

Awakening Joy Teacher's Manual

*Expanded Themes and Suggested Practices
for the Ten Steps
of the Awakening Joy Course*

James Baraz

Dear Awakening Joy Leader,

I'm very happy to know that you plan to share this material with others. Since 2003, these principles and practices have proven to be beneficial to many people. When done in a group format, they've been even more effective. It is my hope that they will be used not only to bring more well-being to those who practice them but ripple out to everyone in their lives and beyond.

In these times of great suffering and divisiveness in the world we need more than ever tools that help bring out the innate goodness in each of us. I hope you will find it to be very rewarding to share this with others and that together we can make a small contribution to bring more consciousness, kindness and joy into the world.

May it be so!

James

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Overview

The Ten Themes of Awakening Joy

- 1) **Intention**—Incline your mind towards more well-being, happiness or joy. Invite it, allow it, and recognize it when it's here. Let go of what you think happiness or joy is supposed to look like. Just keep inclining the mind in the direction of what you intuitively sense you need for personal well-being.
- 2) **Mindfulness**—Be present for what is actually happening in your experience in this moment. Especially **notice what is wholesome** when it's here, since we more naturally tend to focus on the negative. Don't miss moments of wholeness! Really drink them in.
- 3) **Gratitude**—Consciously reflect on all the blessings in your life. You might try doing a daily gratitude practice of writing down what you are grateful for or emailing a buddy. Express your appreciation directly to others whenever you feel it.
- 4) **Open to life's difficulties** with compassion, kindness and patience. If you're going through a difficult period, such as grieving a personal loss, honor it. You need to be just where you are. Feel what you're feeling. It helps to remember that you are not alone; Suffering is part of life. We all are given our share of sorrow. Use practices like *Mindful Self-Compassion* or *RAIN* to skillfully work with difficult feelings as they arise.
- 5) **Integrity** or the "Bliss of Blamelessness"—Consciously stay in touch with how good it feels to make wise choices that are aligned with your highest values. When you act unskillfully, feel the impact of that, learn something from the experience and commit to doing it differently in the future.
- 6) **The Joy of Letting Go**—Practice letting go of your stories, expectations, imagined control, as well as stuff, clutter, and crowded activities that take you out of balance. Practice the most joyful expression of letting go: cultivating generosity.
- 7) **Learning to Love Ourselves**—This includes practicing forgiveness towards yourself for any ways you see yourself as not good enough. Be kind to yourself. Appreciate and celebrate your wholesome qualities. See them as gifts you've been given that you can share with the world.
- 8) **Joy of Connection**—Practice forgiveness towards others. Practice kindness, both towards those you know well and those you don't. Practice *mudita* or sympathetic joy, tuning into the happiness of others. Remember to play and have fun.
- 9) **Compassionate Action**—Find ways to relieve the suffering around you. Be a caring witness without trying to fix the other person. Express your care by responding to the suffering of those close to you or those far away. Mentor others who look to you for inspiration. Help support their development.
- 10) **The Joy of Being**— Get out of the *doing* mode and open to the joy of just relaxing and *being*. Connect with the moment in a restful way. Practice equanimity and balance in the face of challenges. Surrendering the control you never had and listening to the rhythm of your life as it naturally unfolds helps you to profoundly trust in and live in harmony with life.

Awakening Joy is Based on Three Principles

- 1) Develop healthy states of mind that lead to genuine happiness.
- 2) Notice the good feeling in your body and mind that accompanies these states and let your awareness enjoy it.
- 3) Keep practicing this so that it becomes a natural habit. (As the neuroscience axiom goes “Neurons that fire together, wire together.”)

What Does it Mean to Awaken “Joy”?

Some people have trouble with the word joy. It seems too over-the-top bubbly and cheerful. Don’t let the word joy get in the way of your experience. I’m using joy to describe all the healthy states of mind that bring us ease of well-being: contentment, peace, happiness, delight, open-heartedness to name a few. If the word joy snags your mind please translate it to another more accessible word for you.

Take a few moments to reflect on how you respond to the word “Joy”. Notice if there is any resistance you have to the word. If the word “joy” is a stretch or turn off, see if there is another word that resonates more for you that authentically expresses what you are hoping to cultivate through this course—well-being, contentment, delight, happiness, aliveness—and substitute that word whenever you see or hear Joy. You might use a variety of words to describe these open states.

Identifying What Brings You Joy – Creating Your Nourishment List

Instead of just leaving the arising of joy up to chance, it’s helpful to remember what awakens it in you. To a large degree our experience of Joy is supported by how much we actually nourish our spirit. Nourishing our spirit is usually connected with engaging in healthy activities and experiences. If we’re too busy to nourish our spirit, we’re too busy.

The following exercise, taken from *How We Choose to Be Happy*, by Rick Foster and Greg Hicks, will help you create your “Nourishment List”:

In four minutes write down everything that brings you joy. It can be the simplest thing, like watching a sunset, or something exotic, like hang-gliding, or anything in between (walking your dog, listening to music, etc.) Check the items you do regularly in your life. Then circle the things that are realistic to include in your life these days. Get into the habit of regularly choosing one of the items as a support for your course intention. When you do, be present for the feeling of well-being.

Step 1: Intention

Our first theme and practice is the Intention to be Happy. Even though we all want to be happy, many of us don't put this at the center of our lives. We might think: When I go on my vacation then I'll be happy or when I'm with my friend I'll be happy or when I retire I'll be happy. Why postpone your happiness? Why not make it a priority right now?

Putting Happiness at the Center of Your Life

Setting an intention is not wishing or hoping something will happen. You are simply inclining your mind towards a particular vision. Then you make a heartfelt decision to do what you can to bring it about—in this case the natural impulse of the heart toward making greater well-being a reality. The clearer you or your child is about opening to joy (or happiness or well-being), the more you empower your vision.

Intention is different from a goal or expectation. When you set an intention you let go of your timetable or report card that measures whether you've passed or failed. Take a few moments to try it now:

- 1) Imagine what would look and feel like if to put your well-being and happiness at the center of your life?"
- 2) Let yourself imagine how your life would be if you stayed connected to this intention for the next six months. What would it be like two or three years from now if you kept developing that attitude?
- 3) If this seems like a good thing to give yourself, decide right now to do your part to make this happen and let life support you.
- 4) Take a few moments to put your intention into words. Write them down and refer to them regularly as a way to remind yourself what you want to create.

Notice if any resistance comes up for you. If it does, don't judge yourself. It's simply good information to be aware of about old thought patterns getting in the way of your true well-being. Remember that if you open to greater well-being everyone in your life will benefit.

Widening Your Intention

Your intention can go even beyond your own happiness. Widening your intention so that your well-being benefits others as well will motivate you even more. This exercise can help you get in touch with this additional source of inspiration:

- 1) How will developing happiness and well-being within myself benefit my child (the children in my life)? How will it affect others in my home or school?
- 2) Imagine having strengthening your own happiness and joy as a gift to everyone else in your life? What will it look like in your relationships with them? How will it affect them in their other relationships?
- 3) If this seems like a good idea, take a few moments to align your intention to be happy with the thought of benefiting others. The more encompassing your vision of happiness, the greater the potential for joy.

Step 2: Mindfulness

The Basic Tool for a Joyful Life

Mindfulness is the underpinning for all the other practices in this book. We are now in the middle of a "Mindfulness Revolution" appearing on the cover of TIME magazine, in best-selling books, and taught in schools, businesses, hospitals, prisons, and senior centers. Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening right now without wishing it were different; enjoying the pleasant without holding on when it changes (which it will), being with the unpleasant without fearing it will always be this way (which it won't).

As a father, grandfather and former schoolteacher I can attest to the positive benefits of mindfulness. With greater mindfulness, we become less reactive and more interested more attuned to what's really going on inside of the young person. When a child feels understood he or she is able to trust and feel safe around us.

Although mindfulness is sometimes associated with quietly sitting in a meditative manner, that is only one method to develop it. There are many countless ways to be mindful since we are simply bringing a kind, interested awareness to any activity we're engaged in. Michele has developed some simple, effective exercises for the classroom and home that have been used with great success. I think you'll find that your child or children will enjoy and benefit from them.

Mindfulness as Appreciation Practice

Mindfulness is really the art of appreciating the moment just as it is. You're not merely waiting for pleasant moods in order to open to well-being. You can be present for whatever is happening. Instead of leaning forward into the future, looking back at the past or being lost in fantasies of what you long for or fear, when you're mindful you are brought into the immediacy of the moment. You can appreciate whatever your experience is as a sacred moment of life worthy of your attention.

By valuing mindfulness you are simply encouraging your child's natural sense of wonder. In the process you will begin to slow down enough to see the world through the eyes of a child as you become more present for your life. If you want to fully enjoy life, developing an attitude of mindful appreciation is a prerequisite. With mindfulness we expand our usual tunnel vision to notice what is good or interesting around us. Instead of being wary of what can go wrong, we can look for what can uplift us right here, right now.

