the store for striped paint or a yard of milk. It wasn't meant to humiliate—it was a moment of complicity in which we were comrades facing the incomprehensibility of the world. My thoughts are like that—a yard of sorrow, a few inches of indignation, and where did they come from? When I have as much as I want, I can just cut off a strip with long scissors.

7. WHO AM I, ANYWAY?

The mind forms thoughts and feelings without consulting me. Old songs appear in the middle of the night, grief and memories of childhood pop up like clothing stores, but what does that have to do with me? It doesn't seem to be who I am. I do notice that welcome is destructive of my prejudices, and then a spaciousness opens. Then even sorrow has welcome inside it. I don't have to know who I am to take a step.

8. TRUST AND WELCOME

If we just hang out with welcome, the world will carry us along. Welcome is not something to deserve, and who knows who we will be when it has changed us?

Welcome might start as a practice, but it's not a gadget. It transforms and becomes something I notice about reality. Then I'm not opposed to my own life, and I'm amazed how much nicer other people have become.

9. THE APOCALYPSE ALSO NEEDS FRIENDS

So what's the worst case for us? Sometimes I walk outside into a sudden silence. No one is chatting anyone up on their phone, or carrying a ladder, or wondering if they look hot in their Dolce & Gabbana sandals with the little photo prints of rock stars on them, and no car stirs on its swishing tires.

The thought appears: "Oh, did something happen? Did everything happen? Did I blink and years have passed?" Then I hear a train's lonely whistle, and an owl, and an engine starts, and someone is yelling with clumsy good nature across the road. I have no idea if the world changed, but in any event it's here now. All is well.

But what if it really were the end of the world? If it really were the end of the world, I wouldn't think of it as difficult. I'd be full of wonder and possibly laughter. I'd think of it as my today. I'd think the end of the world is always happening while hummingbirds zoom past my nose and the plain brown birds scratch in the leaf litter and cars go by much faster than the posted speed limit.

"So this is what the end of the world is like," I'd think, feeling awe and probably happiness. I could stop bargaining, say, "Welcome," and listen to the vast pulse of the changes. Nothing is ever truly lost.

10. THE END OF THE WORLD IS HERE

JOHN TARRANT, ROSHI, directs the Pacific Zen Institute, a community where koan meditation, the arts, and deep conversations meet daily practice and life. He is the author of *Bring Me the Rhinoceros & Other Zen Koans that Will Save Your LIfe*.



PHOTO BY BERENIKE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Buddhist Wisdom to Get Us Through

Buddhist teaching and meditations are made for times like these. When we need it most, they help us access the best of who we are as human beings. Calm, kind, and resilient, we can help ourselves and others get through this.



PHOTO BY ISTOCK.COM / MARTIN BARRAUD

THE HEALING POWER IN YOUR HEART

PEMA CHÖDRÖN

WHEN I WAS ABOUT six years old, I received an essential teaching from an old woman sitting in the sun. I was walking by her house one day, feeling lonely and unloved, kicking anything I could find. Laughing, she said to me, "Little girl, don't you go letting life harden your heart."

Right there, I received this pith instruction: we can close our hearts to life to try to protect ourselves against difficult circumstances. Or we can let difficulties soften us and make us kinder and more open to what scares us. We always have this choice.

If we see the fears and suffering we're all experiencing now as a chance to grow in bravery and wisdom, in patience and kindness, then our personal distress can connect us with the discomfort and unhappiness of others. What we usually consider a problem becomes the source of empathy, a way to connect with the natural warmth of our hearts.

Natural warmth is our shared capacity to love, to have empathy, to have a sense of humor. It is our capacity to feel gratitude and appreciation and tenderness. It's the whole gamut of what are often called the heart qualities, qualities that are a natural part of being human.

Our natural warmth has the power to heal all relationships—our relationship with ourselves as well as our relationships with other people and with all that we encounter every day in our lives. Discovering our inner warmth can be the value of our personal suffering, the silver lining of the very dark clouds we're experiencing.

In these times, it is easy for us to see firsthand that we are all in the same boat and that the only thing that makes any sense is to care for one another. This difficult time is our chance to come out of our self-protecting bubble and realize that we are never alone. This is our chance to finally understand that wherever we go, everyone we meet is essentially just like us.

When we feel fear, when we feel discomfort of any kind, it can connect us at the heart with all the other people who are feeling fear and discomfort. When things fall apart and we can't get the pieces back together, when we lose something dear to us, when the whole thing is just not working and we don't know what to do, this is the time when the natural warmth of tenderness, the warmth of empathy and kindness, are just waiting to be uncovered, just waiting to be embraced.

Our own suffering, if we turn toward it, can open us to a loving relationship with the world. When you touch your sorrow or fear, your anger or jealousy, you are touching everybody's jealousy, everybody's fear and sorrow. You wake up in the middle of the night with an anxiety attack and when you can fully experience the taste and smell of it, you are sharing the anxiety and fear of all humanity. People's stories are different, their situations are different, but the experience is the same. Instead of your distress becoming all about you, it can become your link with everyone all over the world who is in the same predicament.

The natural warmth that emerges when we experience our pain includes all the heart qualities: love, compassion, gratitude, tenderness in any form. It also includes loneliness, sorrow, and the shakiness of fear. Before these vulnerable feelings harden, before the storylines kick in, these generally unwanted feelings are pregnant with kindness, with openness and caring. These feelings that we've become so accomplished at avoiding can soften and transform us. The practice is to train in not automatically fleeing from uncomfortable tenderness when it arises, and with time we can embrace it.

Of course, it is fairly common that times of crisis and suffering connect people with their capacity to love and care about one another. It is also common that this openness and compassion fade rather quickly, and that people become afraid, guarded, and closed again.

The question, then, is not only how to uncover our fundamental tenderness and warmth, but also how to abide there with the fragile, often bittersweet

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vulnerability. How can we relax and open to the uncertainty of it? How can we face all the fear and uncertainty and not close up again?

The fear we're experiencing these days is so palpable, so atmospheric. You can almost smell the fear around you. We know we are on shaky ground and we don't know what is going to happen next.

The truth is that the ground has always been shaky, forever. But in times when fear is prevalent, like now, that truth is more obvious. We can't make this fear go away. But we can smile at it.

Fear is like a doorway we go through, but where that doorway leads is not predetermined. It is up to us. Usually when we're afraid, it sets off a chain reaction. We go inward and start to armor ourselves, trying to protect ourselves from whatever we think is going to hurt us. But our attempts to protect ourselves do not lessen the fear. Quite the opposite—the fear escalates.

On the other hand, if we choose to take notice of the actual experience of fear, whether it's just a queasy feeling in our stomach or actual terror, whether it's a subtle level of discomfort or mind-numbing dramatic anxiety, we can smile at it, believe it or not. It could be a literal smile, or it could be a metaphor for coming to know fear, turning toward fear, touching fear.

We're all very familiar with the experience of fear escalating, and the experience of running away from fear. But have we ever taken the time to truly touch our fear, to be present with it and experience it fully? Do we know what it might mean to smile at fear?

It's not so easy to do, but fortunately we have a method that can help us discover the courage to smile at fear. Meditation practice is a method for being with ourselves fully and completely, allowing the time and space to see everything we're experiencing, including fear and discomfort, with gentleness, kindness, and honesty. It is the safest environment within which to undertake this mission impossible. Because to know fear is to smile at it.

If you touch the fear instead of running from it, you find tenderness, vulnerability, and sometimes a sense of sadness. It can sound corny, but you feel grateful for the beauty of the world. Your heart is filled with gratitude, appreciation, compassion, and caring for other people. It's a very special way to live.



BODHISATTVA AVALOKITESHVARA IN WATER MOON FORM, 11TH C., CHINA / METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

A TIME FOR REMEMBERING

AMANA BREMBRY JOHNSON

THIS IS A TIME FOR REMEMBERING what we have forgotten. Today, it is a time to remember that our lives and the earthly experiences of everyone and everything around us are sacred.

It is a time to remember that we are all part of a jeweled web of interconnection and interdependence. We are in relation with each other and to everything around us—the earth, the elements, the air, the whole of the environment, the seen and the unseen.

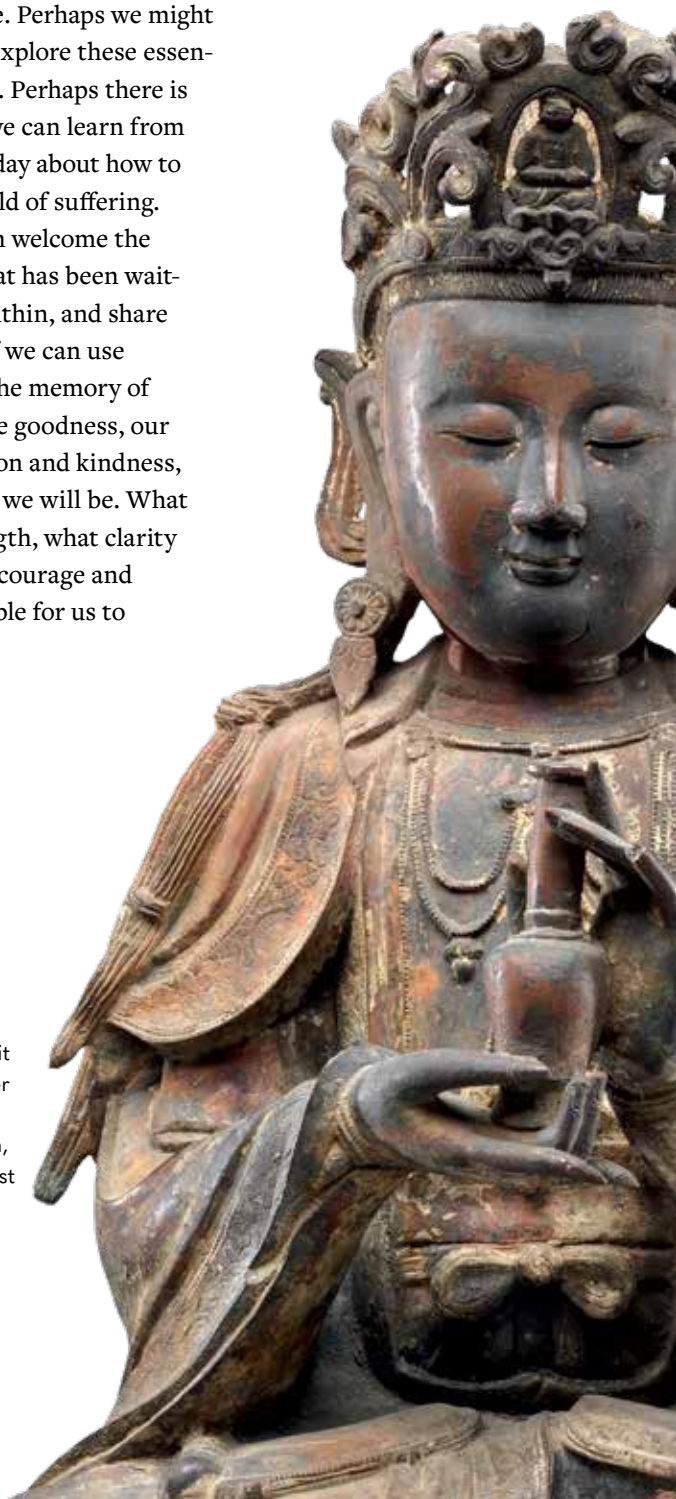
This is a time to remember where we fall on the scales of privilege. Is there really any shelter in place for the homeless, treatment and medicine for the uninsured, provisions for the disabled and the poor, safety for the men and women in our prisons, and for the children detained in barren camps at our southern border?

For some of us, this crisis has been a mere inconvenience. But it has been a matter of life and death for people of color and others who suffer from inequality. They have been sickened and killed by coronavirus at a far greater rate than others.

Many of us are waiting for things to return to "normal" from this time of fear. But for many populations, normal has always been uncertain, fearful, and unsafe. Where do we stand when placed against those who experience these circumstances as just a continuation of the injustice and suffering that have always been a part of their lives?

This time is a wake-up call to the realities of privilege, the delusion of certitude, the smoke and mirrors of permanence, and the fragility of comfort and of life itself. It is also a time when we can lean into opportunity, into possibility, and the truth that our world has changed. We can face the fact that this is most likely a dress rehearsal for the inevitable truth of our planet. It is only our ability to face what we would rather not, and to see it clearly, that will allow us to craft a new way of life imbued with dignity, courage, and joy in the midst of change. Perhaps we might find the time now to explore these essential parts of our being. Perhaps there is something essential we can learn from our circumstances today about how to effect change in a world of suffering.

At this time, we can welcome the innate compassion that has been waiting to emerge from within, and share it with one another. If we can use this time to activate the memory of the truth of our innate goodness, our capacity for compassion and kindness, what powerful beings we will be. What resilience, what strength, what clarity we can exhibit. What courage and wisdom will be available for us to lead with love.



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BODHISATTVA GUANYIN, 15TH–16TH C., CHINA / METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

3 SHORT PRACTICES FOR DIFFICULT TIMES

BONNIE MYOTAI TREACE, SENSEI

1 SMALL PRACTICE: GASSHO MIND

Someone approaches and you need them not to get closer. There will be a flicker of fear or anxiety. Exhale.

Say, "Please stop there" and bring your hands palm-to-palm into *gassho*, the mudra of intimacy. Step back a bit if you need to.

Smile and meet their eyes warmly. Let yourself feel their vulnerability, along with your own. It is okay to take care of yourself in this and other ways. Even more important: don't let fear close your heart.

ANOTHER SMALL PRACTICE: SHOW IT

We are the right sangha, the right community for this challenge.

Every day find a way, big or small, to show care for another. At least one. Every day. Each of us will as always have different opportunities, vulnerabilities, capacities.

Elders and the ill have wisdom and patience, given long experience with loss, resilience, and how attitude is everything. Offer these lovingly. Write the note, whisper the word, etc., ad infinitum.

