

Sustainable Compassion and Wisdom Training (SCT)

Guided Meditations

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Sustainable Compassion and Wisdom Training (SCT, also called Innate Compassion Training, ICT) is a method to help us realize a power of unconditional care from within that can be deeply healing and sustaining, make us more fully present to ourselves and others, break down bias, and empower compassionate action that is less subject to empathy fatigue and burnout. SCT highlights our need to experience how it feels to be held in love and compassion in order to extend love and compassion widely to others; our need to be seen in our unconditional worth in order to see the same in others; and our need to become present to our feelings with kindness in order to become sustainably present to others with kindness.

For these purposes, SCT meditations cultivate **three modes of practice**: The **receptive mode** helps us find an access point for deeply experiencing the energies and qualities of love and compassion within our whole body and mind from the depth of our awareness. This establishes the secure base needed for the other two modes of practice. The **deepening mode** helps us deepen into the non-conceptual source of those qualities—the openness, clarity, and compassionate capacity of our basic awareness (the deep nature of mind). The **inclusive mode** draws on those qualities and energies to help us extend love and compassion inclusively to others and to act from there.

The meditations instructed here are engaged progressively. Start with the meditation that is most connecting and meaningful for you. For many people, that has been Meditation 1 below in receptive mode. Do it every morning for a little while as your anchor for the day. Then reconnect with that meditation briefly in many moments of the day. Frequent repetition for short periods every day gradually retrains the brain to access qualities of love, compassion and wisdom with greater familiarity and ease, increasingly empowering our lives and work with others.

As you familiarize with that first meditation through lots of daily repetition, it empowers you to explore further meditations that build on that one within each mode of practice.

For information on SCT teachings, retreats, meditation groups, videos, and audio guided meditations, see **Foundation for Active Compassion** site: foundationforactivecompassion.org

For a good training program that incorporates SCT, see the **Marga program** website of Natural Dharma Fellowship: www.naturaldharma.org/get-involved/margha-program

For an organization that teaches SCT while focusing on systemic change of institutions and social structures in a more compassionate direction, see the **Courage of Care Coalition** website: courageofcare.org

FOUNDATIONS

CULTIVATING MINDFUL AWARENESS

Mindful awareness contributes to all other practices. Cultivating mindful awareness involves placing our attention on an object such as the body, a sense object, a feeling, thought, or attitude, and letting our attention settle into it with increasing fullness and stability. The mind tends to identify with trains of thought, causing it often to wander. When you notice the mind wandering, just recall the object of attention and let that object draw the mind back to it. To repeatedly notice the mind is wandering, and let the object draw it back, is not a problem. It is how we learn to meditate. When meditating, various isolated thoughts will also continue to arise in the background of your awareness, even when you are not strongly identifying with them. That is fine. Just consider whatever thoughts arise as peripheral to your attention. The main focus of attention is the object you are instructed to focus on and to repeatedly return to.

Abdominal breathing: Sit in a relaxed, comfortable way with back straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Begin with a slow, deep breath, inhaling into the abdomen so it expands, then exhaling slowly and completely, releasing all worries as you exhale. Relax for a moment at the end of the exhale before inhaling again. Repeat several times.

Placing attention in the body with the breath: While continuing to breath from the abdomen, let the breath settle into its own natural rhythm, and relax into the bodily feeling of the breath, by feeling the abdomen expand and contract throughout the whole inhale and exhale. When you notice the mind wandering, let the feeling of the abdomen with the breath, like a magnet, draw you back to it, to settle into that feeling more and more fully. Let the feeling of the abdomen with the breath draw you into itself more and more. Let the feeling unify you with it.

Placing attention in sound: While listening to any ongoing sound, such as a gong, let your awareness settle deeply into the sound, just hearing fully. When you notice the mind wandering, let the sound, like a magnet, draw you back to it, to settle into the sound more and more fully. Let the sound draw you into itself more and more. Let the sound unify you with it.

Walking meditation: While walking at a slightly slower pace than usual, feel the sensation of walking on your feet as fully as you can, step by step. When you notice the mind wandering, let the feeling of the foot in each step draw the mind back to it, to feel it more fully. Each step is drawing you into the present moment of feeling. Alternatively, if you wish, you may let your attention settle into the full sensory field, just seeing or hearing fully, wide open. When you notice the mind wandering, let the visual or auditory field draw the mind back to it, to sense it more and more fully, wide open.

Purposes of such practice: To strengthen the power and stability of attention; to sense more of what is here now; to penetrate deeply into the nature of our experience. This brings fuller awareness of self and others, the natural world, our habits of reaction and what lies beyond them, and fuller presence to what we are doing (“becoming one” with our activities, when walking, washing dishes, listening, etc.). Mindful awareness also supports all other practices. Ultimately, it can support increasing freedom from inner causes of suffering, thereby helping to unleash the capacities of our buddha nature, as do all the other meditations below.

RECEPTIVE MODE: MEDITATIONS 1, 2 AND 3

Meditations 1 and 2 help us start to access the loving qualities, dignity and compassionate capacities of our fundamental awareness (our “buddha nature”)—to heal our hearts and minds in its unconditional warmth, to settle deeply into its openness and clarity, and to establish the secure base of love and compassion that is needed to extend compassion reliably to others.

Preparing for Meditation 1: Caring Moment

In Meditation 1, you will recall and then reinhabit a simple caring moment when you were with another person—a moment that makes you happy to recall or feels deeply positive. A moment when someone was radiating warmth and care to you, seeing you in your deep worth, or deeply listening, or rooting for you, or taking joy in you, or wishing you well. Try to recall such a moment from anytime in your life. If you cannot immediately think of a moment in that form, take some more time to recall one. **Or, if needed, you can try one of these other “caring moment” alternatives:** recall a caring moment with a pet; or recall a moment with another person or animal when you were the caring figure for them (which we will explore further in Meditation 3 below). Or think of a moment when you were in a place that is special to you, perhaps in nature, where you felt deeply safe, well, at peace, or at home.

In the meditation that follows, we focus on the feeling of this caring moment, not on stories that our minds may create about our relationships. We access the felt sense of that caring moment, drop any stories about it, and settle more and more fully into the feeling of it.

