# How Can I Help?



A 6 week course on the path of Selfless Service

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## COURSE AIMS

- Understand the philosophy and practical application of Selfless Service as a path according to Yogic, Buddhist and other spiritual traditions.
- Learn useful techniques of meditation and contemplation to help cultivate awareness, equanimity, compassion and deeper ability to listen to the needs of a situation, ensuring helpful responses.
- Gain insight and understanding into your own personal motivations and reasons for wanting to serve.
- Learn how to avoid pitfalls like attachment, pity, indifference, comparison and self righteousness.
- Get insight into what your skills and talents are and how to apply them in service.
- To be clearer about who helps who, and how all service can create a win-win situation.
- Understand Selfless service as part of your own spiritual path.
- Understand the nature, cause and remedy of suffering.
- Understand the cause of burnout and how to avoid it.
- Learn how to transform both your house and workplace through selfless service.
- How to get started with service, identify needs our there, and how to start a project.

## RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL COURSE READING:




***How Can I Help?***

***Stories and reflections on Service***

**by Ram Dass and Paul Gorman**

## SESSION 1: THE PATH OF SELFLESS SERVICE (PART 1)

### MODULE INTRO

# Selfless Service = Seva = Compassionate Action

Selfless service is a natural expression of an open heart and a conscious mind. In almost every spiritual tradition and organized religion, selfless service is a common thread pervading. All great spiritual teachers, saints and politicians have propagated service and doing good things for others and for the greater good. It seems to be an integral part of human expression. In Yogic and Buddhist traditions the idea of service is taken one step further; service is not only an expression of someone who has attained some degree of understanding of the self and the interconnectedness of all things, but also as a very good vehicle for spiritual growth.

It is our natural expression. Why we as a species are largely becoming more obsessive, depressed, stressed, neurotic, fearful and isolated is because we are not expressing this. Unfortunately we are largely out of practice, and the world does not seem to nurture this behaviour. Fortunately all it takes is a little effort to discover that it is easily within our means and ability to tune into this expression and very quickly we see that we can overcome our conditioning and ideas that we cannot help for '*fill in the excuse*' reason.

The world as it is provides countless opportunities for one to be of service. In fact many saints and sages say that it is actually the easiest and most appropriate path for this age. This course will help bring to light some aspects of how to serve in a way that not only uplifts others but also yourself. As we begin to work with the concepts and ideas we begin to see how this path will bring us face to face with ourselves. We will see our good and our bad, and be able to work with accepting things and evolving through the process. Although nothing in life is ever easy, and many obstacles and difficulties are laid on our path, it is a hope that by working with the attitudes and principles of selfless service, you will be able to overcome the obstacles, transform your life and also uplift others and the world as part of the package. With grace, soon the path will bring purpose and meaning to your life.

This course is by no means complete but is more a map made up of bits and pieces that are here to help inspire you to pursue, in your own way, the path of selfless service. They will help inspire, but remember that it is just a map not the territory and it truly is only when you embark upon the path that you will really experience for yourself why it works so well. For those already walking the path of service, this course will hopefully give you deeper understanding and inspiration of the path.

### QUOTES ON SELFLESS SERVICE



*When service is offered to another being and it contains your best thoughts and feelings, your love and affection, sympathy and compassion, then that action becomes a blessing in disguise to uplift another being. That is seva.*
*– Swami Niranjanananda.*



*The beginning of spiritual life stems from service to humanity. Serving others selflessly, doing good works for others without any ulterior motive will become the social philosophy of the twenty-first century. Selfless service is a complete spiritual sadhana. It is the simplest and easiest path to God. Whatever service we do for others helps to purify our self. – Swami Satyananda*



*Teach this triple truth to all: A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion are the things which renew humanity.*
*- Buddha*



*All the great men and women who have lived on this earth have been selfless and desireless; they lived to serve and help others. They knew that the only way to freedom is to learn to give. This is the law of life.*
*- Swami Rama*

## STORY

### THE DOCTOR WHO LISTENED[3]

On the bulletin board in the front hall of the hospital where I work, there appeared an announcement. "Yeshi Dhonden," it read, "will make rounds at six o'clock on the morning of June 10." The particulars were then given, followed by a notation: "Yeshi Dhonden is Personal Physician to the Dalai Lama." I am not so leathery a skeptic that I would knowingly ignore an emissary from the gods. Not only might such sangfroid be inimical to one's earthly well-being, it could take care of eternity as well. Thus, on the morning of June 10, I join the clutch of white coats waiting in the small conference room adjacent to the ward selected for the rounds. The air in the room is heavy with ill-concealed dubiety and suspicion of bamboozlement. At precisely six o'clock he materializes, a short, golden, barrelly man dressed in a sleeveless robe of saffron and maroon. His scalp is shaven, and the only visible hair is a scanty black line above each hooded eye.