Those younger and able have energy, chances to be creative in how they serve, the quickness to see what needs changing. Offer these. Every day. Clean, garden, cook, write innovative programs, create the next world.

Let's just start, and shift from self-preoccupation to the activities of bodhisattvas.

A THIRD: MEMORIAL MIND

Grief is coming, is here, will be here. Make space and time for it.

Love, appreciation, reflection, sorrow: You will need to sit quietly and let these happen.

We need to be real, are capable of being real, are called on to be real. So, for at least five minutes let grief in. Let it have its way. There are doctors, nurses, caregivers who have died for their patients, for us. Moms have died. Dads. Beloveds in every country. And there will be many more.

To be real is to feel this. Otherwise, we're in denial. "I will not forget you."

Set a timer if you need to, something to call you back. Exhale. Feel your breath. Be where you are. Vow not to take the people around you or gone from you for granted.

BONNIE MYOTAI TREACE, SENSEI is a Zen priest and founder of Hermitage Heart Zen in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Her most recent book is *Zen Meditation for Beginners: A Practical Guide to Inner Calm*.

HOW TO HAVE WISE HOPE

ROSHI JOAN HALIFAX



HOPE ALWAYS BOTHERED ME. It just did not seem very Buddhist to hope.

And for many today, being hopeful seems worse than futile, as we find ourselves dealing with a global pandemic in which millions around the world are dying, economies have crashed, medical systems are facing unprecedented challenges, and clinicians in many countries are confronted with moral dilemmas that are heart breaking. And with all that, the climate catastrophe continues to unfold.

Zen master Shunryu Suzuki Roshi once said that life is "like stepping onto a boat which is about to sail out to sea and sink." Indeed we seem to be sinking. And with this sinking feeling coloring my world, I could not utter the word "hope" without feeling like I was betraying reality.

But last year, oddly enough, I became hopeful, and decided I wanted to look at hope more closely.

I began my exploration with looking at what hope is not. It became clear to me that hope is not the belief that everything will turn out well. People die. Populations die out. Civilizations die. Planets die. Stars die. Recalling the words of Suzuki Roshi, the boat is going to sink! If we look, we see the evidence of suffering, of injustice, of futility, of desolation, of harm, of ending all around us, and even within us. This virus, for example, is a strong case in point. Who knew? Not most of us, but the prospects ahead are certainly "interesting" to consider.

Yet, I believe that we have to understand that hope is not a story based on optimism, that everything will be okay. I have come to consider this point of view dangerous, because being an optimist can mean one doesn't have to bother, one doesn't have to act. Also, if things don't turn out well, cynicism and futility often follow.

Hope is also opposed to the narrative that everything is getting worse, the position that pessimists take. Pessimists take refuge in depressive apathy or apathy driven by cynicism. So pessimists too are excused from engagement.

If we look at hope through the lens of Buddhism, we discover that wise hope is born of radical uncertainty. It is rooted in the unknown and the unknowable. We are certainly in the vise now of a radically uncertain time, but really, how can we ever know what is going to happen? Yes, experts are modeling the future, but they are not making the future. And these models can lead us astray. Who is making the future? You and I are.

Like putting potatoes in the cellar at the onset of a long, hard winter, wise hope is a manifestation of wisdom and caring. It is also an expression of resistance to futility and sappy positivity.

This kind of hope, what I call "wise hope," requires that we open ourselves to what we do not know, what we cannot know. That we open ourselves to being surprised. Because wise hope emerges from deep inside us only through the spaciousness of radical uncertainty, of surprise.

It's when we discern courageously, and at the same time realize we don't know what will happen, that wise hope comes alive. The place where improbability and possibility meet is where the imperative to act rises up. Wise hope is not seeing things unrealistically but rather seeing things as they are, including both the truth of impermanence and the truth of suffering—both its existence and the possibility of its transformation, for better or for worse.

Wise hope reflects the understanding that what we do matters, even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can really know beforehand. But our vows, our actions, how we live, what we care about, what we care for, and how we care—these really do matter all the same.

I often say that there should be just two words over the door of our Zen temple in Santa Fe: *Show up!* One might ask why I would want these words over the door of our temple, at a time when despair, defeatism, cynicism, skepticism, and the apathy of forgetting are fed by the corroding effect of conventional hopelessness.

Yes, suffering is present. We cannot deny it. As I am writing this, another five thousand people have died of covid-19.



PHOTO BY REUTERS PHOTO / JASON REDMOND

Who were they? Who loved these recently deceased? How will they be remembered?

Wise hope doesn't mean denying the realities we are confronted with today. It means facing them, addressing them, and remembering what else is present, like the powerful shifts in our values that recognize and move us to address suffering right now. Seven hundred years ago, in Japan, Zen Master Keizan wrote: "Do not find fault with the present." He invites us to see it, not flee it!

This gift of life that I have called "wise hope" is rooted in our vows and is what Zen master Dogen means when he admonishes us to "give life to life," even if it's just one dying person at a time, one caregiver at a time, one child at a time, one life at a time.

As Buddhists, we share a common aspiration to awaken from our own confusion, greed, and anger in order to free others from suffering. For many of us, this aspiration is not a "small self" improvement program. The bodhisattva vows at the heart of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition are, if nothing else, a powerful expression of radical and wise hope against all odds.

This kind of hope is free of desire, free from any attachment to outcome. It is a species of hope that is victorious over fear. What else could be the case when we chant:

Creations are numberless, I vow to free them.
Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to transform them.
Reality is boundless, I vow to perceive it.
The awakened way is unsurpassable, I vow to embody it?

Indeed, may we embody it, accompanied by wise hope.

ROSHI JOAN HALIFAX is a Buddhist teacher and founder of Upaya Zen Center. She holds a PhD in medical anthropology and is a leader in the field of end-of-life care. Her most recent book is *Standing at the Edge: Finding Freedom Where Fear and Courage Meet*.

REMOVE THE SECOND ARROW OF SUFFERING

TONI BERNHARD

AMONG THOSE OF US who live with chronic illness, there are various memes circulating that describe life in the time of coronavirus. The wording differs, but the theme is basically the same: *Welcome, everyone, to how we already live.*

People like me who deal with chronic illness, which includes chronic pain, have been "sheltering in place" for years, only going out to attend to essential tasks. Others can do more, but still know the sadness of missing out on special occasions. All of us know the suffering of ill health and fears about our future. We can share ways to work with illness and with the additional layer of suffering the Buddha called "the second arrow."

The first arrow is how the Buddha referred to the unpleasant experiences everyone can expect to encounter in life. The Buddha listed these experiences in the first noble truth. They include sickness. Those of us who are chronically ill have already been struck by the first arrow of sickness. Covid-19 is another first arrow that now affects everyone, healthy or not.

We can't stop the first arrow of illness, which is inevitable in everyone's life. But we can avoid adding to our suffering by not letting the second arrow take up residence in our minds.

The second arrow refers to any harmful mental response to being struck by the first arrow, which could include anger, denial, false hope. Fear is one of those harmful responses, perhaps the most painful and difficult to deal with. It stems from the delusion that it's possible to make the future conform to our wishes.

We can't stop fears from arising, but we can learn to minimize the mental suffering they cause. When I feel afraid, I start by evoking self-compassion for the presence of this painful emotion. If I try to suppress fear or get angry at myself for feeling it, it only intensifies.

Then I investigate my fear by looking into what's going on in my mind. The first thing I notice is an ongoing, intense desire to control the future. It's natural for this desire to arise. All of us want this virus to go away. Then I notice that fear—and the suffering that accompanies it—arise when I delude myself into thinking I *can* control the future.

This doesn't mean I shouldn't do what I can to prevent getting covid-19. I should (and do). But having done that, I remind myself that fear only adds a second layer of suffering to the suffering that stems from living under pandemic conditions.

In working with this fear, Korean Zen master Seung Sahn's practice of keeping a "Don't-Know Mind" has been most helpful to me. I don't know what the future holds. So there's no reason to assume I won't be fine or that my loved ones won't be fine. I simply don't know. When I see deeply how fruitless (and painful) it is to spin scary stories about a future that's unknowable, my fear subsides.

It feels as if I've pulled out that second arrow.

TONI BERNHARD is the author of *How to Live Well with Chronic Pain and Illness: A Mindful Guide*. Her newest book is *How to Be Sick: Your Pocket Companion*.



ATTENDANT BODHISATTVA, 10TH–11TH C., CHINA / METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

GIVE YOURSELF A LITTLE T&B

CYNDI LEE

AS WITH ALL PURCHASES THESE DAYS, my new yoga mat was delivered right to my door. All my old mats had finally worn out, so I caved in and sent away for a brand new mat, the first one I'd bought in twenty years.

I'd picked one like the original mat I used—average size, not too sticky, plain old purple. I tossed it in the washing machine to get it broken in. Then I unfurled it on the floor, sat down, crossed my legs, and closed my eyes. I knew the feeling of this new/old mat like I knew my bed, and it triggered a familiar feeling of contentment and well-being.

It wasn't just my new/old mat that was a dear, old friend. So was the feeling of wholesomeness that came with it. Without realizing it, I was "tending and befriending," a practice that usually involves activities with friends and family.

T & B releases the anti-stress hormone oxytocin, which is nicknamed "the cuddle hormone." I wasn't cuddling up with anyone, but I had provided myself with a physical space and activity that felt nurturing, comforting, and safe.

Tending and befriending helps us feel connected even—or especially—when that connection is with yourself. This is a time when we can all use some T & B.

Even if you have never had a practice before, you can start now. It doesn't have to be a big deal—just find a place where you can practice and return there often. Just like my mat, that place will become imbued with the goodness of tending and befriending.

Here are three tending and befriending practices you can do.

1. TAKE REFUGE IN YOUR BREATH

When your mind spins out or you feel tense, take equal breaths in and out through your nose. Inhale for five counts and exhale for five counts. This will help regulate your nervous system and give you a sense of balance.

2. DO THIS DELICIOUS POSE

Lie down on your bed, with your pillow under your lower back instead of under your head. Swing your legs up the wall. Close your eyes and rest your mind. This delicious and easy position is actually an official yoga pose called Inverted Action. Stay here for five minutes or longer. If you don't want to do this on your bed, you can lie on the floor and place your calves on your couch or a chair.

3. SEND SOMEONE LOVING-KINDNESS

My dad always told me that when I felt low I should think about someone else and it would make me feel better. You can do this every day by picking one regular activity—making morning coffee, walking the dog, taking a shower—and during that time think about someone else and send them these wishes: "May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be safe. May you live with ease." This opens your heart and expands your capacity for compassion. When I first started doing this I would pick someone specific, but over time I noticed that different people just popped up, including some that I don't really like that much, like the teenage drummer next door. But I did the practice for them anyway, because my dad was right—it made me feel better.

OMITTING NONE: THE DEEP PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY

MUSHIM PATRICIA IKEDA



PHOTO BY ANNIE SPRATTON



I'VE SPENT MY ADULT LIFE in communities and helping to build communities. I've been part of artistic, spiritual, social justice, Buddhist, and public school communities, among others.

In a practical sense, I know a little about the patience, persistence, relationship building, and maintenance that are needed to create community, and the diversity and inclusivity tensions always present in community life. And then there is community in the broadest sense.

Recently of this year, I dreamt I was in a picturesque small city waiting for an artist friend to pick me up for a pleasant outing to a redwood forest state park. But in the dream the downtown had been occupied by a large meditation-based white supremacy cult, whose smiling members kept trying to usher me into various "free meditation sessions." They had blocked connection to the Internet, and I began to walk, hoping to get a phone signal.

At the edge of the city I learned that animals and birds had died in the countryside encircling us, and that it was unknown how far this extended or what would happen to humans who stepped outside the city limits.

Upon waking, I felt grief-stricken and terrified. Powerful emotions gradually settled into a resolve—to meet and commune with *all* of the elements of our unknown future, both the good and the bad. All these are, whether I like it or not, my community.

My original Buddhist training was in Zen, in which I took a vow of poverty that stripped away security. As a result of that experience, I know that we can consciously and repeatedly go through the experience of "home leaving."

This is a term that traditionally signifies entering monastic life. It references the historical Buddha's departure from his home and family to seek awakening. But in a broader sense, home leaving is the existential choice to leave the stifling and false safety of conditioned expectations for the ungoverned forests in which we directly encounter our most untamed drives and fears, our spiritual disappointments and delusions.

The consequences of home leaving can be unexpected, in both small and large ways. I remember one poverty-stricken period when I was regularly stealing rolls of toilet paper from a bank. I ended—and survived—an eight-month stint in a Korean monastery through an epic fail that blew up almost all of my various identities. I entered a new life as a mother to my half-Korean child, and together we formed a new community of two. We began to connect with Buddhist community members in Northern California, who offered us housing, employment, and hand-me-down baby clothing.

For those of us with a spiritual path and set of practices, who are willing to leave the home of comfortable assumptions, we have now the choice to say *yes* to virus pandemic and economic collapse. *Yes* to mass extinctions of flora and fauna. *Yes* to the threats of Fascism and, speaking for myself, *yes* to giving up the urgent need to know and control, even as I participate fully in communities of strategic resistance and resilience.

Acknowledging my Buddhist vows to stick around as long as I can and help to decrease suffering, I need to go through the inner landscape of *all* my emotions, *all* my hopes, *all* my inconceivable fears and vows and faith and doubt. I need to do this "omitting none," as it says in one translation of the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, the Buddha's teaching on loving-kindness. I'm of use to my communities only if I'm able to show up in imperfect wholeness, in intimate and more healed communion, with as much of reality as I can embody.

MUSHIM PATRICIA IKEDA is a core teacher at East Bay Meditation Center in Oakland, California which is centered on radical inclusivity and social justice.

3 WAYS TO WORK WITH YOUR MONEY WORRIES

SPENCER SHERMAN

TODAY, WE ARE ALL TOGETHER in a boat, tossed by fears for our health, our finances, our future in the stormy waters of coronavirus. What will it take to keep ourselves afloat?