Here's a mindfulness exercise of appreciating the moment:

- 1) *For the next two minutes notice everything in your actual experience to appreciate in this moment. For instance, "I'm able to hear sounds." "My body is breathing and keeping me alive."*
- 2) *Notice how it feels to turn your attention to appreciating what's happening in your experience right now.*

Whether you're a child or adult, mindfulness is central to Awakening Joy for two reasons. First, it has the unique quality of developing many other healthy mind states such as generosity, kindness and clarity while weakening other painful mind states such as anger, greed and confusion.

Four Properties of Mindfulness

There are four characteristics intrinsic to mindfulness:

- 1) **We recognize what our actual experience is.** If we're sad, we're sad. If we're tired, it's okay to be tired. If we're peaceful, we're peaceful. Mindfulness calls it like it is without embellishing our

experience, making it more dramatic and intense or pretending it's not as difficult as it is. We are completely honest with ourselves about what is happening.

- 2) Mindfulness means **being here in the present moment** instead of the past or future or lost in fantasy where we often find ourselves.
- 3) As we pay attention, we begin to see for ourselves that **the present moment is constantly changing**. No matter how bad our experience is right now, it will change. And no matter how good it is, it will also change. Over time, when things get rough, knowing they will pass gives us more courage to be with them and learn from the experience. And when things are terrific, we don't get surprised or shocked when they pass away. With practice we can learn to enjoy the roller coaster ride of life, rather than think we will arrive at some fixed destination.
- 4) Finally, with mindful presence we are **not lost in judgments of how we think our experience should be**. You don't have to set up a pass-fail test for life. Thoughts filled with judgment and expectation lead to a lot of suffering. Things are the way they are. When you can't do anything to change the facts, you can either wish they were different and feel frustrated or accept your situation and respond as wisely as you can.

The serenity prayer describes the power of not getting lost in judgment: "God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Mindfulness cultivates both serenity to be with things as they are and wisdom to see things clearly. Don't be bothered by or try to get rid of judging thoughts. The judgments will probably still be there, but the secret is not judging yourself for having them.

Interrupting Negative Thinking

Our minds want to make sense of the world in order to feel safe or to get our needs met. But often we get confused in our attempt to sort things out: *What if things don't work out? What if the worst happens? What do I need to do to avoid disaster?* Joy is nowhere to be found when we're lost in worry and confusion. Mindfulness interrupts confused and negative thinking by bringing your attention back to what's actually happening right now.

Coming into the present moment is a refuge from our negative thinking. As one Awakening Joy participant wrote:

When I found myself going down the rabbit hole of thinking about something in the past and feeling very badly about myself I realized that if I focus on the current moment in my life (being on a beautiful walk) that I am actually quite happy in the moment.

You have a choice where to focus your attention. With practice you can remember to ground yourself in your breath or body and short-circuit the negative pattern. Right now as you're reading this, turn your attention to the fact that you're sitting here and breathing. Take a few mindful breaths. Notice how available it is to come back to yourself and relax in the present moment.

The Neuroscience of Mindfulness

Neuroscience expert Rick Hanson gives impressive evidence of how mindfulness affects the brain. Brain research confirms the power of mindfulness to affect and change our level of well-being and happiness. It activates positive neuronal circuits and strengthens their circuitry throughout the brain, particularly in the left frontal lobe, producing numerous beneficial effects.

Mindfulness triggers brain wave patterns associated with relaxed alertness. It increases serotonin levels, activating positive emotions. Mindfulness strengthens awareness of our internal state, which increases

empathy. It counters the “fight or flight” part of the brain to help us relax, and it strengthens the immune system, improves cardiovascular health and dampens chronic pain.

Some Daily Life Mindfulness Exercises

There are many ways to incorporate mindfulness into your daily life whether your moments are pleasant or not. Make a game of trying to be mindful in common activities like the following:

- 1) When the phone rings, use it as a reminder to take a few mindful breaths before answering.
- 2) Do the same as your computer is booting up.
- 3) When you find yourself waiting in line at a store or at the movies or you’re stuck in traffic, instead of feeling frustrated, use it as a mini-mindfulness period. Remember that you’re alive, feel your body and take a few mindful breaths.
- 4) Before you eat, stop and reflect on how the food got to be in front of you. This can help connect you with the web of life. Give thanks for the food and taste the first bite mindfully.
- 5) Take a regular chore or routine—washing the dishes, making the bed, taking out the garbage—as a mindfulness practice period. Again make it a game to see how mindful you can be. (I’ve used shaving for many years.)
- 6) See if you can take a mindful walk around your neighborhood. No need to do anything special. In fact just walk and know that you’re walking. Feel your feet on the ground with each step.
- 7) Whenever you think of it, stop and take three mindful breaths and feel your body. You might set your computer or watch to ring on every half hour or hour to remind you to do this.
- 8) This one might be revolutionary: instead of multi-tasking, try *uni-tasking*. That is, try doing one thing at a time. It’s much easier to be present when you do.

Mindfulness Meditation Instructions

Sit in a posture that allows you to be comfortable and relatively still but not so relaxed that you fall asleep. You want to be both alert and at ease. Mindfulness meditation practice typically begins with focusing on the breath, but then the attention is turned to whatever else is happening in the body and mind.

Begin with paying attention to your breath. How do you know you're breathing? Where in your body do you feel it most clearly? You might notice the breath coming into your nostrils and passing out again. You might instead feel the rising and falling of your abdomen. Or you might simply be aware of your whole body sitting and breathing. Each time your mind wanders, gently return to the breath. Paying attention to breathing helps focus and calm your mind so that it can more easily stay present in the moment.

In addition to the breath, you can be mindful of other experiences inside you as they call your attention—various sensations in your body, your moods, your thoughts as they come and go. One moment you might notice a breath, the next you're aware of an itching in your back or arm, then a sound, then a thought, then the breath again. The key to being mindful is remaining aware of any of these experiences as they arise, without getting lost in the story or thoughts connected with any of them.

Most people find that soon after they begin to pay attention to their breath or to some sensation in their body, without even knowing it, they're gone, lost in their thoughts. This is not bad. It's just the way it is. The eye sees. The ear hears. The mind thinks. Thoughts are not the enemy, and the mind can be trained.

How we respond when we realize the mind has been wandering is critical to the process of developing mindfulness. If you get lost in a thought, patiently bring your attention back to the moment, remembering that you're sitting and breathing. It's important to do this with kindness, because reacting with frustration or annoyance only strengthens those qualities. You're in the process of training your mind, and just like training a puppy, patient repetition works better than punishment. Rather than feeling aggravated because you've been lost, you can appreciate that you've woken up from the dream.

Each time you return your attention with patience and kindness to the moment, you strengthen those qualities as well as your ability to remain present. Over time you will find negative patterns naturally unwinding and wholesome attitudes increasing.

Step 3: Gratitude

The Antidote to the Complaining Mind

Our third theme of Gratitude is a particularly potent ally in awakening joy as it helps expand the mind as well as the heart. With a grateful heart we have a container and the space to hold the difficulties we meet. Gratitude is a way of saying *Yes* to life, seeing what's good as well as dealing with the things that need our attention. As Thich Nhat Hanh suggests, try looking for what's not wrong: "Last week I had a toothache. Today I have no toothache. How wonderful!"

One of the main effects of practicing gratitude is that our "appreciation radar" is out much more consistently and we start seeing what is good in our life.

Keys to Gratitude: Contentment and Wonder

Gratitude helps us touch a purity and innocence inside us beyond our stories and dramas, beyond any thought that says this moment isn't good enough.

When we slow down enough to relax our mind we let ourselves be touched by the simplest things—a child's laughter or the beauty of a flower. That's one of the benefits of meditation or taking some time to step off the treadmill of our minds.

Saying *YES* to the moment is really the essence of mindfulness practice. We can begin to see that the present moment is enough as it is. It strengthens our ability to be content with whatever life is offering us. Contentment—not looking for a better moment—gives birth to appreciation which then blossoms into gratitude.

Some Research on the Effects of Gratitude:

UC Davis psychologist Bob Emmons, a well-known researcher on gratitude, in his book *Thanks!* Writes about the extensive research and findings on the subject. He reports that those who practice gratitude increase their feelings of joyfulness, enthusiasm, interest, attentiveness, energy and determination and offer more emotional support and help to others. What's more, their friends and spouses rated them as more helpful than those in the other groups. Studies also have found that practicing gratitude improves physical health, raises energy levels and, for patients with neuromuscular disease, relieves pain and fatigue. I hope that motivates you to make it a focus of your practice.

Basic Mindful Gratitude Practice to Awaken Joy

One of the principles of the course's approach to gratitude is bringing mindfulness directly to it when it's here. There are many ways to access gratitude. The key to deepening gratitude's impact is to let your awareness fully open to it when it's present. Take time to feel it in your body and your mind. How do you know you're feeling gratitude? What does it actually feel like? You don't have to take a very long time. Just a few seconds to let it register clearly in your body is enough. Once you become familiar with the landscape in your body you will feel it easily and naturally this way.

Guided Meditation on Gratitude

- 1) Sit quietly in a relaxed posture. Focus on the heart center. As you inhale visualize breathing in kindness. With each exhale allow any negativity to be released.
- 2) Reflect on some blessing in your life: a person or thing in your life you're grateful for.

- 3) Invite an image of that person or situation. Take a moment to silently send a thought of appreciation to that person or to life for that situation with a simple, sincere “thank you.”
- 4) Let your awareness fully experience your gratitude, taking time to feel in your body the energy of that blessing in your life.

