

PASSIONIST

EARTH & SPIRIT CENTER

1924 Newburg Road • Louisville, KY 40205 • TEL 502.452.2749 • www.earthandspiritcenter.org

Meditation 4/5 — Spring 2016

Awakening The Heart Of Compassion (Contemplative Compassion)

OVERVIEW

This course focuses on one of the most important topics of our time. It is for anyone interested in contributing to a kinder world.

Awakening The Heart Of Compassion provides an opportunity to cultivate greater compassion for oneself, for one another, and for all Creation. During our semester-long exploration, we will integrate the core teachings of the world's religious traditions with emerging scientific understanding regarding the cultivation of compassionate attitudes, perspectives and behaviors.

Compassion is central to every major faith tradition. It is the desire we have to open more deeply to our true nature and to cultivate a caring connection with others. Compassion impels us to nurture an open heart, to work at alleviating human suffering, and to honor the sanctity of all beings. We will learn how meditation is a strategy for uncovering this radiant beauty in ourselves and manifesting it to the world.

This course explores the methods and meditative practices for cultivating compassion, loving-kindness, and empathy that enable us to be agents of healing in a wounded world. Each week we will investigate the various facets of compassion and discover how to integrate compassion into the context of our personal lives, work, community and world. The goal is to develop courage to see things as they are and learn how to respond with an open and caring heart. We will also explore the emerging science of compassion, learning specific research-validated techniques that allow us to build new neural circuits, allowing our compassionate responses to become more habitual.

Awakening The Heart Of Compassion (Contemplative Compassion)

Our central course question:

How may I more fully embrace, exemplify and embody compassion as a core value throughout all areas of my life?

Course outline

Week 1 — What is compassion and why does it matter?

Week 2 — The science of compassion

Week 3 — What blocks our expression of compassion?

Week 4 — Cultivating self-compassion

Week 5 — Cultivating compassion for the ‘known’ other

Week 6 — Cultivating compassion for the ‘unknown’ other

Week 7 — Holding the suffering of the world

Week 8 — Selfless service as gateway to engaged compassion

Week 9 — Envisioning a compassionate society

Week 10 — Embodying compassion in everyday life

Awakening The Heart Of Compassion

Three aspects of our exploration

1. Perspectives on compassion
2. Training the mind; awakening the heart
3. Action experiments in compassionate living

During our ten-week journey, we will explore compassion in three distinct yet interrelated ways.

First, we will explore and define compassion from various perspectives: the world's religious and spiritual traditions, the insights emerging from modern scientific research, contemporary issues of social and ecological justice, and the embodied practice of active compassion.

Second, we will train the mind and awaken the heart as we learn well-researched, evidence-based practices for cultivating compassion.

Third, each week, course participants will choose a specific 'compassion in action' experiment to conduct during the following week. These experiments will be chosen from five categories: 1) the simple application of mindfulness practices and exercises; 2) initiating acts of kindness and active caring; 3) reaching out to others in a spirit of reconciliation and healing; 4) acts of selfless service; and 5) active participation in justice-making.

Each week, we will harvest the fruitage of our experiments as we dive ever-deeper into our spiritual practices, integrating head, heart and hands as we seek to more fully live as instruments of compassion in the world.

Recommended Texts for Awakening The Heart Of Compassion:

How To Be Compassionate by His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Twelve Steps To A Compassionate Life by Karen Armstrong

Self-Compassion: The Proven Power Of Being Kind To Yourself by Kristen Neff

TUESDAY CLASSES

- 10:00 AM–11:30 AM
- 1:30-3:00 PM
- 7:00–8:30 PM

INSTRUCTOR: Harry Pickens

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FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE COURSE ENTAILS:

- √Practice at least one twenty-minute meditation period each day.
- √Engage in the class presentations through presence and dialogue.
- √Conduct your own personal ‘experiment in active compassion’ each week.
- √Read and reflect on the suggested texts.
- √Watch and reflect on the suggested video presentations.
- √Focus on bringing more compassion into your life and daily interactions.

WEATHER CANCELLATION – In cases of inclement weather, consult the homepage of the Earth & Spirit Center website for information about classes being cancelled. Unless otherwise indicated on the website, classes will be held as scheduled.

Week 1: Tuesday, February 14 - What is compassion and why does it matter?

In this class, we will set the stage for our ten week exploration of compassion. We will reflect on our current understanding of compassion. We will clarify our individual and collective outcomes for the course. We will explore a simple model of the core components of an active, embodied compassion. We will explore definitions of compassion as viewed through the lenses of the world's spiritual traditions as well as through the lens of our personal experience. We will also discuss the difference between empathy, sympathy and compassion.