I'm reminded of a story that the late Thich Nhat Hanh told when I visited Plum Village. He said that if panic swept through a crowded boat full of refugees fleeing Vietnam, then all would be lost. But if only one person was calm and steady amongst the many who were terrified and frantic, all the passengers on the boat would survive the journey.

These days, we all feel the fragility of our finances. How can we be the calm person on the boat to get our family or business through these stormy financial waters?

It starts with recognizing the truth of impermanence. The Buddha said our ignorance of the truth of ever-changing world conditions, as well as the changing conditions of our bodies and our minds, is a source of tremendous suffering. Are we so deluded that we think the economy or stock market should only improve?

There's no way out of this suffering until we recognize the futility of trying to hold on to impermanent phenomena. Accepting that everything changes, allows our grasping mind to relax, and suffering to abate. So, given the amount of fear and pain right now, here are some ways you can take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity for awakening:

1. BEFRIEND YOUR FEARS

Turn your attention to where your fears show up in your body. Befriending your emotions and thoughts and cultivating calm are the best practices for financial ease and success. The silver lining in the crisis is that it can be the catalyst to help us let go of impulsivity and create equanimity. Equanimity is the quality of being at ease with everything outside and inside of yourself, and is one of the four highest emotions that the Buddha instructed us to cultivate.

2. GET CURIOUS

The pain we currently feel directs us to look, clear-eyed, at what is so upsetting. Perhaps your net worth has decreased, but what about your value as a human being? As you sense into your vastness, the far reach of your increasing awareness, do money worries subside? The impermanence of market stability pales in comparison to the ever-present awareness and wisdom of our minds and hearts.

Summon up the courage to sense the pain viscerally and allow your awareness around it to expand. Just as your finances fluctuate, so do the sensations in your body. As you get present and become a keen observer of changing bodily sensations, you see that the nature of impermanence extends beyond your body to all phenomena.

Notice that your thoughts are changing even faster than the world news and stock market. Try listening to your awareness of impermanence and let wisdom speak: "Everything is always changing. The markets have gone down before and they will rebound, just like they did after 2008, after 2002, after 1974, and even after 1929."

3. BE GENEROUS

As I contemplate and more fully understand the nature of impermanence, I have become inspired to give to individuals in need and to organizations that increase our collective wisdom. I know this sounds crazy—to give at the very moment when your money seems to be disappearing. But it's an effective path to dissolving hoarding and fear.

Allow generosity to become a lighthouse for you. It's a way to tell your brain that all will be well. It's a way to stay connected to one another. Recognizing the immense value of community, lessens the focus on our separate, impermanent, small identity.

The world is impermanent, the markets will recover, and the coronavirus won't go on forever. As your life, finances, and work change over the coming months, I challenge you to be that person of calm, equanimity, and generosity for your family, friends, and colleagues sharing the boat with you.

SPENCER SHERMAN is the founder of Abacus Wealth Partners and the author of *The Cure for Money Madness*.

WHAT'S NEXT: KEEP YOUR MINDFULNESS GOING

DR. CHRISTIANE WOLF

AS THE RESTRICTIONS AROUND social distancing get loosened, I hope for all of us that we are taking a moment to decide very deliberately which of our old ways we want to pick up again and which we don't.

If anything, this pandemic has taught us two things: that we are profoundly interconnected and that we need to slow down.

Sometimes we need to be shocked out of our autopilot into waking up. Big life changes are often times when we are "invited" to reconsider what we are doing and if it is in alignment with how we want to live our life.

The practice of mindfulness is always about pausing, noticing, and choosing the right response. Mindfulness practice strengthens our capacity to see more clearly what is good and healthy for us as individuals and a society—and what is not.

Right responses come from a place of wisdom and caring. In a time of pandemic, pausing and choosing the right response revolves a lot around preventing infection—of ourselves and others. This is important for those who are at risk of complications and also for a fragile health care system that works hard to serve us all.

When many of us were sheltering in place, other things became clear, too. Maybe you meditated more or took the time to connect with the people who matter most to you. Maybe you made sure that your senior neighbor didn't have to go grocery shopping.

At this moment of transition, please pause for a moment and take stock: What have you learned since the outbreak of the pandemic? What are the personal choices you would like to keep? What are things on a community or societal level that you would like to be part of a solution moving forward?

A classic public health story, known as the upstream/ downstream parable, comes to mind as we reflect on the individual and societal implications of the pandemic.

In this story, people living downstream on a big river become aware that more and more people are drifting down the river to them, at the end of their strength and almost ready to give up. So, being loving, caring people, they start to build big nets to catch the drowning people and new hospitals and shelters to take care of them. But they are so busy saving the people that they never pause and try to find out what on earth is happening upstream that is causing so many people to fall into the river in the first place!

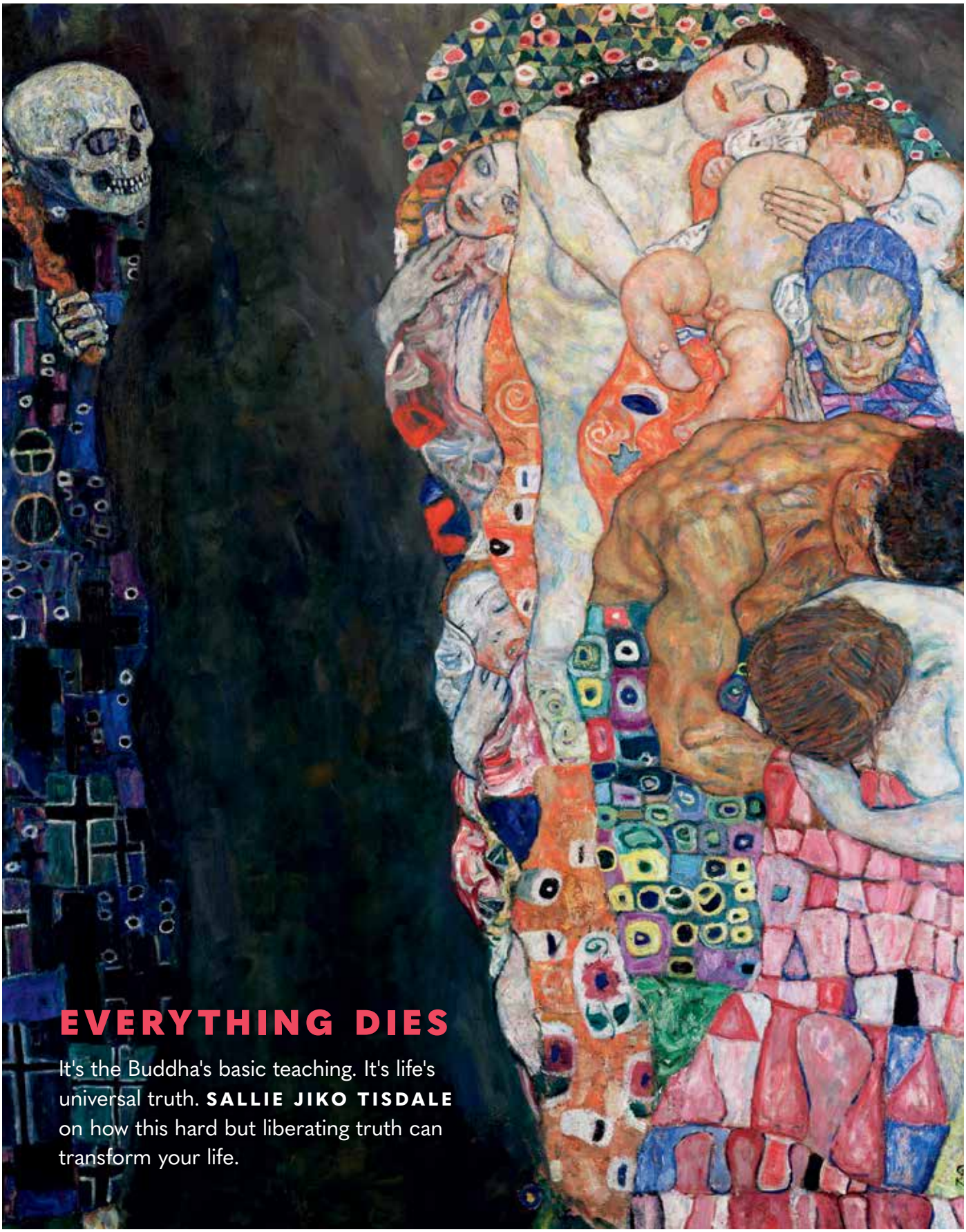
During this pandemic we need to save our own sanity and keep people safe, no questions asked. But just reacting to what's happening right now is not enough. To really reduce harm, we have to look at the bigger picture too.

We can—and need to—make it a way of life to slow down and notice the harm that's happening, upstream as well as downstream, so we can stop it. For everyone's sake.

CHRISTIANE WOLF is a physician turned mindfulness and dharma teacher and a senior teacher at InsightLA. She is the author of *Outsmart Your Pain: Mindfulness and Self-Compassion to Help You Leave Chronic Pain Behind*.



BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI, BURMA (MYANMAR), 15TH C. / COURTESY OF WWW.LACMA.ORG



EVERYTHING DIES

It's the Buddha's basic teaching. It's life's universal truth. **SALLIE JIKO TISDALE** on how this hard but liberating truth can transform your life.

PHOTO: ORIGINAL FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS. DIGITALLY ENHANCED BY RAWPIXEL

"Do we really believe that we will dissolve? Not deep down in the root of the small self, because the small self plans to live forever."

MOST BUDDHISTS PUT FLOWERS on the altar. We know flowers are beautiful, but that isn't their purpose here. Flowers begin to die as soon we cut them; we carefully lay death in the place that symbolizes our awakening. We bow and make offering to this crucial truth, built into the bones of the world.

The Buddha spoke volumes of words, an immense canon, but most of what he said comes down to this: Things change. Change cannot be avoided. Change hurts. The fundamental teaching of all Buddhism can be stated as *everything dies*. The Buddha taught this, it fills the sutras, it is repeated by our teachers. But most of all, we learn this from our own daily lives.

You have probably learned a traditional formula or two for this insistent teaching about the transitory nature of all things:

Anicca vata sankhara: "Impermanent, alas, are all formations!"

Sabbe saokhara anicca: "All conditioned factors of existence are transitory."

In the *Maha Satipatthana Sutta:* "[One] abides observing the phenomenon of arising...abides observing the phenomenon of passing away..."

As a new practitioner, I learned the catechism this way: "All compounded things are subject to dissolution." The language was strange when I first heard it, and as a young practitioner I found myself parsing the words: *Compounded. Dissolution.* Notice, I was told, how everything is put together from other things and will be taken apart. I began to notice. A table, a house, a nation—I could see this.

But if *all* things are compounded and will dissolve, then I am compounded and I will dissolve. And this was not something I could easily accept.

I pretend to accept my own death. Most senior practitioners do; many of them may even believe they accept it. Buddhists have their own peculiar points of pride, outside the usual stream of things we pride ourselves on, like humility and asceticism. Plenty of us are proud of our equanimity in the face of extinction, at least until we see the headlights bearing down.

So how deep does this acceptance really go? It's not just Buddhists who kid themselves about being prepared for death. It's people. It's all of us who don't want to admit that we are organisms fighting for life, that we can sagely repeat, "*Annica, annica*, all compounded things are subject to dissolution," without really confronting what it means.

Do we believe that we will dissolve? No. Not deep down in the root of the small self, because the small self plans to live forever. When we say that "Everything dies," we mean *everything dies but me*. And we can get kind of fancy about this point: *Everything dies, including my body (but not my awareness—not me). Everything is subject to dissolution, but something passes through to a new form and doesn't ever go away (that's me)*. In a thousand ways, most of them not entirely conscious, we hold on to the hope that something of this self, somehow, will remain, and we hold on to that even as everything we touch slides away like sand in running water.

Why should we pretend to more confidence than we feel? Everyone is a beginner when it comes to death. We can't practice it. When my mother died, it was the very first time that my mother died, and I didn't know how to do that, to be a daughter whose mother was dying, to be a daughter whose mother had ceased to exist. When my best friend died—when my teacher died—I didn't know how to do it. Each death I've known has been the very first one of its kind. Even with experience—I know how grieving feels, I know

Death and Life
by Gustav Klimt



the altered state of a vigil, I know a lot about that — I can't entirely prepare. And when I die, it will be the first time this particular *me* dies, and I will be a beginner.

Yes, I know that we are all dying all the time. That's what it means to be a compounded thing dissolving—this self, this moment, gives way to the next as the girl gives way to the woman who gives way to the crone. I know that the me of today is not the me of yesterday, and I was also taught that *if you die once, you never need to die again*. But the real teaching of that formula, the falling away of body and mind for a ceaseless moment, is that *you are already dead*. I know this, but I don't think my body does.

Slay the demons of hope and fear. My teacher would say this to me at a time when I was knocking up against deepening anxiety. My stubborn refusal to submit to the meaning of that anxiety made me more anxious still. The stronger I resisted, the deeper my anxiety became, until I sank well into true fear. How could I slay that demon when I was afraid to walk out the door?

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT DEATH bluntly, honestly, and often.

The original Pali word for aversion, *dosa*, is various and shaded. It can be translated as anger or hatred, denial, projection, distortion, aggression, repulsion, even disgust. That is how it can feel to talk about death, about *our own* death. But I want you to think about it and I want you to talk about it. Even if you have considered your own death deeply, how often do you talk about it? Do you talk about your private conflicts or confusion, your questions, your plans?

How do we begin? Begin with the fear. Begin with the resistance. We know the question. It is why we begin to practice in the first place: *Why do we suffer?* And we know the answer. It is why we keep practicing: *We suffer because of change and resistance to change.*

But knowing the answer does not stop the question from being asked, and knowing an answer today doesn't mean we will remember the answer tomorrow. Ignorance is the first link in the twelve-fold chain of causation—ignorance of impermanence, of *anicca*, of *anatta*, of no-self. This chain feeds itself endlessly—our ignorance of the ephemeral nature of the self building a self over and over. The chain is broken only by the transformation of that first mistake, being ignorant about the compounded nature of the self, which is not separate or bounded at all.