MEDITATION 1: CARING MOMENT

-1) Abdominal breathing: Sit in a relaxed, comfortable way with back straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Begin with a slow deep breath, inhaling into the abdomen so it expands, then exhaling slowly and completely, releasing all worries as you exhale. Relax for a moment at the end of the exhale before inhaling again. Repeat several times. Then, while continuing to breathe from the abdomen, let the breath settle into its own natural rhythm.

-2) Caring moment: Recall a caring moment with its place or setting, and re-inhabit that moment as though it is occurring now. Bring this to mind not as a distant memory, but as happening right now. Relax into the felt sense of this moment, steeping in its loving energy, feeling its tender qualities, and letting them infuse your whole being. Explore accepting this loving energy and tender qualities into your whole body and mind—into every part of your body, into every layer of feeling and emotion. As if every part of you is loved in its very being.

When you notice the mind wandering, freshly recall the caring moment and let its loving power draw you back into it, to settle into the feeling of it more and more, within your whole body and mind.

--3) Releasing: After a while, just relax deeply into this felt sense of love, warmth and acceptance. Let this help your heart and mind to trust, settle deeply, release all of its images and frameworks, and become completely open like space. Let patterns of thought and feeling that arise unwind and release within this utter openness of awareness, this space of warmth and deep acceptance, letting all be.

Spiritual field version of Meditation 1: Another form for step 2 above is to recall your own spiritual field of compassionate connection, and to experience yourself and your whole world as held in the power of its love and wisdom. This aligns with practices done in many spiritual

traditions, and if meaningful to you, can be your way of doing step 2 above. There are two ways to do this. Choose the one that works best for you. 1) Bring to mind the field of caring benefactors that you are familiar with from your own tradition—such as a field of buddhas and bodhisattvas, or spiritual ancestors, or a saint or divine figure of your tradition—feeling them present to you. Or 2) Construct your own spiritual field in this way: think of someone whom you are grateful has been in your life or world—who has inspired, blessed, or uplifted you by their presence, way of being or mentorship. Envisioning that person before you, feel them present to you now. Either option, 1) or option 2), can serve as your spiritual field for this meditation. Then in step 2 of the meditation above, bring your spiritual field to mind as the “caring moment” that is happening now and follow the instruction. The special power of such a field is its unconditionality and stability—we experience the figure(s) within it to be holding us and our whole world in unreserved, unchanging and all-embracing love, compassion and wisdom.

Processing Meditation 1: (1) **Name a few of the loving qualities** that you experienced during step 2 of Meditation 1. This meditation helps us immediately begin to access the loving qualities and dignity of our fundamental awareness (our buddha nature). (2) Now **identify a difficulty or problem** that came up for you during the meditation at some point, **which signals how some part of you was reacting** to the meditation, e.g. a part of you that wants to think about other things; or a part of you that doubts any caring moment is good enough; or a part of you that doesn't think you deserve love or should be receptive to it; or a part of you that wants to grieve the loss of someone that was present to you in your caring moment, etc. “Part of you” refers to the **sense of self** that is operative in you at that moment, with its patterns of thought and feeling.

Preparing for Meditation 2: Becoming More Deeply Receptive to Love and Compassion

In Meditation 2 below, notice when a part of you comes up that has doubts about the meditation or wants to think about other things (as in the examples above), and explore including that part of you in the felt sense of love, acceptance and compassion that occurs when you reinhabit your caring moment or spiritual field.

MEDITATION 2: BECOMING MORE DEEPLY RECEPTIVE TO LOVE AND COMPASSION

-1) Abdominal breathing: Sit in a relaxed, comfortable way with back straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Begin with a slow, deep breath, inhaling into the abdomen so it gently expands, then exhaling slowly and completely, releasing all worries as you exhale. Relax for a moment at the end of the exhale before inhaling again. Repeat several times. Then, while continuing to breath from the abdomen, let the breath settle into its own natural rhythm.

-2) Reconnecting with love: Recall a caring moment with its place or setting, or your spiritual field, and re-inhabit that moment as happening now. Bring this to mind not as a distant memory or abstraction, but as occurring right now. Relax into the felt sense of this moment, steeping in its loving energy, feeling its tender qualities, and letting them infuse your whole being. Explore accepting this loving, compassionate energy and its qualities into every part of your body, into your whole heart and mind—into every layer of feeling and emotion. Every part of you loved in its very being. Feel the unconditional quality of this care.

If part of you is having difficulty with this practice, without trying to change it in any way, just become aware of that part of you and what it's feeling in a completely accepting way, deeply allowing it to be here. Let it have the space it needs to relax, find its own place within

this compassionate space, and settle in its own time. If your mind becomes tired, take a break, relax the mind, then freshly reinhabit your caring moment and begin again.

--3) Releasing: After a while, just relax deeply into this felt sense of love, warmth and acceptance. Let this help your heart and mind to trust, release all of its images and frameworks, and fall gently, completely open like space. Let patterns of thought and feeling that arise just unwind and release within this utter openness of awareness, this space of warmth and deep acceptance, letting all be.

Processing Meditation 2—Five key learnings:

(1) **This meditation purifies qualities of love and compassion toward greater unconditionality.** We may start with an experience of *relatively* unconditional love by reinhabiting a caring moment from our life, but its qualities become purified, stronger and more unconditional through the instruction (“Every part of you loved in its very being.”). This process brings out the unconditional capacity of love and compassion from our basic awareness, our buddha nature. From that secure base, we can bring greater unconditionality to others.

(2) **The mind is learning that it does not have to be totally identified with any one part of ourselves,** by letting each part (each sense of self) be embraced in the compassion of our fuller awareness, which is larger than any part. Our basic awareness is freed from being caught up in any one part, not by rejecting it, but by holding each part in compassion. This is called “unblending.”

(3) In this way, **we begin to reunite with our basic awareness** (buddha nature, the depth of our being), the fuller awareness that can embrace all parts of us—all senses of self and feelings--in compassion without being completely identified with, or caught up in, any one part.