He bows in greeting while his young interpreter makes the introduction. Yeshi Dhonden, we are told, will examine a patient selected by a member of the staff. The diagnosis is unknown to Yeshi Dhonden as it is to us. The examination of the patient will take place in our presence, after which we will reconvene in the conference room, where Yeshi Dhon-den will discuss the case. We are further informed that for the past two hours Yeshi Dhonden has purified himself by bathing, fasting, and prayer. I, having breakfasted well, performed only the most desultory of ablutions, and given no thought at all to my soul, glance furtively at my fellows. Suddenly we seem a soiled, uncouth lot.

The patient had been awakened early and told that she was to be examined by a foreign doctor, and had been asked to produce a fresh specimen of urine, so when we enter her room, the woman shows no surprise. She has long ago taken on that mixture of compliance and resignation that is the fades of chronic illness. This was to be but another in an endless series of tests and examinations. Yeshi Dhonden steps to the bedside while the rest stand apart, watching. For a long time he gazes at the woman, favouring no part of her body with his eyes, but seeming to fix his glance at a place just above her supine form. I, too, study her. No physical sign or obvious symptom gives a clue to the nature of her disease.

At last he takes her hand, raising it in both of his own. Now he bends over the bed in a kind of crouching stance, his head drawn down into the collar of his robe. His eyes are closed as he feels for her pulse. In a moment he has found the spot, and for the next half-hour he remains thus, suspended above the patient like some exotic golden bird with folded wings, holding the pulse of the woman beneath his fingers, cradling her hand in his. All the power of the man seems to have been drawn down into this one purpose. It is palpation of the pulse raised to the state of ritual. From the foot of the bed, where I stand, it is as though he and the patient have entered a special place of isolation, of apartness, about which a vacancy hovers, and across which no violation is possible. After a moment the woman rests back upon her pillow. From time to time she raises her head to look at the strange figure above her, then sinks back once more. I cannot see their hands Joined in a correspondence that is exclusive, intimate, his fingertips receiving the voice other sick body through the rhythm and throb she offers at her wrist. All at once I am envious—not of him, not of Yeshi Dhonden for his gift of beauty and holiness, but of her. I want to be held like that, touched so, received. And I know that I, who have palpated a hundred thousand pulses, have not felt a single one.

At last Yeshi Dhonden straightens, gently places the woman's hand upon the bed, and steps back. The interpreter produces a small wooden bowl and two sticks. Yeshi Dhonden pours a portion of the urine specimen into the bowl and proceeds to whip the liquid with two sticks. This he does for several minutes until a foam is raised. Then, bowing above the bowl, he inhales the odor three times. He sets down the bowl and turns to leave. All this while, he has not uttered a single word.

As he nears the door, the woman raises her head and calls out to him in a voice at once urgent and serene. "Thank you, doctor," she says, and touches with her other hand the, place he had held on her wrist, as though to recapture something that had visited there. Yeshi Dhonden turns back for a moment to gaze at her, then steps into the corridor. Rounds are at an end.

We are seated once more in the conference room. Yeshi Dhonden speaks now for the first time, in soft Tibetan sounds that I have never heard before. He has barely begun when the young interpreter begins to translate, the two voices continuing in tandem—a bilingual fugue, the one chasing the other. It is like the chanting of monks. He speaks of winds coursing through the body of the woman, currents that break against barriers, eddying. These vortices are in her blood, he says. The last spendings of an imperfect heart. Between the chambers of the heart, long, long before she was born, a wind had come and blown open a deep gate that must never be opened. Through it charge the full waters other river, as the mountain stream cascades in the springtime, battering, knocking loose the land, and flooding her breath. Thus he speaks, and now he is silent. "May we now have the diagnosis?" a professor asks. The host of these rounds, the man who knows, answers."Congenital heart disease," he says, "Interventricular septal defect, with resultant heart failure."