PRACTICES BEING TAUGHT THIS CLASS

Review of basic mindfulness practice
Mindful listening

QUOTE

“The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and put another there, and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

“It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others – even our enemies – is a denial of our common humanity.” - Karen Armstrong

“Compassion is a state of mind that is nonviolent, nonharming, and nonaggressive. It is a mental attitude based on the wish for others to be free

of their suffering and is associated with a sense of commitment, responsibility, and respect toward the other.” – Dalai Lama

RESOURCE:

The 21-day compassion challenge — Dr. Lissa Rankin
<http://lissarankin.com/the-21-day-compassion-challenge>

Week 2: February 21 - The science of compassion

In this class, we will explore the emerging scientific understanding regarding the biological, neurological, and psychological components of compassion. What happens in the brain, mind and body when we think and act compassionately? What does research tell us about the distinctions between sympathy, empathy, and compassion? What does the study of neurocardiology — the interface between heart and brain — tell us about how we might ‘rewire’ our brainmind system for greater compassion? How can insights from neuroscience, psychology and evolutionary biology inform, deepen, and enhance our compassion practice?

PRACTICES BEING TAUGHT THIS CLASS

HeartShift

QUOTE

“If we say, oh, the practice of compassion is something holy, nobody will listen. If we say, warm-heartedness really reduces your blood pressure, your anxiety, your stress and improves your health, then people pay attention.” - His Holiness the Dalai Lama

“As human beings, we will inevitably encounter suffering at some point in our lives. However, we also have evolved very specific social mechanisms to relieve that pain: altruism and compassion... While survival of the fittest may lead to short-term gain, research clearly shows it is survival of the kindest that leads to the long-term survival of a species. It is our ability to stand together as a group, to support each other, to help each other, to communicate for mutual understanding, and to cooperate, that has taken our species this far. Compassion is an instinct.”
— James Doty

“It’s kind of like weight training ... we found that people can actually build up their compassion ‘muscle’ and respond to others’ suffering with care and a desire to help.”
Helen Weng

PREPARATION FOR THIS CLASS

1. Watch The Science Of Compassion — Dr. James Doty <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJW5-0tjFDg>
2. Watch Compassion and Altruism in building Resilience — Kelly McDonogal <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khQuZINWFRg>

Week 3: February 28 - What blocks our expression of compassion?

In this class, we will explore intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, societal impediments to expressing and embodying compassion. Although we may sincerely desire to live more compassionately and to offer greater lovingkindness to others, our thoughts, feelings and actions often reflect selfishness, separation, and the worst expressions of our need to survive. Why does this happen? Why is it often really difficult to think and live compassionately? We will take a look at the most common blocks to a lived experience of compassion and begin to explore how each of these blocks may be addressed.

PRACTICES BEING TAUGHT THIS CLASS

Compassion exemplar meditation

QUOTE

What blocks compassion? Unhealed trauma, fear, self-protection, self-centeredness, a feeling of needing to “take care of #1” in an “eat or be eaten” world. - Dr. Lissa Rankin

IN PREPARATION FOR THIS CLASS

1. Watch Daniel Goleman: Why aren't we more compassionate? https://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_goleman_on_compassion?language=en
2. Watch Feisal Abdul Rauf: Lose your ego, find your compassion https://www.ted.com/talks/imam_feisal_abdul_rauf
3. Watch Thupten Jinpa. Compassion is natural. So why is it so hard for us? <http://bigthink.com/videos/thupten-jinpa-on-modern-day-compassion>
4. Watch Paul Gilbert — Cultivating a compassionate society. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3JDokddPts>

Week 4: March 7 - Cultivating self-compassion

In this class, we will learn practices for cultivating greater self-compassion. In order to express and embody compassion for others, it is first necessary to cultivate compassion for oneself. We will examine the difference between self-esteem and self-compassion, and learn to see ourselves through kinder, more compassionate eyes.

PRACTICES BEING TAUGHT THIS CLASS

Self-compassion meditation
Self-directed acts of kindness

QUOTE

“Compassion is, by definition, relational. Compassion literally means “to suffer with,” which implies a basic mutuality in the experience of suffering. The emotion of compassion springs from the recognition that the human experience is imperfect.”

— Kristin Neff, *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*

IN PREPARATION FOR THIS CLASS

1. Watch Krisin Neff: The space between self-esteem and self-compassion
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IvtZBUSplr4>

Week 5: March 14 - Cultivating compassion for the ‘known’ other

In this class, we will explore practices to cultivate greater compassion for family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances. As we gradually extend our circle of compassion, we find that those closest to us often provide the greatest opportunities for opening our heart and expanding our capacity for kindness, empathy, and love. We will pay attention to our inner resistance to forgiving those who may have harmed us and begin to gently deepen our intention to extend compassion even to these individuals.

PRACTICES BEING TAUGHT THIS CLASS

Loving kindness meditation
Empathic awareness
Gratitude letter

QUOTE

IN PREPARATION FOR THIS CLASS

1. Watch Krista Tippett: Reconnecting With Compassion https://www.ted.com/talks/krista_tippett_reconnecting_with_compassion?language=en
2. Watch James Forbes: Compassion at the dinner table https://www.ted.com/talks/james_forbes/transcript?language=en
3. Listen to “Out on a Ledge” (19 minutes), a story of compassion told by Philip Caputo, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, originally on “The Moth”. You can view it on You Tube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EOWhvl4j4c.