What do you fear about death? Make a list. Be honest. Autopsy? Being alone? Pain? Loss of privacy? Do you fear soiling your bed? Do you fear needles? For what do you hope? Make a list. Be honest. Do you want to see it coming? Do you want to be asleep? Do you want to be very old?

Ask the question again. Why am I afraid? Because I will die. What does that mean? (Wait a minute. *Will* I die? Do I have to die?) Ask yourself: Are you ready to die? Don't answer too quickly, because that last one is a doozy. Even people who have made great strides in accepting the fact of their own inevitable dissolution will be flooded with adrenaline when the headlights bear down. The body has its own hopes.

Talk about death. Talk about everything. Imagine it. Write a description of the scene of your death.

PHOTO: ©EZIOGUTZEMBERG / DREAMSTIME.COM

Vanitas Life, Death and Resurrection by Ezio Gutzemberg

Where are you? What do you see? What do you smell, taste, touch? Who is there? Are you inside or outside? Is it warm or cool? Is there music, or words?

Imagine it. Write it down. Then tell everyone who needs to know—your family and friends and teacher and doctor—what you want. Make a record of your wishes and don't forget to decide how your body should be handled after you're done with it. Make copies and pass them out.

Then tear it up. Let it go with all your heart. This will be the work of the rest of your life.

We can do all this. We can make a plan, buy a plot, fill out the advance directive, decide what music we want to hear as we go. But we can't plan not to die. The essence of dying is the loss of control. This is the hardest part for many of us—not that death will happen, but that it will happen without our hand on the controls. It will happen as it happens, when it happens, where it happens, and chances are it won't go according to plan. The only thing we can control, and only with practice, is how we face whatever happens.

These days it is common to talk about a "good death." (There are many official, even government-issued, definitions of a good death.) A good death is usually defined as one where a person is comfortable and at peace.

For myself, I want to think about a right death, a death that fits the life I'm trying to live. Most deaths include what anyone might call good moments and bad moments, desired and undesired consequences. So it is with our lives, and so it is with death. Right deaths are all different; you can't define the details. For me, it means a death unhidden—from me and from those who love me. It means a death met with grace and willingness when the time comes. Achieving this will be the work of the rest of my life.

IF WE CAN FACE IT, recognizing the reality of death will transform our lives.

Flowers are beautiful because they are brief. Beauty is a measure of fragility and brevity and transformation, created in part by our awareness of the precious value of this moment—this moment is what we love. Death is utterly natural, shared by all; it is also heartbreaking. That equation isn't dissonant; it's the nature of love. With our eyes open to change, each thing we meet is luminous and sparkling. To love means to lose. To lose means to love. The last breath allows us to cherish another without reservation, holding nothing back.

Slay the demons, my teacher told me. That meant accepting my anxiety, my fear. It meant coming to see that hope and fear are one thing: fantasies of the unborn future. Hope pulls and fear pushes and together they keep us stuck in what has not happened, living a half-life of imaginary events. I exhausted myself on that mountain, until I gave up. Giving up was the key. Accepting the demons of hope and fear until they slew me, which was what my teacher had been saying all along.

The parable of the burning house told in the Lotus Sutra is a familiar one. The children do not know the house is on fire, so they won't leave until their father tempts them with carts full of treasure. So we are with our own suffering, our ignorance. The Buddha offers us treasures, including one so great we couldn't even imagine it.

Some years ago, I had a brief, vivid dream. I saw a room completely engulfed in flames, and several people were walking calmly through the room, smiling. One turned and looked at me and said, "I can't tell you how safe I feel in this house."

When I begin to truly accept myself as this compounded thing—a dewdrop, a bubble, a cloud—when I really believe for a moment that my precious *me* is a passing sigh in the oceanic cosmos of change, then I begin to find safety inside the burning house. I don't need to escape if I know how to live inside it. Not needing to escape, I no longer need rewards. I just walk through it, aware of dissolving.

SALLIE JIKO TISDALE is a lay dharma teacher at Dharma Rain Zen Center in Portland, Oregon. She is the author of several books, including the recent *Advice for Future Corpses (and Those Who Love Them).*

HOW NOT TO LOSE HEART

When your mind is prey to what the Buddha called "unwholesome states" like fear and despair, **SYLVIA BOORSTEIN** says it's time to cut yourself some slack.



THINGS IN THE WORLD look so bad these days that it's hard not to feel like you're losing heart. Faced with all the suffering, injustice, and bad news, you may find that your mind is falling into periods of what the Buddha called "unwholesome states"—despair, fear, anger, torpor, envy, depression, yearning, etc. If that's happening to you, you should give yourself some slack.

This is, truth be told, an unusual practice instruction, especially if you're familiar with the Buddha's instruction for cultivating zeal: "Practice as if your hair is on fire!" But these are unusual times.

We have been practicing steady high alertness since 2019 when the pandemic began. Although steady alertness coupled with delighted curiosity and expansive goodwill is the perfect platform for the arising of wisdom, the high alertness most of us have been practicing lately has happened in the context of alarm.

In normal times, the Buddha's advice on wise effort, a component of the eightfold path of practice, is this: When unwholesome states arise

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISTOCK.COM / BUBBERS13

"Slow down. Take care of your health. Remember that everything passes."

in the mind, eliminate them. When wholesome states—generosity, kindness, compassion, peace, etc.—arise in the mind, cultivate them.

Under normal circumstances, I love teaching this. It's the active ingredient of my favorite mantra: "May I be free of enmity and danger." When I notice that my attention has settled on a negative thought or feeling that is on the way to blossoming into an unwholesome state, I tell myself, "Do something else. Plan dinner or write."

To take my own advice requires clarity to see what's happening, determination not to stay stuck, and energy to eliminate negative states and cultivate positive ones. In times like this, though, when the mind and body are fatigued, clarity, determination, and energy are in short supply.

Here is a helpful practice for when we have a beleaguered mind, as so many of us do now.

1. Tell yourself, preferably out loud, what is happening: "I am fraught." "I am frightened." "I am angry." "I am so disappointed that my wedding plans are all messed up and I am also humiliated that I'm preoccupied with wedding plans when other people have real problems!"

2. Settle into the feeling of what you just said. Try not to explain your feelings, or justify them. Just name the emotion and feel it. For example, "This is it! I'm mad!" Then relax, breathing, for however long you can rest.

3. When you realize that the intensity of the emotion has passed, feel the relief of its passing. You haven't resolved the situation that produced the painful emotion, but you moved through it, at least for the moment.

As this happens, you've augmented your trust in the Buddha's axiomatic teaching that "Everything that arises passes away." The next time a powerful negative emotion arises in your mind, you'll be more prepared to remember that "This storm is here now. I'm not afraid of it. I can move forward through the middle of it. It will pass."

My son-in-law, Johan, is an ultra-marathoner and regularly runs fifty- and one-hundred-mile races. "There are times," he says, "when I need to go slower to take a drink of water or unwrap a Powerbar or just catch my breath. But I always keep moving forward. Stopping altogether is disorienting to the muscles."

I think it's the same with the mind. In normal times we meet and deal with challenges regularly, managing them gracefully. In pandemic times, the world on high alert turns everyday challenges into startling, complex, and potentially life-threatening events. So give yourself some slack. Slow down. Take care of your health. Remember that everything passes. And don't lose heart.

6 Meditations to Warm Your Heart

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CAROLE HÉNAFF



LOVING KINDNESS | MAY ALL BEINGS BE HAPPY

by **MELVIN ESCOBAR**

PRECARIOUS TIMES like these call for us to be quiet and listen to our hearts. According to its etymology, the word "precarious" derives from the Latin prefix *prec*, which means "prayer."

An especially potent form of prayer for times of crisis like these is *metta*. Metta is a Pali word that has been translated as loving-kindness, universal goodwill, or loving-friendliness. My favorite translation, which I learned from Vipassana teacher Anushka Fernandopulle, is "unstoppable friendliness."

Tradition tells us that, like the sun, metta is always present and doesn't discriminate. Metta is the heart of what are known as the four divine abodes, which include compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. As a prayer, metta offers an authentic experience of our interconnectedness.

Metta is a concentration practice to cultivate unconditional goodwill for all. It is practiced by reciting and contemplating a series of aspirations or prayers that express your goodwill and unstoppable friendliness toward yourself and others. With each recitation, you expand the scope of your loving-kindness—from yourself, to those close to you, to those for whom you feel antipathy, and finally to all sentient beings. For guidance on metta practice, let's look at some quotes from the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, known in English as *The Discourse on Loving-Kindness*, in which the Buddha teaches metta as

a simple and direct way to meet the moment as it is.

Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.

A phrase such as, "May I/you/all be free from inner and outer harm," when repeated with genuine goodwill, cultivates a sense of calm acceptance of things as they are. When the mind is determined to reject what it cannot change, it can become caught up in forms of inner harm such as shaming, blaming, complaining, and explaining. In wishing for safety and ease for ourselves or others, we are more able to hold the reality of impermanence, and the first noble truth that there is no place where one can entirely escape suffering or harm.

Whatever living beings there may be...
omitting none....

A common question that arises is: how do I practice with the most difficult person I can think of? Consider an analogy to weight lifting. It's obvious that it would be unwise and possibly unsafe to start out lifting the heaviest weights. We must practice with lighter ones first. Likewise, we can harm ourselves by trying to practice metta with a very difficult person, if we haven't developed the capacity to work with the aversion and despair that may arise. We must build capacity incrementally, starting with ourselves, a dear mentor, or any beloved being (a pet, a tree, a deity).

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

Most people agree that we should not lie to others or hate them. Metta practice can help us see how we lie to and feel hatred toward ourselves. Sharon Salzberg, meditation teacher and author of the seminal book, *Lovingkindness*, asked the Dalai Lama, "What do you think about self-hatred?" Confounded by her question, he replied, "Self-hatred? What is that?"

The self-hatred experienced by many in the West is actually a product of internalized oppression. The systems of oppression that bell hooks has called "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" teach us that we are never enough, that we must constantly strive to be worthy of happiness. Phrases like, "May I love myself as I am" and "May I be happy and know the true causes of happiness" help us see through the deception.

Let none through anger or ill will
wish harm upon another.

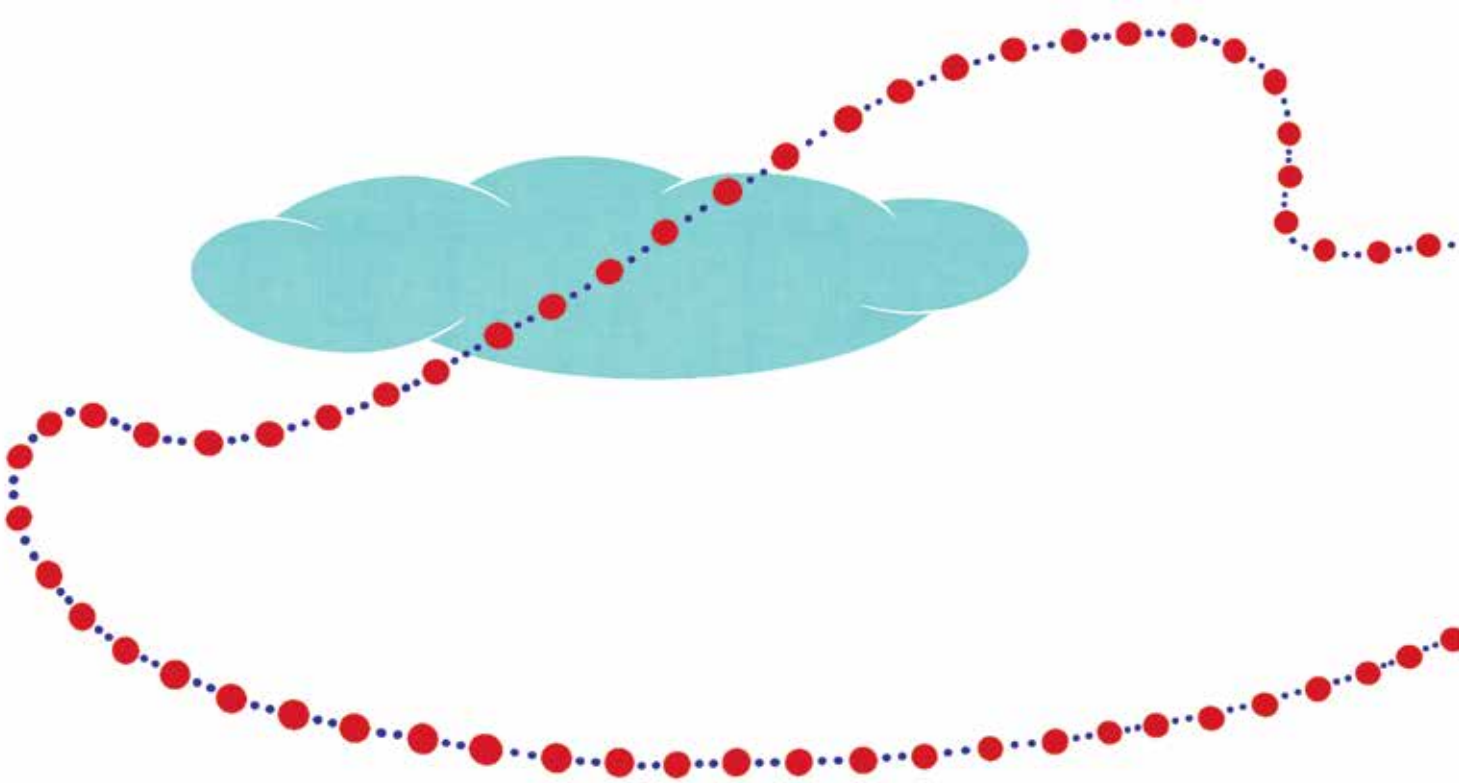
The *Dhammapada* teaches us: "Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world; by nonhatred alone is hatred appeased. This is an eternal law." Although anger can indicate that there is injustice or harm happening, it's easy to slip into ill will toward the targets of our anger. It can be momentarily satisfying to wish harm on another, but the harm rebounds on ourselves. It's the proverbial drinking of the poison and hoping the other person gets sick. A phrase like "May you be happy and healthy," directed to the source of our anger, can help purify us of this poison.