(4) **As all parts of us feel the deep safety and healing power** of such unconditional acceptance and care, **the they can learn to trust the source of those loving qualities,** which is our basic awareness. As this trust deepens with repetition of practice, at the releasing phase of the meditation, the mind is willing to release more fully into the total openness, clarity, and warmth of our basic awareness, our true nature. This process of deepening trust and fuller release, reunifying with the openness and clarity of our deep nature, begins to draw us into the **deepening mode** of practice, which is further developed in meditations 5 and 6 below.

(5) **Just as our basic awareness,** when not identified with any one part, **can embrace all of our parts and feelings in unconditional care and compassion, the same awareness can hold others and their feelings in the same compassion,** without contributing to emotional depletion or “compassion fatigue.” The utter openness, clarity and compassion of our basic awareness is our **ultimate secure base**, from which to extend love and compassion to others sustainably and inclusively, as developed in meditations 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10 below.

The application here of Sustainable Compassion Training to “parts of ourselves” draws from the Internal Family Systems Model (IFS) developed by Richard Schwartz.

In Daily Life:

Do meditation 2 first thing in the morning, however briefly, then reconnect with it briefly many times throughout the day, every day, over coming months. Each time you reconnect with this practice, make it a point to reaffirm that the loving energies and qualities you are experiencing are qualities of your own awareness. This makes you increasingly conscious of how available these qualities are to you, whenever you remember to evoke them.

To reconnect many times a day in little moments strengthens the neural pathways that support these experiential qualities, strengthening the secure base of love and compassion that is needed for us to extend care, love and compassion more sustainably and inclusively to others in our lives and in our work.

Preparing for Meditation 3: Being the Caring Figure

Some people find the next meditation their most effective access point to experience the loving qualities of our basic awareness. It is also a great supportive practice for all of us to explore. In this meditation, we recall a moment when we were an agent of kindness and care for another. This helps us further access, nurture, and embody the capacities of warmth, acceptance, openness, love, compassion, reverence, etc. that come from our basic awareness. To prepare for the next meditation, recall a moment when you were a caring presence to someone else, human or animal—a moment when you were radiating warmth and care to them, or rooting for them, or taking joy in them, or seeing them in their deep worth, listening, making them happy, etc. Try to recall a moment like that from anytime in your life.

MEDITATION 3: BEING THE CARING FIGURE

1) Abdominal breathing: Sit in a relaxed, comfortable way with back straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Begin with a slow, deep breath, inhaling into the abdomen so it gently expands, then exhaling slowly and completely, releasing all worries as you exhale. Relax for a moment at the end of the exhale before inhaling again. Repeat several times. Then, while continuing to breath from the abdomen, let the breath settle into its own natural rhythm.

2) Recall a caring moment: Now bring to mind a moment when you were a caring figure for someone else and the place or setting for that. Consider that moment not as a distant memory, but as though happening right now—you are present in that way now with the other. Feel the loving energy and tender qualities that accompany this way of being with another being. Steep in this loving energy and its qualities, accepting them into your whole body, heart and mind.

If part of you is having difficulty with this practice, without trying to change it in any way, just become aware of that part of you and what it's feeling in a deeply accepting way; letting it have the space here to relax and find its own place in its own time.

3) Notice your caring qualities: Notice the loving qualities occurring in this moment, such as warmth, acceptance, openness, responsiveness, peace, strength. Let yourself fully accept, own, embody these qualities of your caring self.

4) Releasing: After a while, just relax deeply into the felt sense of these loving qualities. Let this help your heart and mind to trust, release all of its images and frameworks, and fall gently, completely open like space. Let patterns of thought and feeling that arise just unwind and release within this utter openness of awareness, this space of warmth and deep acceptance, letting all be.

Processing Meditation 3

What qualities of your caring self did you notice? Name several. Is there a connection between being a caring presence to others and being a caring presence to various parts of you and your feelings? Meditation 3 draws from a meditation form developed by Paul Gilbert and Brooke Lavelle.

DEEPENING MODE: MEDITATIONS 4 AND 5

Preparing for Meditation 4: Compassionate Presence to Feelings

Meditation 4, becoming compassionately present to feelings, supports all other SCT practices. In this meditation, we learn how to welcome feelings into a compassionate space where they can relax, find their own place, settle in their own time, and heal in their own natural way.

“Feelings” here refers to the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feeling tones of physical and mental experiences, and to all the emotions with which they are associated. This meditation training helps us learn how to be with our feelings in the same deeply healing way as they arise throughout our day.

Intense, stressful aspects of our daily lives trigger many difficult feelings in us. Many of us seek to avoid unpleasant feelings by trying to distract ourselves from them, or by trying to suppress them. But by seeking to avoid or suppress feelings, over time, we tighten up inside, which manifests also as physical tightness. This inner stress and tightness make it difficult to open to the qualities we cultivate in all of our practices—qualities of openness, kindness, compassion, equanimity, and wisdom. Such stress and tightness also make it difficult to be present to other people in an open-hearted way.

Meditation 4 shows us that we don’t have to avoid or suppress our feelings and reactions. Instead, we can become compassionately present to them, in a way that helps them relax, settle, and find their own place—ultimately a place of inner healing and releasing. We learn to be more at home with our feelings. This transforms our ways of being with others, since our ability to be present to our own feelings with compassion is what enables us to be present to other people and their feelings in the same way.

This practice has four principles: 1) **Noticing the feeling** within whatever state of mind or body is occurring, 2) **Allowing the feeling to have the space it needs to find its own place**, 3) **Resting with or within** the feeling, 4) **Just letting things be, in openness**.

MEDITATION 4: BECOMING COMPASSIONATELY PRESENT TO OUR FEELINGS

(1) Becoming compassionately present to bodily feelings: Sit in a relaxed way, with back comfortably straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Come down from the thinking mind into the body, take a few abdominal breaths, then settle into the feeling of the body as a whole. Notice the physical sensation in any part of your body, and become aware of it in a deeply allowing way, without trying to change it at all. Just let it have the space it needs to find its own way of being. If another physical sensation replaces it, become aware of that sensation in the same deeply accepting way.