If you meditate, you can include this in your meditation practice or during some quiet time that you take for yourself. Try repeating the above process for 5 minutes reflecting one-by-one the various blessings in your life. End with the intention to express your gratitude directly to those who’ve come to mind. Notice the feeling of well-being or joy as the meditation ends.

Gratitude Practices

There are many ways to practice gratitude. Try choosing one or more of the following as an experiment and notice the effects it has on your consciousness:

1) Write a gratitude list

- For five minutes, write down everything you can think of that you are grateful for, or people you are grateful to.
- Notice how it feels in your body and mind just making the list.
- Share your gratitude list with your buddy.

2) Keep a Gratitude Journal

An alternative to sharing a regular email with a friend is to keep a gratitude journal. Write down regularly what you were grateful for that day. You might find M. J. Ryan’s practice helpful. She suggests asking yourself these three questions at the end of every day:

- What am I grateful for?
- What did I enjoy today?
- Where do I feel satisfied?

3) Expressing your gratitude directly in the moment:

When we share our appreciation of others directly with them it becomes even stronger. This is because transferring a thought into words or actions deepens its impact. The other person gets the benefit of your communication and you deepen your practice of appreciation and gratitude. During these next two weeks, when you find something you appreciate in someone else, practice expressing it directly to them.

4) Daily gratitude email practice.

With a friend, every day send each other a brief email about what you're grateful for that day. Doing it with a partner is a very effective way to keep the practice going.

5) Writing a Gratitude letter.

This is one method that Martin Seligman, the father of Positive Psychology, highly recommends. Jane and I have experienced this for ourselves and can attest to its power. Of all the exercises for developing happiness, Seligman has found this is one of the most effective of all. Even writing the letter without sending it has a major impact on our well-being. (If the person has passed away you still might try writing a letter to them.) Pick someone who you feel great gratitude for—a relative, a friend, a mentor—and write a letter appreciating all the ways they’ve enriched your life. Then, either send it to them or even better, read it to them in person or by phone or Skype.

Be sure to include yourself in your gratitude practice. Send yourself appreciation for doing this course and your intention to awaken joy.

Step 4: Finding Joy in Difficult Times

As you explore this theme you're not trying to look for difficulties in your life. Now you are simply allowing *all* experience in. When life is hard we can learn to practice being with it in a wise, non-resisting way, a little at a time. Continue to work with intention, mindfulness and gratitude as practices to awaken wholesome states, noticing them when they're here.

Sometimes people comment that when difficulties arise it's very hard to set the intention to be more positive or happy. The process requires that you start by allowing yourself to be right where you are. Opening to the possibility of well-being includes learning to be with the difficult times without increasing your aversion to whatever you may be going through.

You needn't pretend that things are terrific when they're not. You can, however, learn to meet challenges wisely and, through practice, use them to learn how to keep your heart open. When we're facing some real difficulties we can't slap on a happy face and simply think we should get over it. For instance, if you're dealing with a major loss you need time to go through the grieving process. It's healthy to grieve the loss of a loved one or a major change in circumstances. Otherwise, the healing is incomplete and our repressed feelings will keep coming back in unskillful ways.

Regarding our well-being, how we relate to our experience matters even more than what has actually happened. As I've said before, truly happy people are not happy all the time. They have learned to open to difficulties honestly and skillfully. That's what we'll be practicing with this theme.

The Transforming Power of Suffering

The practice of learning to open to suffering is a vital part of awakening joy. In a world where everything is changing we can't avoid things like loss, disappointment, illness and death.

In learning to open our heart to difficulties, beneath the pain we discover qualities of wisdom, compassion and love that can hold it. And we often find a courage we didn't know we had. Look back on your own encounters with suffering. Is this true for you? Have your hard lessons stretched you and helped you access strength and wisdom you didn't realize you had? Have they helped deepen your compassion?

Take a few moments right now to reflect:

- 1) Think of a challenging situation or difficult period in your life that you've been through.
- 2) What lessons did you learn by going through the experience? How did it help you grow in some way?

Your willingness to use a difficult situation to become even more aware will help deepen your understanding of the human experience and life. What you learn becomes not only valuable for yourself but also allows you to be there for others who are going through similar situations.

- 1) Bring to mind a difficult situation you are dealing with in your life right now.
- 2) What are the emotions that you're feeling? Have you allowed yourself to feel all the feelings?
- 3) What are the lessons you're learning from this situation? How can you find meaning as you go through this difficulty?

Two Methods for Opening to Our Suffering

Method One: Holding Our Suffering with Kindness and Compassion

In going through difficult times, the most important thing you can do is be compassionate and kind with yourself. A major support for this are the practices of [Mindful Self-Compassion](#) as taught by Kristin Neff (*Mindful Self-Compassion*) and Christopher Germer (*The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*). They offer many very effective tools. I shared in class the most fundamental one, the “Mindful Self-Compassion Break.” You might try this, or your own variations of these phrases, whenever you’re going through a hard time.

1. Place your hand on your heart. (This is a physiologically soothing action which releases Oxytocin, a powerful comforting hormone.)
2. Say to yourself: “This is a moment of suffering.” (or some variation that resonates with you like: “This is really hard.”)
3. Then say: “Suffering is a part of life.” (You might find it helpful to reflect on all the people in the world who are going through what you are right now.)
4. Then say: “May I hold my suffering with kindness and compassion.”

Feel the tenderness through your hand as you hold yourself. You might connect both with the tender one who is receiving the care and also the wise loving one who is extending it right through your hand. Both are part of who you are. Doing this brings you into a deep level of connection and wholeness within yourself.

Method Two: Opening to Suffering using the Acronym of **RAIN**

The next method is using mindfulness to directly experience your actual feelings just as they are. The key is to not get lost in the story of the situation. Whatever it is—sadness, anger, wanting or fear—directly explore and feel the bodily experience or energy of the emotion. The acronym **RAIN** (devised by meditation teacher, Michele McDonald) can help you remember the process of directly opening to and working skillfully with difficult emotions:

1. **Recognize** what you're feeling. (What am I actually feeling right now? Sadness? Anger? Fear?)
2. **Allow** it to be here. Let go of any agenda for it to change and, for a few moments, give it permission to be just as it is.
3. **Investigate** how it feels in your body on an energetic level without getting into the story or trying to get rid of it. (Bring a curiosity or interest that is simply exploring the landscape of the emotion without analyzing or trying to figure anything out.)
4. **Non-identification (a fancy way of saying not taking it personally)**—don't take ownership of the experience as being who you are. (“I'm such an angry person.”) It is not unique to you. It is simply an energy that has come to visit you. It doesn't have to define who you are. Your experience of anger or sadness isn't so different from my anger or sadness. You are exploring the human condition.

Explore a little bit at a time. If it's too hard to mindfully stay with it for more than a few moments turn your attention to the breath or the body or go back to the Mindful Self-Compassion exercise.

Step 5: Integrity – The Bliss of Blamelessness

Looking back on my younger days I can't believe some of my unconscious, selfish behavior. My whole body can cringe with disbelief when I recall some really awful things that I've done. "What was I thinking?! How could I have been so confused?"

Integrity, acting in alignment with our values, is one of the most effective ways to create the conditions for joy to arise. We human beings are programmed in quite an extraordinary way. We have an inner moral compass that can either lead us toward guilt and shame or inner peace. It's called conscience. Whether adult or child, as Jiminy Cricket said to Pinocchio, "Always let your conscience be your guide." If we want to bring more happiness and inner peace into our lives, all we have to do is learn to listen to that inner compass wisely.

Acting in an honorable, ethical way—walking our talk—is probably the most important modeling we can, as adults, gift to our children. As we embody Integrity our children know we are trustworthy and can feel safe around us. But don't put pressure on yourself to become a saint! Just by being real and having the humility to admit when you've made a mistake, you show it's okay to be human. When my son, Adam, was young one of my favorite Sesame Street songs was "Everyone Makes Mistakes Oh Yes They Do." We had many occasions to sing that one to each other as I showed my humanness or forgave him for his. I still lovingly sing it to myself when I blow it!

The Power of Delayed Gratification

As most of us know, listening to our inner wisdom is easier said than done. How many times do we need to see that the momentary pleasure we get when we act impulsively is often followed by many moments of regret? It's quite amazing how short-term gratification often wins out over longer-term remorse. We can click the send button on an angry email sure that we're justified, without realizing all the cleanup and unhappiness we will go through.

So a key to genuine well-being with regards to this theme of Integrity is learning the power of delayed gratification, seeing the bigger picture and choosing to go for the greater happiness. Postponing our impulsive action and living in alignment with our highest values, we can not only avoid unnecessary suffering but actually produce many moments of inner peace and joy. When I face a moment of choice between taking the easy, less conscious way or the high road, I often ask myself how this will feel a week or a month or six months from now. Each time I do, it's clear that delaying my gratification is not really depriving myself—it's actually choosing a more sustainable source of true well-being.