MEDITATION

Here is a typical series of metta contemplations you can practice, reciting them three times as you change the subject of your prayer from "I" to "you" to "all." But feel free to create your own or adapt these to resonate with your own experience.

May (I/you/all beings) be safe and protected, free from inner and outer harm.
May (I/you/all) be happy.
May (my/your/everyone's) body support the practice of loving awareness.
May (I/you/all) be free from ill-will, affliction, and anxiety.
May (I/you/everyone) love (myself/yourself/themselves) as (I am/you are/they are).
May (I/you/all) be happy and free from suffering.
May (I/you/all) find peace in an uncertain world.
May (I/you/all) find ease on the middle path between attachment and apathy.

When you lose concentration, simply and kindly return to your phrases. Try not to judge the judgments that inevitably arise. Meet each moment with unstoppable friendliness. May you be inspired by the transformative potential of this practice.

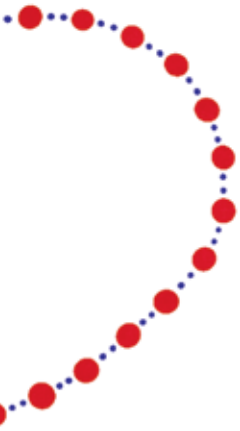


THE GOLDEN CHAIN | GUIDE TO A LIFE OF LOVE

by **CAMILLE HAMILTON PATING**

THE GOLDEN CHAIN is a traditional recitation within American Shin Buddhist communities, much loved as a children's reading. For decades, it has been recited in Buddhist Churches of America temples, youth services for Dharma School, Young Buddhist groups, and scouting and basketball programs. In my Jodo Shinshu temple, saying The Golden Chain comes as naturally as saying *Nembutsu*, or the Name, of Amida Buddha, joyfully expressing gratitude for Amida's compassionate vow.

CAMILLE HAMILTON PATING is a Dharma School teacher and certified assistant at the Buddhist Church of San Francisco.



THE GOLDEN CHAIN

I am a link in the Buddha's golden chain of love that stretches around the world
I must keep my link bright and strong
I will try to be kind and gentle to every living thing and protect all who are weaker than myself
I will try to think pure and beautiful thoughts, to say pure and beautiful words, and to do pure and beautiful deeds, knowing that on what I do now depends not only my happiness, but also that of others
May every link in the Buddha's golden chain of love become bright and strong, and may we all attain perfect peace.

As I write this reflection on The Golden Chain, our country is in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, is suffering an economic recession, and is gripped by massive gatherings for racial justice. We have witnessed relentless suffering, death count milestones, and panic-buying of toilet paper and hand sanitizer. We have seen yet another viral video showing violence against an African American person. There are so many killings of people I do not know, yet the stories are so familiar they begin to repeat themselves. I am overwhelmed by feelings of pain, numbness, and exhaustion. This is when I go to the Golden Chain.

For me, there is a profound restorative power in this simple message of practicing acts of kindness and respect to all beings and recognizing the interdependence of life. The Golden Chain is a guide for living an engaged Buddhist life. In the despair of this unprecedented reality, it encourages us to embrace our humanity.

This simple teaching contains many essential concepts of Buddhist engagement.

I am a link in the Buddha's golden chain encourages me to release my self-centeredness, assumptions, and delusions, and to reflect on oneness with Amida Buddha, the chain that connects us all.

Knowing that on what I do now depends not only my happiness or unhappiness, but also that of others encourages me to be aware of my karmic impacts. Acknowledging our interdependence encourages empathy and listening deeply to those crying out for help.

May every link in the Buddha's golden chain of love become bright and strong, and may we all attain perfect peace affirms our bodhisattva ideals and aspiration for all to access the Pure Land.

The shock of all that is happening in the world now is still raw, and the landscape of this new reality is constantly changing. Wherever the next breaking news story inevitably leads, I will come back to The Golden Chain as an aspiration for restoring humanity in a time of inhuman challenges.

RESILIENCE | SELF-CARE FOR TOUGH TIMES

by **SHAUNA SHAPIRO**



ALL OF US CAN FEEL the impact of these uncertain and challenging times on our hearts and in our nervous systems. While there are parts of our current crisis that we cannot control, that doesn't mean we're powerless. When we're up against change, uncertainty, and stress, resilience is the key to navigating life and emerging with more happiness and satisfaction.

We can cultivate resilience through the practices of mindfulness and compassion. This is the miracle of neuroplasticity—*what you practice grows stronger.* We can carve out pathways of greater clarity, courage, and compassion through practice.

The five steps below help us face difficult emotions, re-center, and find calm. These steps don't have to be done perfectly. Think direction, not destination. The key is practice.

MEDITATION

1. NAME IT TO TAME IT

It's helpful to remember that our emotions are here for a reason. They often serve as a smoke alarm, letting us know about an impending fire. When we ignore or repress our emotions, it can lead to bigger problems.

Mindfulness teaches us a different way to manage difficult emotions—to acknowledge and name what we feel. This is called "name it to tame it." Research shows that when we acknowledge and name our emotions it allows the body to physiologically calm down. Naming an emotion puts the brakes on your reactivity, down-regulates the nervous system, and allows you to see clearly.

2. WELCOME YOUR EMOTIONS

Emotions have a limited time span, typically lasting for only thirty to ninety seconds. They arise, do their dance, and pass away, just like waves in the ocean. When we remember that this painful feeling will not last forever, it becomes more manageable.

Through practice, we can learn to welcome all of our emotions with an attitude of kindness and curiosity. This involves becoming interested in the emotion and the felt experience in the body. For example, you may feel sadness as a tightening in your throat, or fear as a contraction in your belly. All emotions have a signature in the body.

3. BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Self-compassion is not our typical response when we're facing a challenge, have made a mistake, or are in pain. All too often, instead of kindness, we judge, shame, and criticize ourselves. But self-judgment and shame aren't helpful. They actually shut down the learning centers of the brain and inhibit our ability to heal, change, and grow.

The antidote is self-compassion, learning to bring kindness to our pain. The easiest way to practice it is to treat ourselves as we would treat a dear friend facing a similar situation. The willingness to face the pain in ourselves and in life takes great courage. As we practice self-compassion, we learn not only to grow from our own struggles and sorrows, but also to connect with the suffering of others.

4. RECOGNIZE OUR COMMON HUMANITY

It's natural to be feeling fearful and overwhelmed at this time. We're not alone in our feelings. There are many others right now all over the world who are also frightened and overwhelmed. As we recognize our common humanity, our isolation begins to lessen, and we understand that we're all in this together. It can be helpful to send compassion to both yourself and everyone else who is suffering.

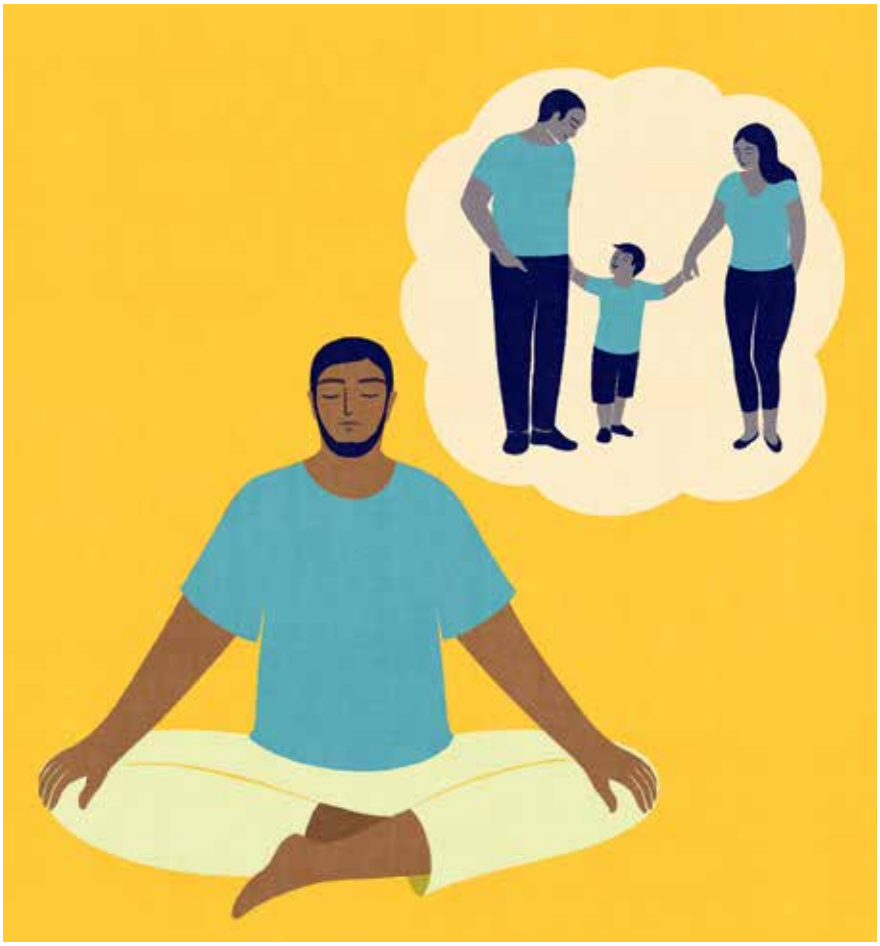
5. PRACTICE, NOT PERFECT

The fifth step is to realize that you won't do any of the first four steps perfectly. This isn't about perfection. It's about practice. Small changes lead to big shifts. In fact, one of the most important discoveries in brain science—neuroplasticity—shows that the brain has the ability to make new neural connections throughout life. This is a very hopeful message because it means that all of us have the capacity to change, heal, and grow. Perfection isn't possible, but transformation is.

SHAUNA SHAPIRO, PhD, is a professor at Santa Clara University. Her most recent book is *Good Morning, I Love You: Mindfulness and Self-Compassion Practices to Rewire Your Brain for Calm, Clarity, and Joy.*

BODHICHITTA | THE HEART OF THE BUDDHA

by **BHIKSHUNI THUBTEN CHODRON**



AT TIMES LIKE THESE, when society is polarized and people feel insecure emotionally and financially, we long for connection with others—to know that we're in this together and that we will take care of one another. Despite this longing, our self-centered mind interferes and keeps us separated.

In order to break down the walls of fear and alienation, we can practice what are called the seven cause-and-effect instructions to develop *bodhichitta*, the aspiration to attain buddhahood in order to benefit others. This meditation practice helps us see we've always been connected to others and that we can open our hearts with love, compassion, and altruism.

Before undertaking the first of the seven instructions, we must generate equanimity. That is, we must free ourselves as much as we can from our attachment to dear ones, antipathy toward enemies (people we don't feel comfortable around), and apathy for strangers.

One way to do this is to see that people change roles in our lives constantly—no one is a fixed dear one, enemy, or stranger. A second way is to see that we create these categories and fit people into them according to how they relate to "me," as if that determines their worthiness.

Once we've cultivated equanimity, we can practice these seven steps to help us develop our compassion, wisdom, and bodhichitta.

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MEDITATION

1. RECOGNIZE THAT ALL LIVING BEINGS HAVE BEEN YOUR PARENTS

Our ability to recognize that all living beings have been our parents at one time or another in beginningless samsara is based on our accepting rebirth and releasing the notion that everyone has always been whoever they appear to be now. If these ideas are new to you, for the sake of this meditation put your hesitation to the side.

2. RECOLLECT THE KINDNESS YOU HAVE RECEIVED

Recall the immense kindness you have received from all living beings when they were your parents by using the example of your parents in this life. They gave you this body, protected and fed you when you couldn't take care of yourself, made sure you received an education, taught you manners and how to get along with others, and encouraged your talents. They loved you and took care of you as best they could, given their own problems and limitations. Forgive their failings for, just like you, they are living beings under the influence of ignorance, attachment, and anger.

3. WISH TO REPAY THEIR KINDNESS

When you are aware that you've been the recipient of tremendous kindness from others, a wish to repay their kindness will naturally arise.

4. EXPERIENCE HEARTWARMING LOVE

Your wish to repay the kindness of others will lead to the experience of heartwarming love. You will see others with affection and want them to have happiness and the causes of happiness.

5. LET COMPASSION ARISE

By contemplating the suffering of all beings, let compassion arise and wish for them to be free from all the unsatisfactory circumstances of samsara and its causes. You'll know your meditation on compassion has been successful when you feel for all beings the same way a mother feels for her only child when they are sick.

6. CULTIVATE THE GREAT RESOLVE

By strengthening your love and compassion through repeated contemplation, generate the intention to free others from suffering and its causes and to bring them happiness. The stronger our awareness of their kindness and misery is, the easier it will be to generate this great resolve. Think: "How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free of suffering and its causes. May they be free. I shall cause them to be free. May all beings have happiness and its causes. I shall bring this about."

7. GENERATE THE ALTRUISTIC INTENTION OF BODHICHITTA

At present we're limited and cannot free all beings from suffering. It's only by becoming a buddha that we'll be able to actualize this deepest aspiration. Therefore, make the decision to attain buddhahood in order to benefit beings most effectively. This is the altruistic intention of bodhichitta. The first six steps of the seven cause-and-effect instructions are usually considered the causes, while this last one—altruistic intention—is the effect. This intention sets you on the path to fulfill your magnificent human potential and is the cause of happiness for all beings.

TONGLEN | A COMPASSION PRAYER THAT RIDES THE BREATH

by **JUDY LIEF**



THE WORLD TODAY is in chaos, full of suffering, confusion, and greed. It's easy to become overwhelmed and shut down, but closing our hearts isn't helpful to anyone. We practice tonglen to touch into and strengthen our inherent capacity for compassion and courage—the inner qualities that sustain us as we meet the challenges of engaging with this suffering world.

Tonglen is like a prayer that rides the breath, similar to how Tibetan prayer flags ride the wind. It enhances our trust in our ability to be kind and, at the same time, it enhances our understanding of the selfish and negative energies that are also a part of us. Tonglen is rooted in our natural tendency to love and connect with one another.