(2) Becoming compassionately present to emotional feelings: Now sense whatever emotional feeling is present within you, from within your body. Not just thinking about it, but sensing how it feels from within. At first you may think you are not feeling anything, but often you can become aware of a subtle emotional feeling that wasn’t fully conscious to you, like a little anxiety or worry, or feeling a little confused, or liking or disliking a little how things are, or a sense of trying to hold on to things. Or you may feel a stronger emotion, like fear, frustration, annoyance, or joy. Or you may just feel numb. Those are all feelings with which you can practice. Or, if you wish, you are welcome to recall an emotional feeling that is quite familiar to you and let yourself feel it now.

Become aware of that feeling within you, with a sense of deep permission for it to be here. Deeply allowing it to be here, gently welcoming it—without being enmeshed in it, without

rejecting it, without trying to solve or change anything in it, without ruminating about why it's here. Like a friend quietly present to a friend, let this feeling have the space it needs to find its own place and to settle in its own time. Rest with the feeling in that way, or rest within it, without trying to change anything, just letting things be. One feeling may open into further feelings—just be with each feeling in the same spacious, accepting way.

If part of you is having difficulty with this practice, notice the feeling within that reaction, and become compassionately aware of that feeling in the same way, letting that feeling have the space it needs to find its own place, to settle in its own time.

When the mind wanders into chains of thinking, notice the feeling associated with those thoughts, and become present to that feeling in the same accepting, spacious way.

As this practice deepens, you may find your mind resting right in the core of a feeling, which may open into a space of deep warmth, calm, and peace from within. If that happens, just relax deeply into that and let everything be.

(3) Releasing: After some time, just settle fully into this feeling of spacious acceptance. Let this help your heart and mind to trust, relax deeply, release all frameworks of mind, and fall gently, completely open like space. Let any patterns of thought and feeling that arise just unwind or release within this utter openness of awareness, this space of gentle warmth and deep acceptance, letting all be.

Processing Meditation 4

This practice is done throughout the day. We began the practice with physical sensations, then became aware of emotional feelings. We can learn to do this practice at any time with any feelings: physical and emotional, unpleasant, pleasant, strong feelings, subtle feelings. If there is no strong feeling at any moment, you can do the practice with your felt sense of body and mind at that moment, even with a subtle feeling of dullness or numbness.

All meditations of SCT take us into a way of being that is different from what we may have been accustomed to. This stirs up feelings and generates various reactions that are reacting to the feelings. In this way, all SCT practices generate the material for compassionate presence to feelings. Whenever you are having a difficulty or reaction to any other practice, you can notice the feeling within that reaction and do this practice of compassionate presence for a little while. If the feeling deeply settles, you can return to the practice at hand. Or you can continue with the practice of compassionate presence, learning how to let things settle and heal by themselves.

This practice is adapted from the *Handshake Meditation* teaching of Tsoknyi Rinpoche.

Preparing for Meditation 5: Letting Be

Meditations 1-4 above bring out powers of love, compassion and deep acceptance that can embrace all of our perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The releasing phase of all those meditations helps the mind let go of all of its frameworks to settle deeply into the openness, clarity, warmth and compassionate capacity available within the natural wisdom of our basic awareness, our buddha nature. The next meditation, “Letting Be,” helps us settle even more directly and fully into the natural wisdom of openness, clarity, and compassion, helping us learn how to reunify with it.

MEDITATION 5: LETTING BE OF BODY, BREATH AND MIND

-1) Abdominal breathing: Sit in a relaxed, comfortable way with back straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Begin with a slow, deep breath, inhaling into the abdomen so it gently expands, then exhaling slowly and completely, releasing all worries as you exhale. Relax for a moment at the end of the exhale before inhaling again. Repeat several times. Then, while continuing to breath from the abdomen, let the breath settle into its own natural rhythm.

-2) Letting be of body: In a relaxed way, let your awareness settle into the feeling of the body as a whole. Notice any feeling of tightness or holding on within the body, and let that relax, allowing bodily feelings to settle in their own way. Deeply let be into the body, letting the body draw you into oneness with it, as if letting the body do the knowing; letting it meditate you. If the mind wanders, let the grounded feeling of the body, like a magnet, draw you back to it.

-3) Letting be of breath: Now while still breathing from the abdomen, feel the abdomen expand and contract with each breath, throughout the entire inhale and exhale. Sense any feeling of holding on to the breathing process, and let that relax. Deeply let be into the bodily feeling of the breath, letting the feeling of the breath draw you into oneness with it, as if letting the breath do the knowing; letting it meditate you. If the mind wanders, let the feeling of the breath, like a magnet, draw you back to it.

-4) Letting be of mind: Now bring your awareness to any thoughts arising in the mind. Notice any sense of grasping to the thinking process or to a mental framework—any holding on to a sense of self, thought or memory—and let that feeling of holding on relax deep within. Give the heart and mind permission to fall gently, totally open—letting the mind reunite with the natural openness that is already here, beyond reference points, like space. Let this total openness of mind draw you into oneness with it, letting this utter openness of mind do the knowing; letting it do the meditating. Let all patterns of thought and feeling just unwind and release within this space of deep acceptance, letting everything be.

When the mind closes up again, holding on to a narrow frame of thought or feeling, again let the heart and mind relax and reunite with the natural openness that is already here; letting all patterns of thought and feeling just unwind and release within this space of deep acceptance.

INCLUSIVE MODE: MEDITATION 6

Preparing for Meditation 6: Extending Love

With repeated practice of meditation 2, we notice two further things important for our lives and work with others: (1) **When the mind is totally identified with one protective part of ourselves, our perception of others is automatically reductive**, and our capacities of love, care and compassion are much impeded. For example, in a moment when the mind is totally identified with a part of oneself that is focused on managing things, others in that moment are reduced just to objects of management. Or if one's mind is totally identified with a part that is angry at another person, the other is perceived in that moment as just an object of anger—just bad. (2) **When the mind unblends from that part of oneself** by holding that part in compassionate awareness (as in meditations 2 and 3), **our perception of others starts to open**, so we can sense more of their humanity and potential—e.g. sensing them now not just as objects of management or anger, but as fuller human beings who have deep dignity, potential and want to be well and happy just like ourselves. With this opening of perception, our capacities of care,

love and compassion become less impeded, so we can be more compassionately present and responsive to others.

