

**Embodying the Bodhisattva Path in These Challenging Times**  
**March 9 – April 13, 2025**

**Practices for the Month**

**Readings**

**Session Two Readings & Resources:**

- Rothberg, *The Engaged Spiritual Life*, Chapters 4 and 5, pp.73-110
- Thich Nhat Hanh, *No Mud, No Lotus*, Chapters 3 and 4, pp. 31-52
- Lion's Roar, "[Bodhisattva](#)" (Scroll down for seven additional short, helpful articles on the bodhisattva path)
- Gil Fronsdal, "[The Bodhisattva and the Arhat: Walking Together Hand-in-Hand](#)" (Insight Meditation Center)
- Pema Chodron, "[Unveiling the Spiritual Warriorship Within](#)" (Tricycle, Short video)

**Part 1: Personal Practice**

- Drawing from two exercises in the Rothberg book (also attached here on p 3-5 of this document), explore adding each of these to your meditation practice, one time each week, or more often as helpful:
  - **Guided Reflection on Opening to and Transforming Suffering** (p 90-91)
  - **The Practice of Lovingkindness** (p101-102)

**Part 2: Guidance for Peer Group Meeting**

Meeting in a peer group creates an opportunity to explore & reflect together on the bodhisattva path. Together you benefit from mutually sharing as well as gain a measure of inspiration.

Structure: We recommend that for each month's meeting you rotate the role of facilitator. During each month's meeting, you can decide who will facilitate (or feel free to create a schedule if you prefer). With 5 group meetings, not everyone in the group will be a facilitator. Time allotments are suggestions. Depending on the # of people, feel free to make adjustments.

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### Suggested Format for Second Group Session March 9 – April 13, 2025

Suggested Time	Topic	Notes
5	Meditation together (in silence)	Facilitator tracks time.
5	Review of the agenda	Facilitator walks through agenda. Group can suggest refinements/adjustments as needed.
4 mins/ person	Checking in. Each person shares: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is alive for you in your Bodhisattva engagement?</li> <li>• What insights have arisen? Challenges?</li> <li>• How are you meeting these?</li> </ul>	Facilitator helps group decide on process (e.g., once each person finishes, they can hand it off to another person)
1	Pause to take in the group sharing.	
4 mins/ person	Group sharing on At-Home Practice #2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on your experience with the Exercise of reflection on opening to and Transforming Suffering</li> </ul>	Facilitator reviews the At Home Practice: Guided Reflection on Opening to and Transforming Suffering
5	Review group logistics. Identify and confirm: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Date &amp; time of next meeting</li> <li>• Zoom link to use</li> <li>• Facilitator</li> </ul>	
1-2	Closing Meditation	

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**EXERCISE: A Guided Reflection on  
Opening to and Transforming Suffering**

After a short period of meditation, bring to mind an area of pain and suffering in your personal life, preferably not your most difficult area. It might involve a physical difficulty, an interpersonal tension or conflict, or personal challenges related to work, finances, or relationships. As you consider this area, be aware of what is happening in your body, heart, and mind. Then reflect on your responses to these questions:

- How have you typically experienced this difficult area? Can you sense what has been helpful in your responses? How have you been reactive?
- Is this area of pain readily apparent to you, or is it more hidden? Can you distinguish between the pain that has surfaced and your suffering in reaction to that pain? Can you identify some of the reactive patterns associated with your suffering?
- To what extent is the pain unavoidable?
- Can you imagine the gifts that you might receive if you skillfully opened further to and worked with the pain and suffering of the situation?
- How might you, at the right time, open further to your pain and suffering in a wise, compassionate, and relatively balanced way?
- What tools, resources, and supports that you presently have would help you to open to and transform your suffering in this area? What further tools, resources, and supports do you need?

Continue this meditation and reflection over a week (or longer), bearing in mind that the transformation of suffering is commonly a long-term process.

At another time, carry out a similar meditation and reflection in regard to an area of pain and suffering in your relational or collective life, particularly with your family, community, or organization, or with the larger society. In reflecting on the above questions, rephrase them in ways appropriate to the situation, considering also that your response probably will be developed with others, as well as involving an individual component.

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Of particular value for those dedicated to inner and outer transformation is the fact that there are detailed instructions for cultivating this quality, instructions that can be applied both in solitary meditation and in the midst of activity. Interestingly, although love is clearly at the center of Christian spirituality, there do not seem to be comparably methodical Christian practices, although the Jesus Prayer and the contemporary Centering Prayer open up very similar territory.

Hence the practice of lovingkindness can be at the heart of a life of service and transformation. In the classical tradition, it is the first of the four *brahmavihara*, or “divine abodes,” the four qualities of the open heart, and it expresses a basic warmth and friendliness. When it encounters suffering, it becomes compassion (*karuna*), the second of the divine abodes, understood as the quivering of the heart that is in contact with suffering. When lovingkindness meets beauty or happiness, particularly that of others, it becomes *mudita*, or joy, especially joy in the joy of others. Equanimity (*upekkha*) is the fourth of the brahmavihara and serves particularly to balance lovingkindness, compassion, and joy with wisdom.

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#### EXERCISE: The Practice of Lovingkindness

The practice of lovingkindness works with short phrases that one repeats constantly, first in reference to oneself and then in reference to various others, gradually extending toward all beings. We choose phrases, either the traditional ones or those of our own creation, that seem best to open our hearts and resonate emotionally with us. The traditional phrases, as collected in the fifth-century text by Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, are the following, with alternative phrases added (the alternatives are indented further):

- May I (or you) be free from danger.
  - May I be safe and free from harm.
- May I have mental happiness.
  - May I be happy.
- May I have physical happiness.
  - May I be healthy (or as healthy as possible).
  - May my body and mind support my awakening.
  - May I accept my limitations with grace.
- May I have ease of well-being.
  - May I live with ease.

Other possible phrases include:

May I accept myself just as I am.

May I be free.

May I be loving.

May I be peaceful.

Typically, we use four phrases like the classical ones that express several nuances of well-being: safety, happiness, health, and ease.

Adopting a comfortable posture, repeat these phrases silently and internally, over and over again. Start with yourself, and move in a sequence of bringing lovingkindness to those in different relationships with you, following this general order:

Yourself.

A benefactor (a mentor, teacher, guide, or someone who has helped you).

A close friend (usually not initially a partner or someone with whom there is a complex relationship).

A neutral person (perhaps someone at work or in your neighborhood to whom you pay little attention).

A difficult person (traditionally identified as an “enemy,” but initially a mildly or moderately difficult person for you).

All beings (you can either gradually expand your awareness outwardly in space in all directions—to the front, to the back, to either side, above, and below—or bring your lovingkindness to different classes of beings—all females and all males; all humans, all nonhumans; all beings known to you, all beings unknown to you; and so forth).

One helpful way to work with the phrases that I learned from my colleague Guy Armstrong is, for each phrase, to first develop an image of the being (human or nonhuman) toward whom you are directing metta, then to bring your attention to the center of your chest (sometimes called the “heart center”), then to say the phrase, and finally to listen for the resonance in your body, heart, and mind. You can just take a moment for each of these steps.

Do this practice initially for 10 minutes at a time, before or after your main contemplative practice. You can also do the practice for longer periods, for 30 or 45 minutes daily, or even for an extended retreat of a day, a week, or longer. You can bring lovingkindness practice into the world, practicing while driving, at meetings, or taking a walk.

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