The natural in and out breath is the starting point for tonglen. Our breathing links us with the world around us: inside out, outside in. Without willing it or even noticing it, we're always sending our own energy out into the world and taking in whatever energies are coming at us. We're not separate from one another. We're linked. Tonglen begins with this quality of connection, of linkage: with oneself, with others, with the world.

Although we're engaged in such an exchange all the time, in tonglen we're intentional as to what we send out and what we take in. In tonglen practice we send out things that bring people happiness, such as love, kindness, well wishes, confidence, strength, and support, and we take in things that cause them to suffer, such as fear, doubt, pain, confusion, and sickness. We offer to others what is good and we take in what is bad, so that others may be free of it. This is the ultimate bodhisattva activity.

There are many variations and ways to practice tonglen. Traditionally, tonglen is included as a regular part of one's daily meditation session. In that context, we engage regularly with this practice and deepen our understanding over time. In the midst of life, there are also many opportunities to apply tonglen in action. We can touch into tonglen on the spot in any situation that needs our love and compassion.

MEDITATION

1. TOUCH SPACIOUSNESS

Sit quietly. Relax and breathe simply and naturally. Let go of restlessness. Let go of the past and the future and of compulsive thinking and planning. Be still. Touch spaciousness. Imagine that you are like a vase. Within you, there is vast space. Around you, there is vast space. Between the two, there's a subtle boundary. Breathe in. Breathe out. Let the inhalation dissolve within. Let the exhalation dissolve without. Begin the practice with a brief gap. Take a moment to stop and start fresh.

2. RELATE TO ENERGIES

Evoke positive energy as bright, cool, and refreshing, and send it to all beings on the exhalation. Evoke negative energy as tarry, thick, and claustrophobic. Remove it from all beings as you breathe in. Let your breathing flow.

3. GET PERSONAL

Begin with a situation that evokes real feelings for you. It could involve the person you care about the most. It could involve someone who is sick or suffering, someone you're worried about. Touch into your feeling of love for that person and your concerns about them. As you breathe out, send out love and sincere wishes for their well-being. As you breathe in, take in their pain or confusion in order to free them from such obstacles.

4. EXTEND

Think of the many others—past, present, and future—who suffer in similar ways. Extend your tonglen to these many beings.

5. DAILY LIFE

Return to the simplicity of just resting and breathing. Let the tonglen session dissolve. Then carry a tonglen attitude, a light touch of tenderness, into your life.

GREEN TARA | FEEL HER WISDOM AND LOVE

by **LAMA PALDEN DROLMA**



TARA IS THE MOST BELOVED of all the female enlightened beings in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. The essence of awakened love and compassion, she is known as "the mother of all the buddhas" and "she who ferries beings across the ocean of samsara."

As a fully enlightened female buddha, Tara is the actuality of compassion and wisdom, and meditating on her helps us awaken our own buddhanature. Her right foot is slightly extended because she is ready to leap to the aid of beings. Her right hand is opened out on her right knee, in the gesture of generosity. Her left hand holds the stem of a lotus flower, which is blossoming next to her left ear.

In order for Tara to be able to benefit us, we need to approach her with an open heart and mind. Through continued meditation practice on Tara, we can establish a relationship in which we are able to trust and rely on her, and the more we are able to open to Tara, the more she is able to benefit us. I have been calling on, praying to, and meditating on Tara for more than forty years. Countless times I have felt her love stream into me, and she has helped me—spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

A recent example was a period of anxiety and uncertainty I experienced after I sold my home of many years and didn't know what was going to happen next. I called upon Tara, asked for her help, and opened to her presence in the sky in front of me. As I imagined her nectar of unconditional love pouring into the crown of my head from her outstretched right hand, I felt soothed and comforted. I let go of any anxiety and fear and connected with my awakened nature—unlimited and inseparable from peace, emptiness, love, and awareness. Tara again and again reminds me of who I truly am.

Like all Vajrayana practices, Tara visualization can be very elaborate. But here is a basic version you can do that contains all the essential steps of deity practice.

MEDITATION

1. SETTLE YOUR MIND

Let your mind settle, resting in natural open awareness. Then take refuge in the awakened ones and generate the motivation to awaken yourself for the benefit of all sentient beings. Recite: "Until awakening I take refuge in Buddha, dharma, and noble sangha / By the merit of my acts of generosity and other awakening qualities / May I attain full awakening for the benefit of all beings."

2. VISUALIZE TARA

Think that everything dissolves into emptiness/openness. Then visualize that in the sky in front of you, from her seed syllable TAM, Green Tara instantly appears, sitting on a full open lotus and moon seat. She is blue-green, the color of a mountain lake. She is arrayed in silks and jewels, symbolizing the six transcendent perfections (paramitas) and full awakening.

3. INVITE HER WISDOM

Radiate light from your heart center. Imagine that it purifies the phenomenal world, makes offerings to the enlightened ones, and invites Tara's wisdom awareness to be present with you. Visualize that this happens through numerous small forms of Tara raining down into the main form you have visualized. Think that the Tara you have imagined becomes inseparable from her actual wisdom awareness.

4. RECEIVE HER LOVE

Repeat her mantra, OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA, and visualize that from her outstretched right hand comes a river of wisdom elixir, turquoise-green in color. This removes all fear, gives protection, removes obstacles and obscurations, and transmits enlightened awareness to you. Make prayers to Tara. Pour out your heart to her and receive her love and blessing.

5. BECOME TARA

Then imagine that Tara dissolves into light, and dissolves into you. Think that your mind is inseparable from Tara's enlightened mind. See yourself in the form of Tara, appearing as a body made of light—emptiness and form inseparable. In your heart area is a blue-green TAM. From it, light radiates out joy, compassion, loving-kindness, strength, and equanimity to all beings. Repeat her mantra while your heart is radiating these qualities.

6. DISSOLVE THE VISUALIZATION

When you have finished repeating the mantra, gradually dissolve the visualization until there is just a drop of turquoise light left in your heart area, the essence of your wisdom and compassion. Then this dissolves into space, like a rainbow disappearing into the sky.

7. DEDICATE THE MERIT

Rest your mind naturally for a few minutes or longer. Then dedicate the merit of your meditation practice to all beings: "Through this goodness may awakening spontaneously arise in our streams of being / May all obscurations and distortions fall away / May all beings be liberated from suffering, and the stormy waves of birth, sickness, old age, and death."

LAMA PALDEN DROLMA is the founder and senior lama of the Sukhasiddhi Foundation, the author of *Love on Every Breath*, and a psychotherapist committed to the integration of spirit and psyche.



FINDING A BETTER BALANCE

Equanimity protects us from emotional overreaction and allows us to rest in a bigger perspective. **DR. CHRISTIANE WOLF** on how to cultivate it.

"GO PLACIDLY AMID THE NOISE and the haste and remember what peace there may be in silence."

With this sentence the German-American writer Max Ehrmann began "Desiderata." My mother appreciated this poem so much that she hung a framed copy across from the toilet in our bathroom, and for years I found myself reflecting on it several times a day in a contemplative position. Was this the origin of my quest for equanimity? The idea makes me smile.

What is equanimity, and how can we invite more of it into our lives? Equanimity is being willing and able to accept things as they are in this moment—whether they're challenging, boring, exciting, disappointing, painful, or exactly what we want. Equanimity brings calmness and balance to moments of joy as well as difficulty. It protects us from an emotional overreaction, allows us to rest in a bigger perspective, and contains a basic trust in the course of things.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KEVIN T. / FLICKR

Equanimity is like the eye of the storm, the calm center, that is grounded in the knowledge that everything is constantly changing and much of it is out of our control. The mature oak tree is another symbol of equanimity. Firmly rooted in the earth, it's not moved by the changing seasons and weather patterns. The tree owes this stability to its taproots, which anchor it securely so that it's stable but not rigid, even in strong storms.

We can ask ourselves: What are our taproots? What helps us withstand the inevitable storms of life? The Buddha warned against being taken in by the "eight worldly winds," which today, 2,600 years later, still blow back and forth: pleasure and pain, praise and blame, success and failure, profit and loss. Of course we'd prefer to experience only one side of the winds, the side we see as positive, but the more we see that they shift again and again, the more deeply we can connect with our taproot.

Equanimity (Pali: *upekkha*) plays a central role in Buddhist teachings. Along with loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), and joy (*mudita*), equanimity is one of the *brahmaviharas*, the four core qualities of the heart. Upekkha is a compound word in Pali, which can be translated as "calmly observing" or "viewing with patience and wisdom."

Equanimity supports the other brahmaviharas. Without equanimity, we'd be overwhelmed by the suffering in the world and we'd shut down or turn away. Without equanimity, the immense beauty and joy of the world, which are also part of reality, could seduce us into a Pollyannaish worldview. Equanimity is vast enough to hold all sides of life in a caring embrace.

Equanimity should not be confused with indifference. From the outside, these two conditions look confusingly similar, which is why in Buddhist literature indifference is referred to as the "close enemy" of equanimity. Equanimity isn't gritting your teeth or white-knuckling it. Rather, it's caring deeply but with a sense of ease. Equanimity can only arise through the embodied acceptance of the fact that we don't have complete control over any given situation.

Equanimity is sometimes referred to as the "grandparent feeling." Grandparents often have the same love for their grandchildren that they had for their own children, but with more ease and perspective around expectations and difficulties. As one grandma expressed it, "All these troubles will come out with the wash."

Equanimity and mindfulness are closely interwoven and mutually reinforcing, but they're two distinct skills that develop at different speeds. We can experience mindfulness from the beginning of our meditation practice, while equanimity often takes a little longer.

Being nonjudgmental is part of the definition of mindfulness. Yet when we begin to practice mindfulness, we become aware of how irritated, judgmental, unfriendly, and lacking in equanimity we often are. Ironically, it's the presence of mindfulness that makes us see this lack of equanimity clearly!

Through mindfulness we can observe the flow of thoughts, feelings, and sensations in the body without having a knee-jerk reaction. By repeatedly doing this practice, insights arise into the complex, often impersonal causal chains of experiences. These insights give us a greater perspective and lead to more equanimity. We can trust that if we regularly practice mindfulness and insight meditation, we'll naturally be more at ease.

Living life in a conscious way will make us more equanimous over time but we don't have to leave that up to the worldly winds. We can practice it deliberately. Ultimately, our equanimity isn't only good for us, but also for everyone we encounter.

3 EQUANIMITY EXERCISES

STAY OPEN, INVITE PERSPECTIVE

Reflect on a situation in your life that you initially viewed as negative, but which then led to a much better situation you couldn't have foreseen at the time. For example, perhaps a painful breakup made it possible to find your true love, or a rejection after a job interview ultimately led to better employment. Invite this perspective into a current situation where you can only see the negative side.

WHEN A LOVED ONE IS SUFFERING

It's difficult to endure when someone we love suffers. Often, we take on their suffering as our own. We get caught up in feelings of guilt that we cannot help more, or we believe we need to feel bad, too, out of a sense of solidarity.

This exercise, which was inspired by the psychologist Kristin Neff, helps us find equanimity when a loved one is suffering. The essence of it is the insight that ultimately we cannot make someone else happy. We can only work with our own mind and reactions and make our own decisions.

Repeat the following sentences quietly during a meditation and also during the day:

"Everyone is on their own life's journey."

"I am not the cause of your suffering (or not the exclusive cause)."

"It isn't in my power to end your suffering, although I would like to, if I could."

"Moments like this are hard to endure and yet I will continue to try to help where I can."

OPEN AWARENESS MEDITATION

After an initial focus on the breath in our meditation, we can open our awareness like a camera lens until the difference between foreground (breath) and background (everything else, such as thoughts, feelings, sounds, body sensations, etc.) dissolves. We sit back and watch the constant arising and passing away of experience in the moment without getting caught in the details. We rest in the perspective of the vast blue sky and let all of experience pass through like clouds or flocks of birds.



"Equanimity is like the eye of the storm, the calm center grounded in the knowledge that everything is constantly changing."

PHOTO COURTESY OF NASA



3 STEPS TO SELF-COMPASSION

Psychologist **CHRIS GERMER**'s three-step practice to soothe your anxiety with kindness.

CHRIS GERMER, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and the author of *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion.*

THIS THREE-STEP PRACTICE taps into the three components of self-compassion: mindfulness, our common humanity, and self-kindness. You can do it whenever you feel anxiety in your daily life.

1. START BY PRACTICING MINDFULNESS

Begin by validating your feelings of anxiety. Say in a warm and understanding way, "I'm experiencing anxiety. I'm feeling anxiety," as you might speak with a dear friend.

Then notice where in your body you feel anxiety the most. Do you feel tightness in your throat, a pounding heart, butterflies in your stomach, or dizziness in your head?

See if you can make a little room for that sensation, allowing it to be there, if only for a few moments.

2. CONTEMPLATE OUR COMMON HUMANITY

It may feel like you're the only person experiencing anxiety, but rest assured that millions of people feel just as you do in this very moment.

Recognize that many others, if they were in the same situation as you, would feel just like you do.

Say to yourself, "Anxiety is part of the human condition. I am not alone."

3. GIVE YOURSELF KINDNESS

Now see if you can give yourself kindness, simply because you're feeling anxiety, not to make anxiety go away. Here are four ways to do that.

Soft Gaze: First, allow a living being to come to mind who has a lot of love in their eyes, such as a child, a pet, a loved one, or a friend. Visualize their eyes and allow yourself to bathe in their gaze for as long as you like.

Soothing Touch: Place one of your hands on the part of your body where you feel anxiety the most, feeling the sense of touch and warmth of your hand. If you like, imagine kindness flowing through your fingers into that part of your body, or gently stroke that part of your body as an expression of sympathy and kindness.

Gentle Words: Reflect for a moment on words you would like to hear most at a time like this. For example, "I love you," "I'm here for you," "You can do this." What words would inspire you to say, "Thank you, I needed to hear that"? Then whisper those words into your own ear, as a silent blessing, over and over.