To enter into the inclusive mode of Meditation 4, we begin in the receptive mode (step 2 below), then let its flow of loving energy extend to others, helping us to commune with them—to sense them beyond our reductive thoughts of them in their fuller life, dignity, awareness, and potential (step 3). “**Communing**” here means a preverbal sense of closeness to another, sensing the other as a subject, a whole life and fuller person beyond superficial impressions and judgments, possessed of great worth and potential. It is to relate to others as what the philosopher Martin Buber called I-Thou, rather than I-it.

When first extending love to others in step 3 below, it is helpful to begin with someone nearby, or someone you think of, who seems fairly easy to commune with in this way. This could be someone familiar to you or a stranger, but not one you have strong aversion toward. As the practice becomes more stable through repetition, you can extend it more inclusively, even to those you have disliked. Beginning this extending practice with someone nearby helps us start to learn how to do it in our daily lives, in relation to anyone nearby in the moment, or anyone we become aware of.

MEDITATION 6: EXTENDING LOVE TO OTHERS IN RELATIONSHIP AND ACTION

--1) Abdominal breathing: Sit in a relaxed, comfortable way with back straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Begin with a slow, deep breath, inhaling into the abdomen so it gently expands, then exhaling slowly and completely, releasing all worries as you exhale. Relax for a moment at the end of the exhale before inhaling again. Repeat several times. Then, while continuing to breathe from the abdomen, let the breath settle into its own natural rhythm.

--2) Reconnecting with love: Recall a caring moment and its place or setting (or your spiritual field), and inhabit that moment as happening now. Relax and settle into the felt sense of this caring moment, steeping in its loving energy and tender qualities, letting them infuse your whole being. Explore accepting this loving energy and its qualities into your whole body and mind—every part of you loved in its very being. Feel the unconditional quality of this care.

If part of you is having difficulty with this practice, without trying to change it in any way, just become aware of that part of you and what it’s feeling in a deeply accepting way; deeply allowing it. Let it have the space it needs to relax and find its own place in its own time.

--3) Extending love to someone nearby: Now notice someone nearby you (or think of someone) with whom you can commune. While continuing to receive the loving energy from within your caring moment or spiritual field, let that energy come through you now to that person, as if you are a windowpane for it. Imagine this energy infuses this person’s whole being. Let this flow of loving energy help you commune with them in their deep dignity and worth, wishing them well. Instead of relating to a superficial impression of the person, let this flow of energy help you sense the human being beyond your limited impressions, with their whole life experience, dignity and capacity. Sensing them as like you in wanting to be well and free of suffering, wish them deeply well.

If a part of you feels doubtful about this, without trying to change it in any way, just settle back into the receptive mode of step 2, and become compassionately aware of that part of you in a deeply accepting way. If it relaxes and settles, you can return to the inclusive mode of step 3. If the mind gets tired or uptight, take a short break; rest the heart and mind; then begin afresh.

--4) (when ready for this step) Let this flow of love extend more broadly: After some time, if you wish, you can let the loving energy come through you now more broadly to everyone

nearby around you (or to anyone that you think of), infusing their bodies and minds. Let this flow of energy help you commune with them in their dignity and worth beyond limiting impressions, wishing them deeply well.

--5) Releasing: After a while, just relax deeply into this felt sense of love, warmth and acceptance. Let this help your heart and mind to trust, release all of its images and frameworks, and fall gently, completely open like space. Let patterns of thought and feeling that arise just unwind and release within this utter openness of awareness, this space of warmth and deep acceptance, letting all be.

Processing Meditation 6:

This practice helps us **experience ourselves as an extension of the field of love in which we are held**. We hold as we are held, love as we are loved, know as we are known.

By practicing this extending meditation in our days, with whoever is around and whoever we become aware of (including in daily news), it becomes increasingly inclusive.

In step 3 above, if you have difficulty seeing another person as more than a reductive impression (“but she’s just a stranger,” or “just dislikable”), then your mind is identified with a part of you that is only seeing through that narrow lens. Notice that part of you, that sense of self, and settle back into the receptive mode of step 2, bringing compassionate awareness to that part for a little while. When that part begins to feel safer and more at ease, **notice your lens on the other person begin to open up**, so you can sense them in their fuller life and dignity, more able to wish them well. This practice introduces a new degree of freedom to choose whether to continue to relate to our reductive impressions of others, or to the actual persons beyond those impressions. We experience what it is like to relate to the dignity and worth of other persons more than to our own limiting thoughts of them as just “strangers” or “dislikable ones” (or even as just “my friends”).

When you are first introduced to this practice, just do steps 1), 2), 3), and 5). When you become familiar with those steps through repetition of practice, you can begin also including step 4). **We familiarize with the practice by** doing it each morning in a meditation session (however brief) and then **repeatedly reconnecting with it many times throughout the day**—noticing whoever is around us, or whoever we think of, and communing with them as instructed.

It is wise to **keep this inclusive mode practice private**, to make a protected space for it to unfold, to avoid imposing our ideas about it on others or inviting others’ misinterpretations.

The process of unblending from limiting parts and reunifying with the openness and clarity of our basic awareness, which unfolds with repeated practice, **helps us sense more possibilities** in each situation beyond any one lens upon it, with greater space in the mind for innovation, creative responsiveness, and humor (“skillful means”). We can find **greater freedom to take up various roles** or parts of ourselves as needed, but now without being so fully identified with them. There is greater space in the mind to be who or what is needed in the situation.

The three modes of SCT meditation bring out a power of love and compassion that can take us increasingly **beyond in-group bias**, by cutting through our habits of reductive labeling and by communing more inclusively with others in our days. This can help us become more open, less self-defended, more able to listen to those whose socially, racially, ethnically or religiously embedded experiences differ from our own (see Meditation 8 commentary for more on that).