Break Week March 21 – No Class this week.

Week 6: March 28 - Cultivating compassion for the 'unknown' other

In this class, we will cultivate our capacity to extend compassion to those individuals and groups that we may consider 'not us' because of differences in belief systems, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, religion, politics, and other categories that tend to separate human beings. We will notice our tendency to defend and close our hearts in the face of the 'other' and experience practices that gently support us in extending compassion and lovingkindness beyond our 'comfort zones'.

PRACTICES BEING TAUGHT THIS CLASS

Extending the circle of compassion

QUOTE

“The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another.” – Thomas Merton

“Our measure of compassion isn't our service to the poor; but our sense of kinship with them.” – Greg Boyle

“We need to move from a spirituality of alienation from the natural world, to a spirituality of intimacy with the natural world; from a spirituality of the Divine as in view of verbal revelation, to a spirituality of the Divine as revealed in the physical world around us; from a spirituality concerned simply with pathos of the human, to a spirituality of concern for the pathos of the entire Earth community.” – Thomas Berry, CP

IN PREPARATION FOR THIS CLASS

1. Watch Robert Thurman: Expanding your circle of compassion
https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_thurman_on_compassion
2. Watch Matthieu Richard: How to let altruism be your guide
https://www.ted.com/talks/matthieu_ricard_how_to_let_altruism_be_your_guide

Week 7: April 4 - Holding the suffering of the world

In this class, we will explore practices that support our capacity to be present in the face of the immensity of suffering experienced by sentient beings during this time on planet Earth. Often, we turn away in the face of suffering because of our fear or our sense of powerlessness. We will explore this impulse to turn away and cultivate practices that allow us to bring the Light and Love of our true nature to the suffering we behold, so that we can be fully present and available to that which is before us, bringing our gifts of quiet mind, compassionate heart and selfless service.

PRACTICES BEING TAUGHT THIS CLASS

Cleaning the reactive mind
Compassionate presence
Shining as the sun

QUOTE

“All of us have to share in each others’ sufferings or risk losing our humanity.” – Philip Caputo

“Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.” – Henri Nouwen

IN PREPARATION FOR THIS CLASS

1. Watch Joan Halifax: Compassion and the true meaning of empathy
https://www.ted.com/talks/joan_halifax?language=en

Week 8: April 11 - Selfless service as gateway to engaged compassion

In this class, we will explore the transformational power of selfless service to others as a gateway to an embodied experience of compassion. We will study the lives of many who have tapped into the power of selfless service in our community and beyond. We will open our eyes to discover opportunities for selfless service all around us. We will discern how and whom we are guided to serve. And we will make a commitment to active service as we seek to live as instruments of compassion.

PRACTICES BEING TAUGHT THIS CLASS

Bodhisattva breath
Head-Heart-Hands

QUOTE

“God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house... God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives... God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war... God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives, and God is with us if we are with them.” – Bono

“If you remove the yolk from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, and if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday and the Lord will continually guide you and satisfy your desire in scorched places.” – Isaiah 58:10

IN PREPARATION FOR THIS CLASS

1. Watch Jamila Raqib: The secret to effective nonviolent resistance
https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila_raqib_the_secret_to_effective_nonviolent_resistance?language=en
2. Read 198 methods of nonviolent action. <http://www.aeinstein.org/nonviolentaction/198-methods-of-nonviolent-action/>

Week 9: April 18 - Envisioning a compassionate society

In this class, we will envision a world guided and governed by compassion. In order to co-create a better world, we must begin by taking the time to imagine it. We will explore what research tells us about the power of envisioning a desired reality in motivating positive constructive action. We will explore ancient prophecies from a variety of spiritual and religious traditions predicting a time of compassionate transformation of our global society. And we will seek to inwardly discern what this inspired and inspiring vision of possibility requires of us in order to bring it into being.

PRACTICES BEING TAUGHT THIS CLASS

Love's vision meditation

QUOTE

“The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us?” – Dorothy Day

IN PREPARATION FOR THIS CLASS

1. Watch Paul Gilbert, The Conditions For A Compassionate Society <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3JDokddPts>
2. Watch Karen Armstrong: My wish: the Charter for Compassion https://www.ted.com/talks/karen_armstrong_makes_her_ted_prize_wish_the_charter_for_compassion?language=en

Week 10: April 25 – Embodying compassion in everyday life

In this class, we will review and integrate what we have learned, discovered and experienced during our journey. We will prepare for re-entering the wider world with a greater intellectual understanding, emotional comprehension, spiritual perspective, and physically embodied experience of compassion. We will celebrate our progress, honor our transformation, and commit to living as instruments of compassion in service of a better world for all.

PRACTICES BEING TAUGHT THIS CLASS

No new practices this class. We will review and integrate what we have learned and discovered during our journey.

QUOTE

“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.”
– 1 John 4: 16

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.” – St. Paul, Colossians 3:12

IN PREPARATION FOR THIS CLASS

Review your notes, compassion experiments journal, and class materials.