Take some time to practice self-kindness—through soft gaze, soothing touch, and gentle words—however it feels just right for you.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUILIA BERTELLI



HOW TO HAVE THE WORLD—AND THE LIFE—WE WANT

As we work to face immediate crises, we can't lose sight of our hope to create a more compassionate, just, and sustainable society. Leading Buddhist teacher **SHARON SALZBERG** talks about how to care for ourselves, for others — and for our future. Because we're in it for the long haul.

LION'S ROAR: What's your response to people who say that meditation and mindfulness are just ways of checking out and feeling good, no matter what's going on around us?

SHARON SALZBERG: Sometimes, of course, meditation does feel good, because it's a respite from our normal, anxiety-driven thoughts. But that doesn't mean those thoughts aren't happening. It means we're creating a different relationship to them, so we feel space. We get some rest even as our conditioning is playing out.

What most people don't understand about meditation is that it's not about cutting out all thinking, or just sitting there in bliss or peace. It's about developing a different relationship to whatever is happening. We learn to have a way of experiencing joy, wonder, and delight that we may not have had before because of always being so distracted. We learn to have a different relationship to pain, so we don't isolate ourselves when we're experiencing it and we don't isolate others when they are. And we learn not to endlessly seek stimulation in order to feel alive.

Changing society is a slow process, so if we want to affect any real change, we have to be in it for the long haul. How do we cultivate the patience and persistence we need to do that?

It's always good to be mindful of one's expectations. Being older now, I have seen there were times when I thought nothing was being accomplished, only to find out later that we had planted a seed of something good.

It's like the way we sometimes look at our meditation practice and think, "That was a waste of time!" But then suddenly we're in a challenging circumstance and we realize, "Oh, meditating really helped me have a steadier mind and be more present for opportunity." A lot of work in the world can be like that.

There's an enormous amount of suffering in the world, particularly now. How can we avoid falling into the trap of wanting to look away from it?

Well, sometimes we will. It's not necessarily a trap unless we stay there. Sometimes we need a break. That is actually true. Sometimes change takes a long time. We're not going to see immediate results, so we need to allow joy. We need a sense of community, so we don't feel we're struggling alone. There's a lot of joy in community, as we feel supported in a common purpose.

And meditation is a tremendous tool. We can easily get exhausted and feel overwhelmed, but meditation is resilience training. We learn how to begin again and again in our efforts, and we discover inner strengths and a sense of connection to others.

How is it possible to fight hard for what we believe in, but to do it compassionately?

By recognizing human frailty. We realize we all get lost in ignorance. We realize the degree of disconnection that causes one of us to harm another, and that people have views that are very conditioned.

It's absolutely possible to have compassion for yourself *and* compassion for others. Wisdom or discernment might tell us that we don't want a particular person making choices about our lives. We don't want them on a school board, for example, deciding what texts our children are going to read, or in a legislative body, making decisions about our health care. So we fight, but without that element of enmity.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTINE ALICINO

What's the best approach when we want to spread a message about a cause that's important to us?

Convey passion, interest, and commitment. It's never good to proselytize or cease to listen to other people's point of view. Also, it's one thing to have ideals and it's another thing to take action, even seemingly small action. I found that I care about people voting, so I decided to go out every weekend and help register people.

How should we respond when people are angered by our message, or they're apathetic or uninterested?

When someone's angry, that would be an interesting time to hear where they're coming from and how they're interpreting what you're saying. This makes for much better communication. Also, remind people that you're not trying to talk them into something. You're trying to reveal your own heart and what you care about, which is irrefutable. You can't argue with "I care about this," compared to, "You're a fool because you didn't register to vote."

In terms of apathy or lack of interest, there's such a pervasive feeling that "The suffering is intractable, so what could my contribution possibly amount to?" People need to be encouraged to do the good that's in front of them, whether it's political or not. Even when it's just helping a friend who's in trouble, we do the good that's in front of us, realizing that we're not in charge of the universe. We can't solve it all. But we can offer our engagement, and that's very important.

Do we need to practice compassion for people who cause harm?

What's essential is not being lost in hatred and fear. For some people, calling that practicing compassion is a bridge too far. I also think it depends on what's happened and the timing. If you've had a devastating personal loss because of someone else's actions, that's not the moment to focus on compassion for that person. You are trying to survive. You need to grieve. You maybe need to have compassion for yourself, because many of us feel guilty in those circumstances, like, "I should've done this," or "Why didn't I do that?" So self-compassion is the task at hand, certainly for a while.

To be lost in hatred is another thing. That's the kind of preoccupation any of us can get into when we're obsessed with someone else's actions. I have a friend who got into one of those things about someone: "They did this," "They said that," "They're so terrible." After a while, out of compassion for himself, he said, "I let them live rent-free in my brain for too long."

When we encounter the suffering of the world and experience overwhelming grief or anger, how can we cope with it?

One of the things we say in mindfulness training is "Look for the add-ons." That terrible feeling is there, but what—out of habit—do you tend to add onto it? Maybe it's "This is all I'll ever feel. This is going to last forever," or "I'm the only one who has ever felt this," or "I should've been able to stop this. This is all my fault," or "It's a disgrace that I feel this." Often we're adding shame or anger. That's habit. As we get more mindful, we can see the arising of those add-ons and are able to relinquish them.

Then you're left with just the emotion, and you take an interest in it. It's not "Why is that emotion there? What am I going to do about it?" but rather questions like "What does it feel like in my body?" and "What are the changing states of that emotion?"

Underneath anger or feeling overwhelmed there is very often a sense of helplessness, and that's a horribly uncomfortable thing to feel. But if we can face it and be with it, then we don't do desperate acts to avoid it and we learn a different relation-

ship to it. It's like "Okay, this feels really painful. But it's not wrong. It's just painful."

We develop compassion for ourselves and compassion for others, and then we realize, "Oh, if I take one small action, that will help ameliorate that feeling of helplessness." It won't dissolve this terrible system of suffering and oppression so many people experience, but it will bring back to life our sense of connection.

Anger can be a powerful fuel giving us the energy to right wrongs. But how can we ensure we don't burn out from it and that we use anger skillfully?

In Buddhist psychology, anger is a very interesting state. The positive element of it is energy. Anger keeps us from being passive or complacent, and it gives us courage. It's often the angriest person in the room who's insisting everybody look at the problem, while everyone else is determined to look the other way.

So, there's a power to that. But if the anger becomes chronic, we can burn up. The image that's used in Buddhist psychology is a forest fire, which burns up its own support. Anger can destroy us.

It's also true that when we're consumed with anger, we lose perspective. We don't see options; we don't find creative solutions. So the first step is what I described before—seeing the anger itself, without the add-ons. Feel it in a more balanced way and watch as it changes. That will create space, and in that space, options arise.

What's your message for people who feel guilty about having goodness in their own lives when there's so much suffering in the world?

Look at what's sustainable for you. People hit a wall by not taking care of themselves. They get overwhelmed and exhausted. They feel a sense of meaninglessness. In psychological terms, there's vicarious trauma—the traumatic experience we feel from dealing with people who've been traumatized.

The people who reach out for a meditative practice are often the people who have either hit the wall or sense it's right there and they need something to build resilience. Often, it's hard. They think, "I can't take the time, there's so much to do, and I'm not helping anybody else." But it is like being on an airplane when the flight attendant says, "If the cabin pressure goes down and the oxygen masks descend, put your own on before you try to help anybody else."

What's your recommendation for a wellness routine for activists?

Meditation is a tremendous tool, including movement meditation, whether it's walking meditation or yoga or whatever one chooses to do.

But the basic understanding is that we have to have boundaries. Though we need to do what we can do unstintingly, there's only so much we *can* do. I really feel if I were in charge of this universe, it would be a lot better. But I'm not. That's the truth of things, and sometimes you have to take joy in the fact that, although you couldn't solve somebody's terrible problem, they didn't feel so alone for a day, or whatever it is you managed to do. We have to surrender to reality. That will give us strength and buoy us up.

So we just do what we can and then let it go?

Yes. Not in a resigned way, but feeling the fullness of it. Being connected and caring uplifts us and breaks us out of conventional ideas of where happiness is to be found, like in endless accumulation or stepping on others to get ahead. We have lots of myths and lies that we've been taught, and we can break free of those through caring actions.

What's the difference between empathy and compassion?

In the Burmese Buddhist tradition, there's a twofold definition of empathy and compassion. First there's the trembling or the quivering of the heart in response to seeing pain or suffering, and then there's movement toward seeing if we can be of help.

So the first part of that—the trembling or quivering of the heart—is empathy. We resonate. We have a felt sense of what it's like for this other person or people. It's not an imposition like, "I know exactly what you're feeling," but we have a sense that, "Oh, there was a time in my life when I felt lied to or overlooked or I had such a terrible thing happen to me, so you're likely in a position like that." Empathy is very much a felt sense.

Compassion is the part where we move toward seeing if we can be of help. It's not like moving in to insist we're going to help or to forget ourselves. "Moving toward" implies balance—compassion for ourselves as well as others, clarity, perspective, and wisdom.

What does this mean for activists?

These days, there's some emphasis in society on empathy training. That is totally necessary because it can be a cold, cruel world without it. But often people I work with—caregivers, activists, aid workers, people like that—they've already got a lot of empathy. That's why they do what they do. They're burning out for different reasons. It's more about balance, having compassion for themselves, and having perspective. Remember, you're not in charge of this universe.

What are some practices or concepts in Buddhism that might be helpful to non-Buddhist activists?

People who are activists more than practitioners are the very people who say, "I had to deal with the chronic anger that was destroying me," or "I had to just get out, ride a bike, and look at the sky. I needed a break and I was too guilty to take one, but then I learned I had to."

So that's the notion of balance in Buddhist teachings. Also, there's equanimity. Not everything is a quick fix. You've got to be in it for the long haul, so patience is useful.

Then there's the Buddhist teaching that we all have innate dignity. When it comes to standing up for their own rights, people have to realize they're worth something in order to protest their conditions. I think of this woman who's a leader amongst the striking fast-food workers, fighting for fifteen dollars an hour minimum wage and a union. In that kind of situation where you have very little, often the people in your family say, "Don't threaten what little you have. Just be quiet." But something in her said, "No, I work hard, my friends work hard, and we shouldn't be treated this way, because everybody is worth something."

What can Buddhists learn from secular activism?

A sense of agency. Instead of simply feeling outrage, writing a nasty tweet, or sitting there discussing a situation, you will feel better if you do something—anything. Do one thing. Sometimes we hold back because it seems like what we can do is so small it couldn't make a difference. But it's essential we do it.

One of the things that's important to me is broadening my definition of social activism. I include art and writing, because things that break down barriers and have us think differently are also about social change. Let's not limit ourselves to thinking social action means only marching in the streets.

How can we know if our creative expression has a higher purpose?

Look at your motive, which would be a very Buddhist thing to do.

SHARON SALZBERG, a leading teacher of Insight Meditation, is one of the founders of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts. Her newest book is *Real Change: Mindfulness to Heal Ourselves & The World*.

How to Practice

Feeding Your Demons



LAMA TSULTRIM ALLIONE teaches you an innovative technique to turn your inner demons into friends.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CAROLE HÉNAFF

LAMA TSULTRIM ALLIONE is the founder of the Tara Mandala retreat center in Pagosa Springs, Colorado, and author of *Feeding Your Demons* and *Wisdom Rising: Journey Into the Mandala of the Empowered Feminine*.

FEEDING OUR DEMONS rather than fighting them contradicts the conventional approach of fighting against whatever assails us. But it turns out to be a remarkably effective path to inner integration.

Demons (*maras* in Sanskrit) are not blood-thirsty ghouls waiting for us in dark corners. Demons are within us. They are energies we experience every day, such as fear, illness, depression, anxiety, trauma, relationship difficulties, and addiction.

Anything that drains our energy and blocks us from being completely awake is a demon. The approach of giving form to these inner forces and feeding them, rather than struggling against them, was originally articulated by an eleventh-century female Tibetan Buddhist teacher named Machig Labdrön (1055–1145). The spiritual practice she developed was called *Chöd*, and it generated such amazing results that it became very popular, spreading widely throughout Tibet and beyond.

In today's world, we suffer from record levels of inner and outer struggle. We find ourselves ever more polarized, inwardly and outwardly. We need a new paradigm, a fresh approach to conflict. Machig's strategy of nurturing rather than battling our inner and outer enemies offers a revolutionary path to resolve conflict and leads to psychological integration and inner peace.

The method that I have developed, called Feeding Your Demons™, is based on the principles of Chöd adapted for the Western world. Here is an abbreviated version of the practice.

5 STEPS OF FEEDING YOUR DEMONS

STEP 1: FIND THE DEMON IN YOUR BODY

After generating a heartfelt motivation to practice for the benefit of yourself and all beings, decide which demon you want to work with. Chose something that feels like it is draining your energy right now. If it's a relationship issue, work with the feeling that is arising in you in the relationship as the demon, rather than the other person.

Thinking about the demon you have chosen to work with, perhaps remembering a particular incident when it came up strongly, scan your body and ask yourself: *Where is the demon held in my body most strongly? What is its shape? What is its color? What is its texture? What is its temperature?*

Now intensify this sensation.



STEP 2: PERSONIFY THE DEMON

Allow this sensation, with its color, texture, and temperature, to move out of your body and become personified in front of you as a being with limbs, a face, eyes, and so on.

Notice the following about the demon: *size, color, surface of its body, density, gender, if it has one, its character, its emotional state, the look in its eyes, something about the demon you did not see before.*

Now ask the demon the following questions: *What do you want? What do you really need? How will you feel when you get what you really need?*

STEP 3: BECOME THE DEMON

Switch places, keeping your eyes closed as much as possible. Take a moment to settle into the demon's body. Feel what it's like to be the demon. Notice how your normal self looks from the demon's point of view. Answer these questions, speaking as the demon: *What I want is…. What I really need is…. When I get what I really need, I will feel…* (Take particular note of this answer.)