Many people in caring roles and social service seek a power of care and compassion that can become more inclusive, beyond bias, and can help them avoid empathic distress and compassion fatigue. **Empathic distress** occurs when we empathize with others who are suffering and our attention turns inward on ourselves, so we get caught up in the pain of our own empathy. **Compassion fatigue** occurs when the caring motivation that brought us into our work with others shuts down, often because of repeated experience of empathic distress or secondary trauma. And these difficulties are exacerbated when administrators and co-workers, who are subject to the same difficulties, co-create work environments that feel uncaring, unsupportive or overly demanding. This inclusive mode meditation helps us **avoid empathic distress** because the outward directedness of its loving energy keeps our caring attention on others, while any part of us that feels the pain of empathy is embraced in the compassionate healing qualities of our fuller awareness. Meditation 9 below will further empower our ability to avoid empathic distress. We are **inoculated from “compassion fatigue”** by learning how to access a replenishing secure base of love, compassion and wisdom, and how to reconnect with its energies and qualities frequently in our days.

Authentic love confirms people in their deep dignity while also confronting harmful behaviors. This practice does not involve accepting anyone’s harmful thoughts or actions. It puts us in touch with their fuller humanity, dignity, and potential. By learning to connect to that dignity and potential in them, we can challenge people’s harmful ways of thinking and acting on behalf of that potential, on their behalf, not just on behalf of others whom their actions harm.

In Daily Life: After you have established a secure enough base through much practice of meditation 2 or 3, you could take up meditation 4 as a main practice. Do meditation 4 first thing in the morning (however briefly) and reconnect with it many times throughout the day, every day, over coming months. To reconnect many times a day strengthens the neural pathways that support the capacity to be present to others in this caring way, more sustainably and inclusively.

Pre-blessing your day: When you do the meditation in the morning, you can think of all the places you will go, and all the people or beings you will be near (even when commuting), and include them all in step 4 of the morning meditation. Then to arrive at any of those places, of itself, can evoke the practice of communing and wishing them deeply well. It is as if your morning meditation pre-blesses your day, so when you arrive anywhere, you receive its blessing.

GENERATING EMPATHY AND COMPASSION FOR ACTION: MEDITATIONS 7, 8, 9

You can progressively practice Meditations 1-6 for some months before taking up Meditations 7, 8, and 9 regularly. Compassion is a loving concern for beings that empathizes with them in their suffering and wants to take action to alleviate it. The receptive and deepening mode meditations above help us establish a secure base in the protective energy of love and compassion, so our minds can feel safe enough to permit layers of our own suffering to become more conscious to us. This reveals similar hidden layers of suffering in everyone around us, deepening our empathy and compassion for them. Compassion for self and others helps the mind settle into its most natural state, the unity of openness, cognizance and warmth that is our natural wisdom. By resting in its natural wisdom, the mind can further unleash its capacities of compassion. As compassion and wisdom empower each other, they become a force for healing and compassionate action.

Please familiarize with Meditation 7 for several weeks or months in daily practice. That establishes the foundation for Meditation 8. For fuller explanations, please study the manual, *Awakening through Love*, by John Makransky.

Preparing for Meditation 7: Taking our Suffering Feelings into Compassion for Others

Meditation 7 makes us more conscious of layers of struggle, stress and suffering in ourselves that others also experience in their own ways, as a basis of empathy for them. Below is a list of difficult situations and associated feelings. Please examine the list and select one such situation and feeling to explore in the meditation below. You can explore many such feelings as you repeat the meditation in coming months, letting repeated daily practice evoke your own list of further feelings to explore.

- Become conscious of a feeling of physical pain anywhere, or of anxiety that you feel about your body or your health.**
- Recall a feeling of not being seen, or of being looked down upon.**
- Recall a feeling of strong anger from being betrayed or hurt by what someone did.**
- Recall a feeling of intense longing, incompleteness, or addiction.**
- Recall a feeling of failure, hopelessness, or despair: "I'm hopeless, unimprovable."**
- Recall a feeling of grief at the loss of a loved one; or grief at the loss of anything such as a job, a relationship, a way of life.**
- Recall a feeling of anxiety over meeting all of your obligations and responsibilities, or of attaining enough security for yourself or your family.**
 - Recall a moment when you were at your *worst*, saying or doing something that makes you ashamed to recall. What feelings come up when recalling that moment?**
- Recall feeling lonely, abandoned, or cut off.**
- Recall a feeling of fear for a loved one in their vulnerability or mortality.**
- Bring to mind fears you have of severe illness, accident, violence, or injury.**
- Bring to mind any fears you may feel at your own impending death.**

MEDITATION 7: TAKING OUR OWN SUFFERING FEELINGS INTO COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

- 1) Abdominal breathing:** Sit in a relaxed, comfortable way with back straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Begin with a slow, deep breath, inhaling into the abdomen so it gently expands, then exhaling slowly and completely, releasing all worries as you exhale. Relax for a moment at the end of the exhale before inhaling again. Repeat several times. Then, while continuing to breath from the abdomen, let the breath settle into its own natural rhythm.
- 2) Reconnecting with love and compassion:** Recall a caring moment or your spiritual field, and inhabit that moment as happening now. Relax into the felt sense of this caring moment, steeping in its loving energy and tender qualities, letting them infuse your whole being. Explore accepting this loving energy and its qualities into your whole body and mind—every part of you loved in its very being. Feel the unconditional quality of this care.
- 3) Experiencing a suffering feeling as a doorway to empathy:** Now, while continuing to feel the resonance of that care, bring to mind the feeling you selected from the list above (or any other feeling). Take time to sense what it's like for someone to experience that feeling, through your own experience of it (pausing after each question to explore): How does it feel in your heart

and mind? How does it feel in the body? What other feelings come up in association with that feeling? How does the whole world look and feel from within this feeling?

Many other people experience feelings like this in their own ways. So now sense right through your feeling what others feel. Feel right through your feeling what they feel. In this way, sense this feeling as not just your own, but as your deep connection to many others.

4) Receiving compassion for all: After exploring in this way for a little while, recall that your whole being is held in unconditional love and compassion from your caring moment or spiritual field, and let all of your feelings be embraced in this compassionate energy, every part of you loved in its very being. By accepting this loving energy into your own suffering feelings, imagine that you are accepting it into everyone's analogous feelings, by letting the radiance of this energy extend through you to them all, while wishing them deeply well and free of suffering.