Forgiveness and Healing from the Past

There is a price to pay for becoming more aware: We can't fool ourselves anymore. We may cringe as we look back on our poor choices. But as painful as it is, cringing isn't such a bad thing. If we're cringing it means we're no longer the same person that could do those things now. We've changed and grown. The good news is that it's never too late to change. The key ingredient is deciding to go for real happiness and bringing more awareness to our unskillful behavior patterns. The only way out of that cycle is self-forgiveness and the commitment to learn from your mistakes.

How can we forgive ourselves when we realize we've acted unskillfully? What do we do with the guilty feelings? Rather than getting lost in guilt, we can practice what is known as "wise remorse." When you realize you've done something you regret, rather than drowning in guilt, ask yourself, "What can I learn from the experience that will help me remember to act more skillfully if a similar situation arises again?" In this way you can use the painful event as a springboard for more skillful actions in the future. And if there is an appropriate opportunity to make amends for unskillful past actions, doing so can bring about a real healing. This is an on-going process of learning that takes patience.

Integrity Practice: Healing the Past

- 1) Think of an incident you still regret or feel guilty about. As you recall the situation, notice if fear or confusion motivated your words or actions.
- 2) Imagine that another person had harmed you in the same way and expressed their regret and asked forgiveness. Could you forgive them?
- 3) Now imagine yourself as a wise and kind being who understands how confusion and fear led to your actions, and forgive yourself.
- 4) If it is possible for you to sincerely apologize and directly ask forgiveness from someone you may have hurt, do so, without expecting any particular response.
- 5) Reflect on what you have learned from this situation. How might you act differently in similar situations in the future? Make a deliberate commitment to act in that way.

Five Habits for Happiness

In Eastern philosophy there are traditionally five guidelines for acting with integrity. The basic underlying principle is to refrain from causing suffering to others or ourselves. These are not commandments but, rather, principles to help us become more conscious and make wiser choices. If we keep them in mind, they are like brakes to minimize causing harm to ourselves or others. When we live by them they not only minimize our suffering, but positively promote a feeling of wholeness.

- 1) **Honor all life.** The first guideline, refraining from killing, is really developing a respect and reverence for life. When we are consciously not causing intentional harm to other living beings we experience the happiness that comes from offering the gift of harmlessness.
- 2) **Share your time and resources.** The second guideline to refrain from stealing can be a practice in sufficiency and abundance. We not only avoid suffering by not taking from others, but we can also experience joy by expressing our generosity.
- 3) **Take care with sexual energy, respecting boundaries and offering safety.** Sexual energy can be a source of great joy or great pain. Rather than the attitude of "How can I maximize my own pleasure?" we can turn it around to: "How can I give some pleasure to an intimate partner or offer others safety?" When people feel respected and know we have healthy boundaries, they can feel relaxed and at ease. They can sense that we don't want anything from them other than their genuine happiness. And we feel good inside as well.
- 4) **Speak kindly.** Usually translated as not causing suffering through speech, the basic guideline is saying what is truthful and useful in a kind way. This not only is a more effective way to communicate, it gives us a greater likelihood of being heard. It also brings happiness to ourselves as we are connected to an attitude of kindness inside us. It's important to include speaking to kindly to ourselves in this guideline. Why not treat yourself as you would treat anyone else?
- 5) **Develop a clear mind and healthy body.** By not abusing substances, like alcohol or drugs, we are more likely not to wobble in our actions regarding the other guidelines thereby avoiding harm through our unclarity. Even more as we value a clear mind and healthy body we give ourselves the gift of feeling mentally alert and physically more alive, which are the most supportive things we can do to awaken joy.

Integrity Practice: Choosing Habits to Awaken Joy

- 1) For one week, choose one of the Five Habits mentioned above that you would like to cultivate as a way to bring more happiness and well-being into your life. You may want to choose one that is a particular challenge. For example, if you tend to speak sharply to your child, you might decide to work with "Speak Kindly". If it feels beneficial, continue it for another week until it becomes a strong habit of happiness. Or you may choose another habit and develop that one.
- 2) Think of ways in which you might act in alignment with this new habit. Write them down, place the paper in a prominent location where you can readily see it every day, and make a commitment to add these choices to your life. Your old habits may rebel and struggle for dominance. Each time you are faced with the moment of choice, take a breath, remember your commitment, and choose integrity.
- 3) When we act skillfully we are planting seeds of happiness within ourselves as well as in the response from others. We also feel good when we recall what we've done. Every time you remember to make one of these choices (e.g., speaking kindly to your child even when you feel impatient), notice if you feel happier: a) in the moment you act skillfully b) with the response you receive back from the other person c) later when you recall your action.
- 4) Take this one day at a time. Notice if it becomes easier to make your positive choices. At the end of the week, notice if your level of well-being and happiness has increased.

Step 6: The Joy of Letting Go

This is a natural continuation of our last theme's practice of Integrity. Integrity involves a quality of restraint in which we let go of acting on impulses that might cause harm. Now we continue to develop an attitude of wise letting go by applying it to other areas of our life and noticing the feeling of well-being that accompanies it when we do. In the U.S., some think freedom means being able to choose from 150 TV channels or 31 flavors of ice cream. But unfortunately all those choices usually have the opposite effect. We rarely realize that true liberation is an inner freedom that is no longer at the mercy of endless desire. This is where "The Joy of Letting Go" is such a radical and profound pathway to true well-being.

Letting Go is not Passive Acceptance

But don't confuse letting go with a passive acceptance of situations that you feel an urgency to change, especially in these challenging times. More than ever, because of their deep caring many are moved to effectively respond to the forces of greed and hatred that are causing suffering to many innocent victims and to the planet. Though we can act with determination, what we need to let go of the expectation that things will go just the way we want in the timetable we want them to. Later on in the course we'll be exploring this more when we get to the theme of compassionate action.

Letting Go of the Illusion of Control

Letting go doesn't mean rejecting what is here. Often it's simply an attitude of letting things be as they are. One example is the power of letting go of troublesome thoughts. You don't need to get rid of those thoughts. The very effort to "get rid of" is rooted in aversion and trying to push them away actually gives those thoughts more life. It's like saying, "I don't want to feel this frustration right now!" The more we try to make the thought go away the bigger it becomes.

What we are really letting go of the illusion of control in a world of change. This attempt to control things keeps us bound in fear. Letting go of control is not easy since that habit is so strong. We often think that if we don't hold on tightly to keep things the way they are or try hard enough to make things happen, we'll be disappointed. The irony is that our over-efforting is what blocks the natural unfolding of things. The secret of letting go is seeing, through direct experience, the pain that comes with attachment to things being a certain way. When you find yourself struggling, if you look deeply, chances are you may discover attachment somewhere—either wanting things to stay the same or wanting them to change. As unpleasant as this realization may be, this is not a bad thing. As you bring awareness to this predicament, you will see directly for yourself that attachment leads to suffering and you will become more motivated to practice letting go.

There are several dimensions of letting go that can lead to a joyful heart. **The following are suggested areas of exploration to practice with. If one area in particular speaks to you, work with it in a more focused conscious way.** Awareness itself will start to allow the possibility of change. If you take on a particular practice, notice how it affects your general level of well-being. Then you will see for yourself why it's said that the highest happiness comes from a mind free of attachment.

Letting Go as Simplifying

The essence of letting go is bringing greater simplicity into our lives. When we simplify and get rid of clutter, we uncomplicate our minds. One aspect of simplifying can involve letting go of material things. How much do we really need? Our consumer society is constantly telling us all the things we need to make us happy but it's just not so. We crave simplicity. The spacious feeling that comes from cleaning out your closet is actually more invigorating than acquiring more "stuff." Ven. P. A Payutto's clear articulation of "wise consumption"—how we know when "enough is enough":

It is an awareness of that optimum point where enhancement of true well-being coincides with the experience of satisfaction. Consumption . . . balanced to an amount appropriate with well-being rather than to the satisfaction of desires. In contrast to maximum consumption leading to more satisfaction, we have moderate, or wise consumption leading to well-being.

This practice of finding the point of optimal well-being requires mindful attention. But it saves you from going overboard turning pleasure into suffering. (Will that extra portion of dessert *really* bring you more happiness or more indigestion?)

The Rippling Effect of Simplifying

There are profound ramifications for simplifying our lives that go beyond the personal. Some striking information: 1) 75% of every dollar spent on food in the U.S. goes for advertising, packaging, transportation and storage. Contrasting that, 95% of food purchased from a farmer's market goes directly to the farmer. 2) a major contributing factor of climate change can be tied to the livestock industry. I highly recommend Bill McKibben's book *Eaarth*, which documents the enormous price our society pays with habits that depend on a non-sustainable lifestyle.

Letting go of our consumer mentality to acquire more can have a tremendous effect on not only our own happiness but on the survival of the planet. Try this reflection:

- 1) Quiet down and look inside. Remember just how much you care about this planet—about nature, all the people, plants and animals who live on this planet as well as future generations
- 2) As you get in touch with that caring consider how, through letting go of some habit of consumption or in taking some positive action, you could have a lighter footprint.
- 3) How would this contribute to your greater happiness and well-being?

If you get clear on some action, see what how it affects you to consciously take it on as a practice that supports deepening joy. Be present for those moments.