STEP 4: FEED THE DEMON AND MEET THE ALLY

Take a moment to settle back into your own body. See the demon opposite you. Then dissolve your own body into nectar. The nectar has the quality of the feeling that the demon would have when it gets what it really needs (i.e. the answer to the third question). Notice the color of the nectar.

I magine this nectar is moving toward the demon and nurturing it. Notice how the demon takes it in. You have an infinite supply of nectar. Feed the demon to its complete satisfaction and notice how it transforms in the process. This can take some time.

Notice if there is a being present after the demon is completely satisfied. If there is a being present, ask it: "Are you the ally?" If it is, you will work with that being. If it is not, or if there is no being present after feeding the demon to complete satisfaction, invite the ally to appear.

When you see the ally, notice all the details of the ally: *size, color, surface of its body, density, gender (if it has one), its character, its emotional state, the look in its eyes, something about the demon you did not see before.*

When you really feel connected with the energy of the ally, ask these questions: *How will you help me? How will you protect me? What pledge do you make to me? How can I access you?*

Change places and become the ally. Take a moment to settle into the ally's body and notice how it feels to be in the ally's body. How does your normal self look from the ally's point of view? When you are ready, answer these questions, speaking as the ally: *I will help you by... I will protect you by... I pledge I will... You can access me by...*

Take a moment to settle back into your own body and see the ally in front of you. Look into its eyes and feel its energy pouring into your body.

Now imagine that the ally dissolves into light. Notice the color of this light. Feel it dissolving into you and integrate this luminosity into every cell of your body. Take note of the feeling of the integrated energy of the ally in your body. Now you, with the integrated energy of the ally, also dissolve.



STEP 5: REST IN AWARENESS

Rest in whatever state is present after the dissolution. Pause until discursive thoughts begin again, then gradually come back to your body. As you open your eyes, maintain the feeling of the energy of the ally in your body.

Feeding Your Demons™ *is a process created and developed by Lama Tsultrim Allione. © Tara Mandala. For further information and training in Feeding Your Demons, go to taramandala.org.*

YOU ARE THE GREAT PERFECTION

Rest in your true nature without effort or distraction — **MINGYUR RINPOCHE** teaches the renowned practice of Dzogchen.



PHOTOGRAPH BY WOLFGANG HASSELMANN

YOU ARE ALREADY PERFECT.

You are already a buddha. In fact, there's no difference between your true nature, right now as you sit reading this, and the true nature of the buddha, or any enlightened being for that matter.

That's the view of Dzogchen, a Tibetan word that means "Great Perfection." Dzogchen is treasured above all other practices in the Nyingma school of Vajrayana Buddhism because it helps us connect directly with our own enlightened nature.

Your essence, and the essence of every living creature, is pure, whole, and complete. There's nothing missing, and that's why we call it the Great Perfection. YOU are the Great Perfection. Don't forget that. Dzogchen is talking about you. This Great Perfection is you right now, right here in this moment, not some fully developed you after you do a lot more meditation.

In Dzogchen, we call this enlightened nature *rigpa*, or pure awareness. Unlike some approaches in which buddhanature is taught in a more theoretical way, and you need to study and meditate for a long time to figure out what it is, Dzogchen is experiential. You get introduced to pure awareness directly, right on the spot.

A traditional way to describe Dzogchen is in terms of the ground, the path, and the fruition.

The Great Perfection is our true nature, whether we realize it or not. That's the *ground* of Dzogchen. It's the reality of our experience and who we are.

But that doesn't help if we don't experience it for ourselves. The way to do that is by having this pure awareness introduced to us, and then getting familiar with it until it becomes stable and enduring. That process is the *path*.

Then, once we're familiar with our own true nature, once we've realized it fully and integrated it into every aspect of our lives, we will fully manifest the enlightened qualities that were there all along. That's the *fruition*.

THE GROUND OF DZOGCHEN

It might be a little unclear what this "true nature" really is, so let me explain a bit more about the ground.

When we use all these fancy terms like "buddhanature" and "pure awareness," what are we actually talking about? Well, there are three main qualities to look for here. We refer to these as the "empty essence," "luminous nature," and "all-pervasive compassion." That's the ground, your true nature.

"Empty essence" means that the true nature of mind, the essence of pure awareness, transcends all our ideas, concepts, and beliefs. It is utterly beyond all our suffering and problems. It is completely free. The term for this is "innate purity"—the essence of who we are was, is, and always will be perfect. It's completely pure, and nothing can change that.

This empty essence is ungraspable, beyond our ordinary way of seeing things, but it's not nothing. There is also a luminous, knowing presence. This is what we call the "luminous nature." Sometimes it's called "self-clarity," because this clarity is spontaneous and natural. It's just there, all the time. Even when we're asleep, distracted, or completely neurotic. It's there.

The empty essence and clear nature are one and the same. They're inseparable. This inseparability is the third quality of the ground, which we call "all-pervasive compassion." This open, spacious clarity manifests as all our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, just like the sun radiates light. These experiences, in fact *all* of our experiences, are none other than the manifestations or play of pure awareness.

THE PATH OF DZOGCHEN

But what good does just knowing this do us? Not much. That's why we need a path. We need to translate this from nice words and ideas to an actual experience.

The Dzogchen path is really quite simple. That's not to say it's easy, but it is simple.

The only thing we need to do is to recognize this pure inner nature. We need to experience it for ourselves. That's it. If we want to make it a little more complicated, we could say that first we need to have pure awareness introduced to us, and then we become familiar with it.

So, how does that happen?

This is where a teacher becomes important. There's a lot going on in our minds. We have all sorts of memories and reactions, emotions and expectations. In short, we have monkey mind.

Seeing the subtle quality of empty clarity in the midst of all this mental activity isn't easy. If it were, we would have recognized rigpa a long time ago! But a skilled teacher who has recognized pure awareness in him or herself, and who holds an authentic lineage, can point it out to us. They can help us find our way through all the complexities of the mind to see this simple, ever present reality.

You might think that because you are already perfect, because this awakened nature is fully present as the very nature of your mind, then you don't need to meditate or practice. Nothing could be further from the truth. The trick is *how* you practice. You still need to meditate, but meditate effortlessly. You still need to practice, but practice naturalness.

Rather than practicing with the notion that there's some level to achieve beyond where you are right now, the main practice is learning to trust that this original purity is always present, especially when it feels like it isn't. Every step you take on the path should reinforce your trust that pure awareness is right here, right now. Until your recognition is unshakeable, you still need to do formal practice.

THE FRUITION OF DZOGCHEN

As I said, the core of the path is simply recognizing the nature of mind and coming back to that recognition again and again, until it's as familiar as an old friend. If you do that, there will come a time when you've experienced this pure awareness so thoroughly and completely that you never lose touch with it. When you're meditating, you're meditating in pure awareness. When you're eating, you're eating in pure awareness. Even when you're sleeping, you're still resting in the recognition of pure awareness.

That's what we call "full realization," the fruition of the path. At this point, all the qualities of the ground, your true enlightened nature, become manifest. These were there all along, but because you didn't know they were, it was almost as though they didn't exist. But now you know them. You know them thoroughly and completely. Perfect wisdom, boundless compassion, the spontaneous capacity to benefit others—all of these manifest.

This fruition is simply the full expression of your true nature. It's as though you go out and travel the whole world, looking and searching high and low for some peace of mind. But in the end, you come home and realize that everything you were looking for was right where you started. That's the Great Perfection.

PRACTICE: DZOGCHEN

The trickiest part of Dzogchen practice is that it is not something we can do. The whole point is that we are learning to recognize what is already there, while our "doing" impulse is based on the assumption that who and what we are in the present moment needs improvement. So how do we put this into practice?

Dzogchen meditation involves three important qualities: effortlessness, presence, and naturalness. In traditional terms, these three are called non-meditation, non-distraction, and non-fabrication.

To connect with effortlessness, we shift from a mode of "doing" to one of "being." We let go of the impulse to fiddle with the knobs of experience and give ourselves permission to simply be. We rest in effortless awareness.

But while we rest in effortless awareness, we are not lost or distracted. We are fully present, alert and aware. This presence is the second quality. It's not something we need to make happen. It's already here, with us all the time. When we drop the effort and simply rest, we're giving ourselves the opportunity to recognize the open clarity of awareness, to *be* this open clarity.

Nothing can diminish this effortless awareness. All our thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and impulses arise from this knowing presence, and dissolve back into it. For this reason, we do not need to create any special state of mind to experience the mind's innate purity. We don't need to block our thoughts and emotions or control the movements of our attention. Just be as you are.

This is the third quality—naturalness. We let everything unfold without trying to correct, alter, or improve anything.

As we grow more comfortable with resting in awareness, these qualities of effortlessness, presence, and naturalness will emerge, and we will slowly come to see that this spacious awareness is who we truly are.

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HELP WHEN YOUR HEART BREAKS

Caring for people who are suffering is a loving, even heroic calling, but it takes a toll. **ROSHI JOAN HALIFAX** teaches this five-step program to care for yourself while caring for others.



The young burn victim with her father and Roshi Joan Halifax after the little girl was treated successfully at Upaya Zen Center's Nomad Clinic in Nepal.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW PALEVSKY

IN THE EARLY MORNING, a weary man dressed in tattered clothes walked into a rural Himalayan mountain hospital with a grimy, reeking bundle in his arms. I was in Nepal serving in one of Upaya Zen Center's Nomads Clinics. The doctor who was heading up our team approached the man, who wordlessly began to unwrap this large knot of rancid rags to reveal inside a young child who was severely burned on her head, arms, back, and chest.

When we examined the little girl, we saw that some of her burns were filled with writhing white maggots and other burn sites were badly infected. The man was a mute, but his eyes conveyed terrible sadness and deep resignation. Our intercultural medical team immediately mobilized, and the child was taken into a small wooden room, where local nurses and our Western team began to tend to her terrible wounds.

From the beginning, I was not only observing the clinicians and child but also my own mental and physical state. I had worked as a consultant in the burn unit at the University of Miami School of Medicine in the 1970s, and I was aware from my past experience of how painful debridement is. This is a process that entails the removal of infected or dead tissue from a wound site, and the clinicians were doing a massive and masterful job on this child.

My heart went out to the little girl as her burns were being cleaned. Her crying was reflected in her father's distressed eyes. In the midst of the procedure, the child seemed to have slipped into my skin. I realized that I was overwhelmed by my perception of her pain—my heart rate had increased, my skin had grown cold and clammy, and my breath had quickened. I realized that my identification with the child's experience had gone out of control, and if I were to stay in the room, I needed to shift from hyper-attunement to care, from empathy to compassion.

This was an example of the kind of empathic distress, secondary trauma, and moral suffering that caregivers often experience when interacting with those who are suffering. GRACE is a process I created to move out of such distress and into grounded and principled compassion.

The mnemonic for **GRACE** is this:

- Gathering attention
- Recalling intention
- Attuning to self/other
- Considering what will serve
- Engaging and ending

G Gather your attention by pausing, taking an in-breath, and giving yourself time to get grounded. On your exhale, invite yourself to be present in a place of stability in your body. You can also bring your attention to a phrase or an object. Use this moment of gathering your attention to interrupt your assumptions and expectations and to allow yourself to relax and be present.

R Recall that your intention is to serve others, act with integrity, and preserve the integrity of others. Your motivation keeps you on track, morally grounded, and connected to your highest values.

"Recall that your intention is to serve others, act with integrity, and preserve the integrity of others. Your motivation keeps you on track, morally grounded, and connected to your highest values."

A Attune to self by first noticing what's going on in your own body, heart, and mind. Notice whatever biases might be present and shift your perspective accordingly. Then attune to the other person and what they might be experiencing physically, emotionally, and mentally.

C Consider what will really serve by letting assumptions go and insights arise. As the encounter with the other person unfolds, notice what he or she might be offering in this moment. What are you sensing, seeing, learning? Ask yourself, what will really serve here? Draw on your expertise, knowledge, and experience, and at the same time, be open to seeing things in a fresh way. Don't jump to conclusions too quickly.

E Engage, enact ethically, and then end the interaction and allow for emergence of the next step. Compassionate action emerges from the field of openness, connection, and discernment you have cocreated with the other person. Draw on your expertise, intuition, and insight and look for common ground consistent with your values and supportive of mutual integrity.

Catching myself in a distressing and fragile situation as I watched the young Nepali girl in pain, I shifted my attention to the simple sensation of my feet on the floor. I took an in-breath and allowed myself to get grounded. I then recalled briefly that I was there to serve, as were all those who were working on the child. I kept my awareness on my situation and stayed grounded. When my heart rate slowed and my head cleared, I lent my attention again to the child. All this occurred in a matter of a few seconds.

I recognized that though this was a very hard thing for this child to go through (and for the clinicians as well), the doctors and nurses and aides were saving the child's life.

As soon as I had this thought, I was flooded with warmth and a deep sense of gratitude that the man had brought his daughter to the clinic and that our team, including these compassionate Nepali nurses, were there to keep this little girl alive. I took in the whole room and sent love and strength to all who were there, including the child.

I was to see her and her father hours later, as he departed the clinic with her in his arms. Her face was bright and relaxed, and her eyes were luminous, as were the eyes of her father. Years had dropped from his face. I lightly hugged them both, bowed, and saw in her father's hands the medicines that would help her to continue to heal.

After I watched him moving carefully down the trail with his daughter held close, I had the thought that if this was the only person who was aided by our work, the months of preparation for Upaya's Nomads Clinic were worth it. Then I dropped that thought quickly. It was "extra."

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GIVE YOURSELF A MOMENT OF LOVING-KINDNESS

(A SIMPLIFIED METTA PRACTICE)

1. Breathe.
2. Say, to yourself:

   May I* be safe
   May I be healthy
   May I be happy
   May I be at ease
   May I be filled with loving-kindness
   May I be peaceful
3. Repeat.

* *As you go on with your metta practice, you may want to switch out "I" with "we," "you," "all," and so on to expand your loving-kindness to include others.*



PHOTOGRAPH BY NASAM THAUFEEQ



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