5) Releasing: After a little while, relax deeply into this felt sense of care and compassion. Let this help your heart and mind to trust, release all of its images and frameworks, and fall gently, completely open—letting the mind reunite with the natural openness that is already here, beyond reference points like space. Let patterns of thought and feeling just unwind and release within this utter openness of awareness, this space of warmth and deep acceptance, letting all be.

Processing Meditation 7:

We get **overwhelmed by suffering when it feels like it comprises our whole reality**. **This practice prevents that**, by helping us experience suffering feelings as encompassed in a larger awareness of compassionate openness, deep acceptance and warmth, where all such feelings can heal, deeply settle, and release.

Often our experience of suffering makes us feel terribly isolated from others in our own pain. With this meditation, **we learn to experience our painful feelings not as isolating** us from others **but** as *connecting* us to them—as **compassionate solidarity** with others. People all over the world experience hidden layers of suffering like the feelings listed above, though they do so in their own specific ways, according to context and culture. This meditation prepares us for meditation 8, in which we sense those around us as harboring hidden layers of suffering, just as we do, which empowers deepening compassion for all of us.

MEDITATION 8: EXTENDING COMPASSION TO OTHERS IN LAYERS OF SUFFERING WE SHARE

-1) Abdominal breathing: Sit in a relaxed, comfortable way with back straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Begin with a slow, deep breath, inhaling into the abdomen so it gently expands, then exhaling slowly and completely, releasing all worries as you exhale. Relax for a moment at the end of the exhale before inhaling again. Repeat several times. Then, while continuing to breath from the abdomen, let the breath settle into its own natural rhythm.

2) Reconnecting with love and compassion: Recall a caring moment or your spiritual field, and inhabit that moment as happening now. Relax into the felt sense of this caring moment, steeping in its loving energy and qualities, letting them infuse your whole being. Explore accepting this loving energy and its qualities into your whole body and mind—every part of you loved in its very being. Feel the unconditional quality of this care.

3) Extending: Now **envision someone dear to you** in front. While continuing to receive the loving energy from within your caring moment or spiritual field, let this energy come through you to that person, as if you are a windowpane for it. Let this flow of energy help you commune

with them in their deep dignity and worth, while sensing them in their hidden layers of suffering and wishing them deeply well and free of suffering. After a little while, **do the same while envisioning a stranger** in front; then (when ready for this step) **someone you have disliked**.

4) Releasing: After a little while, relax deeply into this felt sense of care and compassion. Let this help your heart and mind to trust, release all of its images and frameworks, and fall gently, completely open—letting the mind reunite with the natural openness that is already here, beyond reference points like space. Let patterns of thought and feeling just unwind and release within this utter openness of awareness, this space of warmth and deep acceptance, letting all be.

Processing Meditation 8

We do this practice in the morning as an anchor for the day, and reconnect with it throughout the day in many moments. As we do so, we increasingly sense everyone around us as possessed of hidden layers of stress and suffering analogous to our own. By sensing those hidden layers in all others, including strangers and even those we have disliked, **the practice further breaks down biases** that impede more inclusive and unconditional love and compassion. It thereby prepares us for Meditations 9 and 10 below. Meditation 8 can also further empower us to be less self-protective, readier to listen deeply to others whose culturally, socially, racially, ethnically, or religiously embedded experiences differ from our own.

Accessing our capacities of love, care, empathy and compassion **through meditation is necessary** to support our empathy for others, **but not complete**. **To more specifically educate our empathy, we need to build relationships with others whose life experiences differ from our own, through ways of coming to know each other:** connecting with, opening new spaces for people to find their voice, literature, film, theatre, etc.

Preparing for Meditation 9: Generating a Strong Will of Compassion for Action

Compassion meditations 7 and 8 above reveal more of the human condition we share with others in our layers of suffering, reframe our own experience of suffering into a basis of compassion for others, and further break down our reductive impressions of others by sensing them all as harboring hidden layers of distress and suffering like ourselves. **Meditation 9 helps us become more fully present to others' suffering without being overwhelmed by it** or thinking that we have to turn away. We can take our deepening awareness of others' suffering as a fuel of empathy and compassion that makes us more fully present to them while generating a strong motivation for responsive action. Two key purposes, then, of meditation 9 are: **to bring out a strong will of compassion for action, and to develop skill at channeling empathy into compassion instead of empathic distress**.

MEDITATION 9: GENERATING A STRONG WILL OF COMPASSION FOR ACTION

-1) Abdominal breathing: Sit in a relaxed, comfortable way with back straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Begin with a slow, deep breath, inhaling into the abdomen so it gently expands, then exhaling slowly and completely, releasing all worries as you exhale. Relax for a moment at the end of the exhale before inhaling again. Repeat several times. Then, while continuing to breath from the abdomen, let the breath settle into its own natural rhythm.

2) Reconnecting with love and compassion: Recall a caring moment or your spiritual field, and inhabit that moment as happening now. Relax into the felt sense of this caring moment, steeping

in its loving energy and qualities, letting them infuse your whole being. Explore accepting this loving energy and its qualities into your whole body and mind—every part of you loved in its very being. Feel the unconditional quality of that.

3) Letting what touches your heart evoke strong care and compassion: Bring to mind a person or group whose suffering deeply touches your heart, sensing the suffering they must be experiencing. How must it feel for them in heart, mind and body? What other feelings may be arising for them? Take some time to deepen your empathy in this way.

Don't get stuck in the pain of this empathy. Instead, let the power of this empathy generate an intense compassion from your heart that wishes them free of all the pain and suffering that impedes their wellbeing and happiness. Let this wish and energy of compassion radiate powerfully from your heart to that person or group, infusing their whole being and environment in the healing power of compassion, wishing them deeply well and free of all the causes of their distress and suffering, each in their own best way. After a little while, let this compassionate wish and energy now extend to all beings who experience the sufferings of living and dying in this world, infusing their whole being and environment in the healing power of compassion, wishing them deeply well and free.