Greater Balance through Simplifying

Another area of letting go that can lead to more happiness is **bringing more balance to an overcrowded, busy life**. We create suffering by taking on more than we can possibly handle. Even if the choices are pleasant ones doing too much throws our life out of balance. As Peace Pilgrim, a wise 20th Century American sage, says: "If your life is in harmony with your part in the Life Pattern, and if you are obedient to the laws which govern this universe, then your life is full and good but not overcrowded. If it is overcrowded, you are doing more than is right for you to do, more than is your job to do in the total scheme of things."

Reflect on this:

- 1) What is making my life complicated or out of balance these days?
- 2) What would I need to simplify or let go of to bring my life more into balance?

To practice with this theme, you might try the following experiment. Pick an area to take on as a practice of simplifying. This can be as simple as practicing not looking at email more than you need to. If you want to add something to your schedule, make sure to delete something else.

Every time you make a choice for simplifying by letting go of stuff or overcrowding your life feel the joy of practicing a way that better serves you.

Letting Go of Our Stories

One of the most profound letting go practices is **letting go of the stories and beliefs we tell ourselves about who we are and how it all is**. While some of our stories are important and can inspire us in very positive, impactful ways, we often believe mental fabrications that evoke feelings of smallness, fear, separation or contraction that don't serve our well-being. These kinds of limiting stories are a major source of our suffering. They may involve beliefs about our past, our potential, what others think of us, our expectations, or any interpretation that causes us confusion or fear.

"What story am I believing right now?"

- 1) What story do you believe that keeps you from experiencing well-being and joy?
- 2) What would it be like if you saw it as just a story and could let it go?
- 3) What would you need to understand or remember in order to let it go in the future?

Letting Go of Expectations and Figuring Out

Letting go of expectations and plans allows us to be with what really is and respond with openness and curiosity. Having a plan is useful for giving us direction, but if you're looking to see if life passes or fails your test, you're setting yourself up for suffering. Even if you have a strong intention and give whole-hearted effort, in the end you need to let go of the outcome when life takes an unexpected turn, which it often does.

Letting go of trying to figure out how things will turn out creates a lot of space in the mind, too. Often we don't have enough information. Life will keep unfolding, revealing in its own time what we need to know. We just have to be open enough to hear the messages. Anxiously trying to find the right answer rarely allows space enough for your wisdom to emerge. By letting go of worrying about what is beyond your control, you can quiet down enough to listen inside to the wisest response to your current situation.

Generosity, the Full Flowering of Letting Go Practice

The kind of letting go that most directly results in well-being is generosity, the active expression of letting go which also acknowledges the inter-connectedness that we all share. **The stuff we share is the currency of our caring and love.**

Generosity brings us joy and it is something that can be consciously practiced. A wise teaching encourages that while performing a generous act one should reflect, "I am generous" and let the uplifting feeling that accompanies it gladden the heart. We experience genuine delight in giving with no ulterior motive. We share because it feels good.

It's important to include ourselves in our generosity practice. We're not trying to be martyrs by giving more than is appropriate. If you do, your generosity will result in a feeling of depletion instead of abundance. That's one reason why nourishing yourself is so important. Not only is your own well-being increased but others benefit from your self-care as well.

Receiving as a Part of Generosity Practice

Another aspect of generosity comes with understanding the three elements that are said to affect the power of an exchange of a gift: the purity in the heart of the giver, the purity of the gift and the purity in the heart of the receiver. **It's just as important to receive graciously when someone is being**

generous with us. Pay attention to receiving graciously, particularly if it's easier for you to give than to receive.

Practicing Generosity

Let generosity be a source of joy for you. Practice it in any way that feels right. Start wherever you are. Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer is being truly present for someone. You can also cultivate generosity as an extension of your gratitude practice. Each day find someone in your life to whom you can express genuine appreciation. No need to keep it to yourself. Let them benefit from hearing about something you value in them.

Step 7: Learning to Love Ourselves

When I was growing up I did not like myself very much. Insecure and shy, I had a hard time believing that other than my close friends others would like me either. I often felt like a fraud and feared that I would be discovered. If someone told me that it would be possible to love myself I wouldn't have believed them. I'm here to tell you it's possible. But it means looking past our own filters of self-judgment to discover the goodness that everyone who likes us sees.

We all want to be happy. Even stronger than all the doubts, judgments and self-destructive voices, there's a pure force wishing for our happiness right inside of us. It's rooting for our well-being. All our actions are motivated by the idea that they will help us feel better or feel less bad. Unfortunately, often we are confused as to what leads to true happiness. The process of learning to love ourselves means accessing and then empowering this force, so that it wisely directs our choices towards what is truly good for us.

This theme of loving ourselves follows naturally from letting go because when you let go of the limiting stories of who you think you are, you see that you're truly lovable and worthy of love. When you can love yourself or even just begin to appreciate who you are, you allow all your wonderful qualities to shine through.

Then you can tap into your true goodness, see the gifts you've been given and experience the joy of sharing them with others. If loving yourself seems like a stretch, then just being kind to yourself or wishing yourself well can begin a profound and life-changing process. Besides feeling good on the inside, this becomes a great gift to everyone you meet, especially our children. They can easily see how we treat ourselves and that becomes a significant. So learning to genuinely like and even love ourselves is a key to their well-being.

It's amazing how rare it is to genuinely appreciate who we are. How many of us have a low self-image driven by an inner critic? These thoughts of self-judgment often come from an underlying sense of unworthiness. Seeing yourself as unworthy is missing the truth of who you are: a perfect expression of life with the same True Nature (Divine Spirit, or Kingdom of Heaven) as every other living being, right within you. As one teaching puts it: "Believing in your littleness is arrogant, because it's preferring your own opinion to God's."

Forgiveness: A Pre-requisite for Loving Ourselves

In order to love ourselves we need to accept ourselves just as we are with all of our imperfections. The subject of forgiveness came up with the theme of Integrity. With this theme of self-love it is again a significant part of our practice—not only forgiving yourself regarding past actions but for any way you see yourself as not good enough.

If we only see our faults we just perpetuate the feeling of not being good enough. We cut ourselves off from recognizing who we really are (when we're not acting from fear or confusion). The crucial task in learning to be kind and loving towards ourselves is to remember our basic goodness, along with all our other positive qualities.

Jack Kornfield, in his book *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace*, writes of the Babemba tribe of Zambia who offer a radically different possibility of forgiving ourselves.

"In the Babemba tribe, when a person acts irresponsibly or unjustly, he is placed in the center of the village, alone and unfettered. All work ceases, and every man, woman, and child in the village gathers in a large circle around the accused individual. Then each person in the tribe speaks to the accused, one at a time, each recalling the good things the person in the center of the circle has done in his lifetime. Every incident, every experience that can be recalled with any detail and accuracy, is recounted. All his positive attributes, good deeds, strengths, and kindnesses are recited carefully and at length. This tribal ceremony

often lasts for several days. At the end, the tribal circle is broken, a joyous celebration takes place, and the person is symbolically and literally welcomed back into the tribe."

Maybe you need to forgive yourself because you can't accept some part of who you are: your body or your mind or your limitations. As Robert Bly says, "Every part of us that we do not learn to love will become hostile towards us." Forgiveness requires us to let go of any ideal standard that is impossible to measure up to, a merciless perfectionism not based on wisdom.

Learning forgiveness and compassion for ourselves takes time and patience. It doesn't happen overnight. But as with our other practices, by inclining the mind that way we are planting powerful seeds that will bear fruit. Whenever you have a moment of self-forgiveness, be present for the wholesomeness of the feeling. Let your awareness register how that moment of forgiveness feels in your body and in your mind.

Recalling Our Goodness

Imagine if we could do some version of the Babemba Tribe for ourselves! Recalling one's good deeds is actually a powerful practice to counter-act the tendency towards guilt and shame. Try this:

Take some time and recall as many good deeds you've done as you can.

What made you act that skillfully?

Can you see the goodness that wanted to be expressed?

Notice how it feels when you recall your goodness.

When you get self-critical recall some of your past good deeds and see if that lessens the negative self-talk.

A Forgiveness Practice

When we judge ourselves for our shortcomings or how we think we're not good enough in some way, we add additional pain to the situation. In some teachings this is called adding a second arrow on top of the first. Instead of self-judgment we can bring self-compassion to our judging mind. This is a huge step in practicing true kindness to ourselves.

If self-judgment is a challenge for you, try the following exercise that I shared in the live class:

- 1) What do I need to forgive myself for?
- 2) What would I need to understand in order to truly forgive myself?
- 3) Imagine someone else filled with self-judgment about this issue. Would you be able to forgive him or her?
- 4) Let the wisest and most compassionate part of you forgive that confused being who doesn't feel good enough. Let yourself feel the wholesomeness of your compassion.

Classic Loving-Kindness Practice

One way to take good care of yourself is to practice sending thoughts of loving-kindness to yourself. Take some quiet time (10 minutes and experiment with slowly and silently repeating the loving-kindness phrases below to yourself: *May I be happy. May I be peaceful. May I be kind to myself. May I love and accept myself just as I am.*

As you say each phrase, if possible, have an image of yourself that corresponds to the phrase. See yourself in a happy moment and send thoughts of well-wishing to the image as if you're splashing a blessing over it.

You can also direct these phrases towards your body or some part of your body that you want to develop a healthier relationship with. Your body has been doing the best to serve you for a long time. Send it some kind and appreciative thoughts.