4) Releasing: After a little while, relax deeply into this felt sense of care and compassion. Let this help your heart and mind to trust, release all of its images and frameworks, and fall gently, completely open—letting the mind reunite with the natural openness that is already here, beyond reference points like space. Let patterns of thought and feeling just unwind and release within this utter openness of awareness, this space of warmth and deep acceptance, letting all be.

Processing Meditation 9

Empathic distress occurs when our attention turns inward upon ourselves, so we get caught up in our own feelings of pain from empathizing with others that are suffering. In contrast with this, the power of love and compassion in **this meditation directs our empathic attention compassionately outward toward others**, so we don't internalize the suffering as empathic distress. **A further protection from empathic distress** is the wisdom we have cultivated in all prior meditations of SCT—the awareness that suffering is never the only reality here, but is embraced in a larger reality of openness, warmth and care in which it can transform and deeply heal. The instruction of Meditation 9 also **points us in a direction of creative responsiveness for action**, by turning our attention to causes of distress and suffering, encouraging us to deepen our learning and response to such causes.

APPLYING SCT TO SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ACTIVISM: MEDITATION 10

When we progressively train in meditations 1 through 9 in daily practice, they empower meditation 10, which applies SCT to activism for social and ecological change.

Preparing for Meditation 10: Extending Compassion for Social and Ecological Action

Think of some injustice you deeply care about in empathy for those who are suffering, e.g. protection of immigrants and refugees, protecting the living beings and environment of the natural world, racial injustice, women's rights, affordable healthcare for all, protecting the unborn, protecting LGBTQ+ persons, gun laws, good education for all, protecting the unjustly imprisoned, or another issue you care strongly about. Think first of those who are suffering in

that way for whom you deeply care; then think of someone who fights for the other side of that issue, against the changes that you see as necessary to address that suffering.

MEDITATION 10: EXTENDING COMPASSION BOTH TO THOSE SUFFERING FROM INJUSTICE AND TO THOSE FIGHTING THE CHANGES YOU THINK NEEDED TO ADDRESS THE INJUSTICE

-1) Abdominal breathing: Sit in a relaxed, comfortable way with back straight, eyes gazing gently downward. Begin with a slow, deep breath, inhaling into the abdomen so it gently expands, then exhaling slowly and completely, releasing all worries as you exhale. Relax for a moment at the end of the exhale before inhaling again. Repeat several times. Then, while continuing to breath from the abdomen, let the breath settle into its own natural rhythm.

-2) Reconnecting with love and compassion: Recall a caring moment (or your spiritual field), and inhabit that moment as happening now. Relax into the felt sense of this caring moment, steeping in its loving energy and tender qualities, letting them infuse your whole being. Accept this loving energy and its qualities into your whole body and mind—every part of you loved in its very being. Feel the unconditional quality of this care.

-3) Extending: Let the loving energy come through you to those who are suffering under the injustice (human or other beings). Let this gentle energy help you connect with them in their dignity and potential, sensing them also in their layers of suffering, and wishing them deeply well and free of the causes of their suffering. After a little while, let the loving energy come through you both to that first group who is suffering, and now also to those who are fighting the changes you see as needed to address that suffering. Let the loving energy help you also connect with them in their dignity and potential, sensing them also in their hidden layers of suffering, and wishing them deeply well and free from the causes of their suffering.

If a part of you feels doubtful about this, without trying to change it in any way, just settle back into the receptive mode of step 2 above, and become compassionately aware of that part of you (that sense of self) in a deeply accepting way. If that part of you relaxes and settles, you can return to the inclusive mode of step 3.

-4) Releasing: After a little while, relax deeply into this felt sense of care and compassion. Let this help your heart and mind to trust, release all of its images and frameworks, and fall gently, completely open—letting the mind reunite with the natural openness that is already here, beyond reference points like space. Let patterns of thought and feeling just unwind and release within this utter openness of awareness, this space of warmth and deep acceptance, letting all be.

Processing Meditation 10

The purpose of this meditation is to help us **retain connection with the dignity, worth, and potential of all the persons involved in any issue, without erasing disagreement on the issue**. The aim is to empower our ability to confront people’s ways of thinking and acting, not only on behalf of those suffering from an injustice, but also out of care for those who oppose the changes we see as necessary to end the injustice. **From this fundamental posture of care for all involved comes a fuller capacity to hear all others, and the layers of pain that they may be speaking from**. We need this to more fully inform any work we may do for social and ecological change.

This approach aligns with the principle of “nonviolent resistance” that Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. taught and modeled: “There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies. When we look beneath the surface, beneath the impulsive evil deed, we see within our enemy-neighbor a measure of

goodness and know that the viciousness and evilness of his acts are not quite representative of all that he is. We see him in a new light. We recognize that his hate grows out of fear, pride, ignorance, prejudice, and misunderstanding, but in spite of this, we know God's image is ineffably etched in his being. Then we love our enemies by realizing that they are not totally bad and that they are not beyond the reach of God's redemptive love." *A Gift of Love*, 47-48

FURTHER RESOURCES

For orally guided meditations, meditation groups, SCT retreats, videos, and other support for these practices, go to foundationforactivecompassion.com and click on links for *media*, *events*, and *groups*. For a very good training program that incorporates SCT, see the Margha program website of Natural Dharma Fellowship: www.naturaldharma.org/get-involved/margha-program

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

John Makransky, *Awakening through Love* (Wisdom, 2007), a fuller manual of SCT theory and practice.

Tsoknyi Rinpoche, *Open Heart, Open Mind: Awakening the Power of Essence Love* (Harmony Books, 2012).

Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, David Shlim, *Medicine and Compassion: A Tibetan Lama's Guidance for Caregivers* (Wisdom Publications, 2006).

Tulku Thondup, *The Healing Power of Mind* (Shambhala, 1996) and *The Heart of Unconditional Love* (Shambhala, 2015).

Nyoshul Khenpo, Surya Das, *Natural Great Perfection: Dzogchen Teachings* (Snow Lion, 1995)

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, *Crystal Clear: practical advice for Mahamudra meditators*

Pema Chodron, *Start Where You Are* (Shambhala, 1994).

Richard Schwartz, *Introduction to the Internal Family Systems Model* (Trailheads, 2001).