This practice can have real power, especially if we say the phrases slowly and connect with our intention and the meaning behind the words. Use whatever phrases you resonate with (*May I share my love well, may I have inner peace*, etc.) You might pick three or four and say them consistently so they become more accessible.

An Exercise to Develop Loving-kindness towards Self

In traditional loving-kindness practice we get in touch with our noble qualities before sending thoughts of well-wishing to ourselves. A variation came to me during one loving-kindness retreat and it enabled me to understand myself from a fresh perspective with profound results.

Have you ever wondered what it is about you that others appreciate? You may take for granted all sorts of qualities that touch those around you: perhaps your good-heartedness, humor, thoughtfulness and caring to name a few. Try following the instructions below, pausing for a moment to connect with each point, to help you get in touch with your wholesome attributes.

- 1) Bring someone to mind who genuinely loves you.
 - a. Imagine that they're here with you.
- 2) Feel the special energy and love that you share.
- 3) Imagine, for a moment, that you can inhabit their reality and look at yourself through their eyes. What qualities do they see in you that touches them? Your kindness, your sincerity, your playfulness? Notice all of them.
- 4) Take some time to feel all of those qualities from their perspective.
- 5) Now move from their vantage point back into your own self and, from the inside, feel these same qualities. Appreciate them. Delight in them.
- 6) Wish yourself well with thoughts like, "May I be happy. May I be peaceful. May I share my love well. May I see all the goodness inside."

Keep in mind the qualities that surface in the exercise. Feel their wholesomeness. You might write down the qualities you saw and appreciated about yourself in your journal and reflect on them regularly these next two weeks.

Step 8: Connection with Others

Relationships are often the barometer of our happiness or sorrow. They are the major source of our greatest joy as well as our deepest suffering. When we share an easy flow of love we feel connected, secure, at home within ourselves. When we're lonely or isolated we become depression and anxiety are often not far away. Having focused on a healthy connection with ourselves we now naturally move into how we create happiness through "Connection with Others." This includes not only people close to us, but everyone we encounter in our lives.

The Power of Forgiveness: The Doorway to an Open Heart

Even with those closest to us—sometimes *especially* with those closest to us—frustration and anger can be triggered in a moment. When others disappoint us. When this happens, the doorway to greater connection is forgiveness.

It's good to realize that the person who benefits the most from your forgiveness is you. You are the one that suffers when your heart is closed in anger. Being consumed by ill will is likened to picking up a hot coal to angrily throw at someone and not realizing we're the ones getting burned. Holding onto bitterness is like drinking poison and hoping that the other person will get sick. By understanding that we're creating our own suffering, can motivate us to change. If you find yourself contracted, disconnected and suffering because you're caught up in anger, forgiveness may be your key to awaken joy.

An essential quality of forgiveness is empathic understanding. Some years ago I met a 13-year old girl from Trinidad named Lael-Anne who was wise beyond her years. Though she hadn't quite figured out the details, she told me about an invention she was working on that was guaranteed to bring peace into the world. She had my attention! She called it a "Perspective Helmet." Once you put it on you can immediately understand the perspective of another person. I agreed that such an invention would be a major contribution toward world peace and address most other man-made problems in the world.

We are all products of our conditioning. We see the world that we're familiar with. I remember seeing a poster that showed a sad little boy. The caption said that a child raised in a home with domestic violence is 700 more times likely to experience domestic violence in his or her adult life. Who is to blame? It's just a perpetuation of confusion over generations.

People do hurtful things because they're lost in stress or confusion. Without condoning the action we can forgive the confusion that led to an unskillful response. This doesn't mean. But you might begin to replace anger with compassion. When your heart is contracted in anger, it might help to imagine what their mind state is. Sometimes I imagine them as a small child doing the best they can and being lost in their own habits of confusion. You might try saying something like, "I forgive your confusion," allowing your heart to soften as you let go of the hot coal. You might notice the relief that comes with just a moment of forgiveness.

Although someone's actions may seem bizarre to us, they make sense to them. The Dalai Lama suggests keeping in mind that the other person's words and actions are *not about you*, but about *their internal reality*, which has intersected with yours in a way that doesn't meet with your hopes and expectations.

If you're not yet ready to forgive someone, then forgive yourself for being just where you are, particularly if you judge yourself for feeling the way you do. We can't hurry up the process. Hurt sometimes takes awhile to heal. But know that you're the one who benefits most in forgiving another. So be open to the possibility of forgiving them sometime in the future, not only for their sake, but for yours as well. As Desmond Tutu says, "Forgiveness is the highest form of self-interest. I need to forgive so that my own anger and lust for revenge doesn't corrode my own being."

The Power of Loving-Kindness

We're naturally drawn to those people around us who are kind and loving. Expressing kindness and good will towards others causes love to come back to us. We have a tremendous power to draw out different qualities of those around us by what we look for. A major support for loving-kindness is the ability to see the goodness in others. If you keep looking for the good you'll have a much better chance of finding it. Not always, of course, but your odds increase tremendously. When you know someone appreciates you, you can relax around them and be yourself.

Just like us, everyone wants to be happy, safe and loved. This is especially true of children. When I was a schoolteacher, the special challenge I gave myself at the start of each year was to find the key to every child's heart. Some kids radiated so brightly you had to practically wear shades around them. Others were shy or had learned to get attention by acting out. But I knew every one of them wanted to feel safe and accepted for who they were. Looking for their goodness gave me a much greater chance of bringing it out.

Of course, we should have reasonable expectations of respect and cooperation. But the more we have a particular idea of how they're supposed to be, the more they will disappoint us. When we genuinely appreciate others just as they are and wish them well, they relax and enjoy our company.

As part of his practice, a friend who took my Awakening Joy course adopted an experiment of connecting with people he passed on the street. "I decided that I would say good morning to everyone I saw on my walk around Marina Bay," he reported. "I was amazed at the smiles and reactions I got just from taking the time to acknowledge they were there." As we connect positively with others, we allow the goodness and generosity of spirit to flow through us and awakens that in others. Our hearts naturally open, we feel happy and it comes back to us.

Sympathetic Joy

Another way we can experience the joy of connection is tuning into the happiness of those around us. This is sometimes called Sympathetic Joy. It's very easy to experience this around children. We delight in seeing them happy. We all know this feeling when we root for someone to do well. Most movies give us chance to delight in the hero or heroine's triumph.

Delighting in a child's joy is one thing. Delighting in other adults' joy it can sometimes be a different story. We may feel envy when we hear of someone else's success. But there's no quota or limited supply of happiness. Just as we're affected by someone else's anger, we can be affected by another's joy and tune into that energy. If someone else is happy, we can delight in the fact that there's a little more happiness in the world. We can let their happiness rub off on us. As the Dalai Lama says, if our happiness depends on our own well-being, it's limited. But if it can be activated by the happiness of others, we increase the possibilities by seven billion!

Connection through Playfulness, Fun and Laughter

One of the best ways to enjoy connection is by having fun with them and letting ourselves be playful. Besides feeling close to them, it is one of the most important ways to reduce stress and get out of our heads. This one of the best things about being around children. They know how to play! When you're with your kids, let them remind you of the kid right inside. Playfulness and humor are crucial to genuine happiness. They all too easily can get squeezed out of our "important" agenda. Keeping your heart light—be playful, silly and have fun. It will directly connect you to joy. As one friend puts it, "If you can't laugh, it's just not funny."

Our culture has become increasingly cut off from valuing play. According to one study, "Individuals who spend some time just having fun are 20 percent more likely to feel happy on a daily basis." In another study of hundreds of adults "those who enjoy silly humor are one-third more likely to feel happy." If you find you're taking yourself way too seriously, try lightening up. Get out of your head by doing something playful or silly. It might be just the right prescription. Have as much fun and laugh as much as you can. It's not an accident that laughter makes you feel good. Research has shown laughter to release

endorphins (the body's natural pain killer), reduce the stress hormone cortisol, relieve tension in the body, counteract depression and anxiety and strengthen the immune system.

Many of us need permission to have fun and be able to laugh, so here it is. I'm not only giving you permission—take it as an assignment! Don't feel pressure to have fun. Just know that it's available, if you're open to it. Harold Thurman Whitman beautifully put it this way: "Do not ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Connection with others helps us come alive.

Forgiveness Practices

Forgiveness works both ways. Sometimes we do something that hurt others and we regret it. Other times we're on the receiving end of others' hurtful words or actions. Until we are able to come to some resolution with such conflicts, we spend lots of energy either in guilt or anger. Forgiveness is what frees up that energy and allows our hearts to open to life and greater well-being. When we've been humbled by our own unskillful actions and need to ask forgiveness, that can be a springboard toward forgiving others. Here are some forgiveness practices that I would encourage you to try at home.

Asking forgiveness:

- 1) Bring someone to mind that you may have acted unskillfully with. Imagine them in front of you.
- 2) Get in touch with any remorse you have. Reflect on your state of mind and the confusion or ignorance that would cause you to harm them.
- 3) Apologize by saying silently, "I'm truly sorry for any harm I might have caused you. I ask your forgiveness."
- 4) Imagine them hearing your sincerity, taking in your words and forgiving you. Notice how that feels.

Extending forgiveness:

- 1) Bring someone to mind that has acted unskillfully towards you and caused you to suffer in some way. Imagine them in front of you.
- 2) Reflect on their state of mind and the confusion or ignorance that would cause them to harm you.
- 3) Extend forgiveness by silently saying, "For any harm you may have caused me intentionally or unintentionally, I forgive you. I forgive your confusion."
- 4) Imagine seeing them take in your words and feel your forgiveness.

Notice how that feels.

Loving-Kindness Practices

It's easy to practice consciously directing thoughts of well-wishing and good will towards others. You might hold your close relationships as practice vehicles to develop an on-going openness of heart. When you feel affection naturally flowing, bring mindful attention to that feeling and directly connect with the joy of that good feeling. If you verbally express your love, it will increase the feeling still more! Here is a basic loving-kindness practice. You can do this internally as a meditative exercise or silently, when you are with others during your daily activities.

- 1) Formulate an image of the person to whom you wish to send metta as you reflect on their good qualities.

- 2) Send them these kinds of thoughts (or others that come naturally to you): *May you be happy. May you be peaceful. May you share your love well.*
- 3) Pay attention to how it feels in your body or mind to wish them well.

Practice this same spirit of well-wishing with others you encounter, besides those close to you. As you're waiting in line at the grocery store, instead of seeing everyone as being in the way, an obstacle slowing you down, try practicing sending them thoughts of kindness like, "*May you be happy. May you have a good day. May you share your love well.*" It's a much more pleasant experience than feeling stuck and it transforms the situation.

The aim of loving-kindness practice is to widen our circle of connection to include all beings everywhere without distinction. One might wonder about practicing loving-kindness towards someone who causes harm to others. It helps to realize that, if someone is genuinely happy, they will not intentionally cause harm to us or anyone else.

From Agenda to Love

The heart that is loving is expansive without an agenda for who they're supposed to be. You can see the difference between the two by trying this exercise:

- 1) Bring to mind someone you love— a friend, a child, or perhaps a pet. Focus on how much you care about his or her well-being and happiness. Notice how good it feels to simply love that being and wish them well with thoughts like, "May you be happy."
- 2) Now think about wanting something from him or her—attention, reassurance, affection, a certain behavior. Notice if the feelings in your body and your state of mind shift from openness to contraction, from a sense of fullness and connection to pulling back and closing down.
- 3) Now once again let your thoughts return to the love and positive feelings you have for that individual. Notice the difference in your body and mind

Sympathetic Joy Practice

- 1) Bring to mind someone with whom you have a warm connection and who is going through a good period in his or her life. Picture them in a moment of happiness and imagine you're in their cheering section. Send them these thoughts, as if splashing them with a blessing: "May your happiness continue. May your happiness grow."
- 2) Do this in your mind with a number of different people.
- 3) Finally, imagine all the people who want you to be happy in a cheering section rooting for you as you direct these phrases towards yourself. Feel all the support from others, as you slowly let yourself take in the words.

Work with sympathetic joy by having your radar out for happiness around you. When you see someone in good spirits, say these phrases "May your happiness continue; may your happiness grow," realizing that their happiness is contributing a little more joy to the world. You can also formally include a few minutes of saying those phrases silently to yourself when you meditate.

Step 9: Compassion

We are wired up to care. When we see a child fall and hurt herself, something instinctive motivates us to help. There's nothing in it for us. Just a movement of the heart that causes us to respond. Isn't that wonderful? Modern neuroscience has shown that our brains have "mirror neurons" that naturally empathize with another person's experience. The same brain cells that light up when you stub your toe also light up when you see someone else stub theirs. When we see suffering in another it evokes caring in our own heart. That is why watching a movie is such a powerful experience. We are with the hero or heroine's challenges and triumphs.

The capacity to care and respond to another's suffering is more than just a nice thing to have; it is a way to access and awaken joy. Helping others and making a difference in their lives is one of the most fulfilling ways to experience true well-being. Martin Seligman, the father of Positive Psychology and author of *Authentic Happiness*, writes that the greatest source of happiness is identifying what our gifts are and using them to make a contribution to others.

In this theme we look at different ways to access the joy of compassion. Just like adults, although our children are naturally wired up to care, they also have strong instincts to get what they want even at the expense of others. Giving them opportunities to experience the joy that comes from expressing their caring is one of the most important things we can do. This world needs as many compassionate human beings as we can help shape.

Compassion is Not Rescuing

With all the suffering around us, it would be easy to get overwhelmed or simply shut down. This benefits no one. It's essential to include ourselves in our compassion practice. Otherwise we burn out. You can be compassionate with yourself by knowing your capacities and limits. By remembering to nourish ourselves, as we respond to the suffering of others, especially our children, we have more to give and it becomes a more joyful experience.

Compassion doesn't mean tirelessly rescuing everyone we see from their suffering. It's not supposed to be a heavy burden. Not only can't we prevent people from suffering, we usually can't take it away from them. Of course we don't want to see our children suffer. But suffering is part of life. In fact, sometimes our attempt to rescue them can actually disempowers. In our heroic attempt to take away their suffering we can undermine their own growing process and prevent them from seeing their inner strength.

A key to wise compassion is balancing our caring with another great heart quality, equanimity. Equanimity is the spacious acceptance that, although we want things to be different, this is the way they are. Equanimity is simply acknowledging, "It's like this." Feeling frustrated and distressed because we we're powerless to change the situation just drains our capacity to respond.

Equanimity helps us stay centered when we see others suffer. The famous Serenity Prayer sums up the need for both action and equanimity: "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." The more we can find this balance, the richer our compassion becomes a healing environment for others.

Often compassion just means being there for another. Instead of trying to fix someone or take away his or her suffering, your caring presence is often the most comforting thing you can offer someone in pain. If you see a child going through a difficult time, before going into action mode, first take on the practice of just being with them. Listen to their experience. Imagine what it's like for them to be going through it. If you were in their situation what kind of presence would you want from another? Find a centered, balanced place inside that is mainly witnessing them in a loving, supportive way. You might ask them questions that help them get in touch with what they're feeling. Let go of any agenda to try to fix them. Don't miss the uplifting feeling that accompanies your loving presence.

Mentoring

One of the most joyful aspects of being an agent of compassion is empowering them through mentorship. It's a real joy to support a young person's development and help her or him blossom into their full potential. Each of us can empower others to find their destiny. Every young person who hasn't reached his or her full potential and has a good heart is a perfect candidate to invest in. Even those who, in their confusion and ignorance, cause suffering to others have great potential. I see the process of mentoring and empowering as the following:

- 1) See the good in that person, including their unique gifts and talents.
- 2) See the potential they have to help others.
- 3) Believe in them and let them know it.
- 4) Help awaken those gifts through encouraging and supporting them to develop themselves.

By mentoring and empowering that person we are helping a seed of deep compassion and wisdom come into bloom. It's tremendously rewarding and a guaranteed way to bring some joy into your life.

Responding to the Suffering Around Us

Relieving the suffering of others through volunteering brings a tremendous uplift of the heart. It's also one of the most effective ways to get us out of our own suffering. For some, focusing on our family or those close to us in need of support is the ideal arena to express our caring. For others, volunteering through some social service program is a source of real joy. Some quotes on service that I find particularly inspiring:

"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve." Albert Schweitzer

"I slept and dreamt that Life was Joy. I awoke and saw that Life was Service. I acted and behold, Service was Joy." Rabindrinath Tagore

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." Anne Frank

One research study showed that "volunteering contributes to happiness by decreasing boredom and creating an increased sense of purpose in life. Volunteers, on average are twice as likely to feel happy with themselves as non-volunteers."

If you have the time, you might consider a simple, doable project that puts you into an environment of service to someone local to you. It could be spending time with someone you know who needs support or it could be volunteering in a new setting. Don't do anything that will take an unrealistic amount of time. You don't want to *resent* your compassion practice! Do it as an experiment in discovering how it feels to step outside your comfort zone. Be present for whatever wholesome (or other) feelings arise as you serve another.

Extending Compassion Beyond the Local

We only need to look at a newspaper to see all the other kinds of suffering in the world. If you are moved by any given situation, ask yourself, what can I do in a small way to express my caring? If you feel outrage over how human beings can be so insensitive or cruel to one another, don't let the outrage poison you. Go underneath those feelings to the place of real caring for those who are the victims (and perhaps try to feel compassion for the ignorance of the perpetrators).

We're all familiar with terrible disasters that leave thousands homeless, like earthquakes or tsunamis or the suffering that comes from war. You might consider responding to situations beyond your

neighborhood. Or perhaps you have concern over climate change and its consequences. If you feel helpless with regard to these victims, ask yourself how you could respond wisely, rather than feeling powerless. Stay in touch with your caring heart, which might motivate you to act from that wholesome place.

As writer Andrew Harvey advises, "Follow your heartbreak." See what you're moved to do. "Action absorbs anxiety," as Angeles Arrien says. Whatever action you take in response to suffering, whether writing a letter or sending funds, do it as a conscious compassion practice. You might try saying the phrases "May you be free of suffering" or "I care about your suffering" (including the Earth) quietly before or after you write a letter or send money.

As you express compassion you will be modeling for your children the most inspiring way to live. Our deepest happiness does not come from what we can get from others but how we can contribute to their lives. May it be a source of real joy for you and the children you live and work with.

Compassion as a Formal Contemplative Practice

You can incline your mind towards greater empathy by consciously planting seeds through formal compassion meditation. Here is a classical compassion practice. I encourage you to include this in your meditation/quiet time for a few minutes each day and see what effect it has:

- 1) Sit quietly getting into a relaxed quiet space. You can use your breath to do this.
- 2) Bring to mind an image of someone you care about, who might be going through a hard time. Feel the connection and caring you share.
- 3) Say either of these phrases—
 - a. *I really care about your suffering or*
 - b. *May you hold your suffering with compassion.*

Then get in touch with the meaning behind the words, projecting those thoughts and feelings toward the person. Imagine they feel your caring and love.

- 4) Repeat this slowly for one or two minutes, staying in touch with the feeling as much as possible.
- 5) Direct those thoughts towards yourself, then another person. Notice how it feels to send compassion to yourself or another.

Mentoring

In the best-seller *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, Ishmael Beah writes about how he transformed from a boy who committed unspeakable acts of cruelty into an inspiring presence who has shown many the possibility of profound transformation. His road back was possible through the love and mentoring of others, especially Laura Simms, a woman who saw he was capable of something else. It's never too late for someone to change and turn their confusion into wisdom and compassion. To support someone's development, you might initiate the mentoring them, using the steps below:

- 1) Think of someone in your life who respects or looks up to you; someone who hasn't fully come into their own power or realized their full potential.
- 2) In whatever way that feels appropriate, let them know you believe in them and that you're in their cheering section.

- 3) Within reasonable parameters that work for both of you, be there for them as a guide, mentor or pillar of support.
- 4) Notice how this feels inside and how it affects the relationship between you.

Step 10: The Joy of Simply Being

Our final practice theme, “The Joy of Simply Being” is an antidote for the intensity and frenzy of life. It is also the way to access the inner peace we’re all looking for. Up until now all the other practice themes have involved some kind of *doing*— practices to cultivate specific states of well-being such as generosity, gratitude, compassion or kindness. Now we switch from doing to simply *being*. We stop all *trying* and let ourselves completely rest, simply receiving the moment that’s given to us right now.

William James spoke of “the ceaseless frenzy of always thinking we should be doing something else.” In our manic-paced modern life, we can pride ourselves on our “busy-ness”, often worn as a badge that says we’re doing so many “important things”. We become expert multi-taskers thinking we’re getting a lot accomplished, measured by how many balls we have in the air at the same time. In actuality, it’s been proven that when we’re multi-tasking we can not experience true happiness. When our brain is rapidly flitting from one task to another it doesn’t get a chance to light up the centers associated with true well-being.

Moving from *doing* to *being* doesn’t mean disengaging from life. Quite the opposite. We’re actually able to be present instead of toppling forward in our minds thinking about the next thing we need to do. That is how genuine connection is possible. In *The Little Prince*, the beautiful and insightful book by Antoine de Saint- Exupery, the Little Prince finds delicious pleasure in fully enjoying his flower. The wise fox tells him the great secret: “It’s the time you spent on your rose that makes your rose important.”

The practice of simply being is about the ease and relaxation that is available in any moment we remember to be present without thinking about the past or future or having any agenda at all. It allows our actions to come from a more centered, effective place. This state of being is not foreign to us. Neuroscience expert Rick Hanson says it’s been shown through fMRI experiments: “When you are not hungry or threatened or in pain, your brain’s natural state has these characteristics: It is conscious, calm, contented, caring, and creative.”

The Practice of Equanimity

The joy of being is supported by learning to develop the quality of equanimity. Equanimity is a balance of mind that allows things to be as they are. It has a quality of spaciousness, not fighting what is here. Spaciousness and balance come when we stop trying to control our world and rest in the simplicity of things as they are. We’ve already explored three other heart qualities—loving-kindness, sympathetic joy and compassion—but it is equanimity that holds these other qualities in balance. Without equanimity our loving-kindness can tip over into attachment, our compassion for the suffering of others can overwhelm us and our joy can spin us out in excessive exhilaration.

The mind filled with equanimity is relaxed, but completely engaged. There’s a big difference between equanimity and apathy or indifference, epitomized in the classic teenage response, “Whatever.” This apathetic attitude is really disconnected. With equanimity you connect fully with life because you’re willing to be with everything as it is. You can do this when you understand that, since everything changes, whatever is happening right now, whether difficult or wonderful, will not last. That gives us the courage to be with the hard stuff and the wisdom not to hold onto the highs when they subside.

Life has ups and downs. Anything can happen at any moment. As one teaching says, “Fortunes change quicker than the swish of a horse’s tail.” When you understand how quickly everything can change, you see that things are really out of your control. So the peace and happiness you’re looking for doesn’t depend on *what is happening* to you at any given moment, but on *your relationship to what is happening*.

At times you can consciously invite the experience of being by inclining the mind to come into balance. One form of equanimity practice is to simply say when you are thrown, “May I come into balance of mind right now.” That phrase can remind you that there’s another perspective you can bring to the situation to

help you relax into the present moment. Try practicing using this phrase whenever you find that you need to come back to center.

The balance and spaciousness that comes with equanimity allows you to relax your grip and vigilance and receive life in an open state of being.

Trust and Surrender

When we develop equanimity, we loosen our attachment to things working out a certain way. This opens us to another aspect of *being*: trust and surrender. This kind of trust is not based on a belief that things will work out just the way we hope, but rather that our awareness will meet the moment when it comes. Of course, conscious planning is important, but obsessing about the future is a certain prescription for suffering. We can do our part, but we usually don't have enough information to see how things will turn out.

By learning to trust in the unfolding and in your ability to respond to it, you keep your mind from contracting and getting in the way. Then life becomes an adventure instead of something to fear. A friend recently told me that he sees life as being like a roller coaster ride. It's always been that. But with practice when the big curves and drops come, he can relax into them instead of being in the grip of fearing them. And that has made all the difference in enjoying his life.

Learning to Listen

The spaciousness produced by coming into *being* has an additional benefit: it helps us access our wisdom to respond skillfully to any situation. As the great Taoist sage Lao Tzu wrote: "By letting it go it all gets done. The world is won by those who let it go. But when you try and try, the world is beyond the winning. To the mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders." When we become familiar with relaxing and can simply *be* we allow for a wise response to emerge from within instead of forcing things.

Think of a good decision you've made in your life. Chances are it was the voice of wisdom speaking to you—something in you felt the "rightness" of it. How does it feel in your body when you are able to hear that voice? Relaxed, open, connected, grounded? What is the tone in your mind when it speaks its truth? Probably clear, kind, and supportive. Getting to know the voice of wisdom and its ring of truth is the secret to trusting it and letting it guide you to a deeper sense of being even in challenging times. And this voice can only be heard when we stop our running around and relax into *being*.

The Joy of Everyday Being

This mode of *being* is the essence of a mind at ease and is actually much more available than we realize. Most of us regularly experience moments of freedom, such as the deep feeling of connection when we let the beauty of nature touch us or the feeling of peace when we allow ourselves to enjoy a break after finishing a task. But we're usually unaware of these moments of pure being, free of worry, wanting or confusion. In missing it, we miss the deep peace that's here for us to enjoy.

When we are mentally spinning our wheels, no matter how terrific the circumstances, we still suffer. Our happiness or suffering is not so much about external conditions as about what's going on inside. That's why meditation practice is such a powerful tool to develop inner peace. The more we learn to be here and relax into the moment, the more that carries over to the rest of life.

Coming into Being: Pause, Relax, Open

Greg Kramer, who teaches a method of wise speech called Insight Dialogue, has a useful formula for returning to calm and inner peace even when we're caught up in a complex task like communicating. It has three parts: pause, relax and open. Try it yourself:

Pause. Don't feed the internal dialogue in the mind.

Relax. Feel your body. Take a breath and let go.

Open. Receive the experience of life as it's presenting itself in this moment.
Let yourself be open to the person you are with.
Let go of any agenda and just let yourself *be*.

Whenever you're caught up and tense—or just waiting in line at the store or for your computer to boot up—try using this simple technique of "Pause, Relax and Open."

It can help open you to a bigger perspective than the drama at hand.

Make it a game to "disengage your clutch."

Accessing Beingness by Fully Enjoying the Moment

You don't have to be still to open to this quality of *being*. Whenever you're fully engaged in an activity you are experiencing *beingness*. Whether gardening, dancing, having fun or enjoying your work you experience what is known as *flow*, a term coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. When you're in flow you become absorbed and fully engaged with the activity at hand. Thoughts about the past or future don't distract you.

Whenever you find yourself fully engaged notice how good it feels not be concerned with the past or future. Notice and enjoy the experience of true fulfillment that doesn't need anything added on or taken away. This is another experience of the joy of simply being.

Developing Equanimity

Developing equanimity involves recognizing how we can get thrown off kilter as things change and accessing the wisdom to bring ourselves back into balance.

Take a moment to reflect on the following:

When do you get thrown off balance in your life?

In your wisest moments, how do you come back to balance?

What helps you remember to keep things in a wiser perspective?