A gateway in the heart, I think. That must not be opened. Through it charge the full waters that flood her breath. So! Here then is the doctor listening to the sounds of the body to which the rest of us are deaf He is more than doctor. He is priest.

I know ... I know … the doctor to the gods is pure knowledge, pure healing. The doctor to man stumbles, must often wound; his patient must die, as must he.

Now and then it happens, as I make my own rounds, that I hear the sounds of his voice, like an ancient Buddhist prayer, its meaning long since forgotten, only the music remaining. Then a jubilation possesses me, and I feel myself touched by something divine.

## THEORY TOPICS

### WHO'S HELPING WHO?

On one level, service is a natural expression of our hearts. Certain situations arise and we respond in a way that helps. We don't even do it consciously. We may be lost in our own minds drama and feeling a little down, when suddenly a friend needs us and we respond without a thought. This interaction takes us out of our minds and into our hearts. It feels very natural. The experience seems to help us as much as we are helping them. We are uplifted as a result of being able to escape our pre-occupation with self and for a moment move into a more selfless place, where we can sense exactly what is needed and we respond to the situation appropriately from that space.

Of course it is not always like this and many times our head gets in the way of being of service. We feel we are incapable; we are overpowered by self doubt. This too is part of the process of extending oneself out into the realm of connecting with others. We begin to see aspects of our selfish nature. If left unchecked we can get into cycles of self loathing, or resentment, or feel anger at the way things are, and that we should be put into these positions. We resist our inherent nature to help, because we are overwhelmed by the immensity of the need, or simply tired, or lost in a drama. It all seems pointless. Another needy person tries to get 2 bucks of you, and you say NO! Maybe a little bit too strongly. All feelings of kindness, and compassion and ideas of what a great person you are, just go out the window.

Our helping is often conditioned by our pre-conceived ideas about who we are. We use our intellect and justify our actions. Our heart starves of its natural expression and we are left with an uneasy feeling.

Good news. Nothing is broken. This too is part of the process. The path of selfless service, forces us to look at ourselves more deeply than is often comfortable and often what we see is our negativity and attributes we do not like. If we are identified with these roles we are in for a rocky ride. Luckily we have methods that help us quickly see these roles we are stuck in and we can return (hopefully faster each time) to a greater sense of self and

connectedness. Negative emotions and feelings are often great reminders that we have gotten attached and lost, and so we simply find our way back. Over time we develop a greater sense of self, and become familiar with the space and feeling of it. It becomes easier to find our way home.

The key is discovering that we are capable of great things, of filling many roles, and more importantly we may begin to develop an awareness that is able to stay separate from the drama. We are able to move more fluidly through the roles, playing out the appropriate role for each situation and then letting it go to embrace the next one. Our lives stop becoming a pre-determined conditioned sequence of one reaction after another, and we move into a more creative place, where we respond appropriately to the moment, based on being present to the moment. The rest unfolds naturally.

When we are able to recognize the roles we play and stay above them, it allows us to express our nature more freely. We begin to shake off our conditionings and habitual reactions to life and are more able to respond from a deeper aspect of our true nature. This leads to us feeling more centered, balanced and focused in the midst of the madness of life. We begin to become instruments of the higher and more divine aspects of our nature. The more we practice this, the more we are able to let go and surrender to the process and over time we begin to move more freely in all our relating with the world around us. So the path of selfless service helps us to explore more deeply our own connection to our heart and spirit and teaches us to use the head to find appropriate ways of honoring that connection.

Of course we are not yet enlightened saints who consistently operate from this space. For us the path is a dance between the head and our hearts. The head needs boundaries and control while the heart is totally free and craves the connection and feeling of purpose that comes through connecting with the world around us. We will often get caught up in our personality and roles, which will then define who we help, how much we are prepared to help, and also may cunningly motivate our caring and helping for selfish motivations or to fulfill our own wants and needs. We may reach out to someone because we need the intimacy of the connections, rather than listening to what the person actually needs, we replace their need with our own. This will limit our ability to help. But this too is part of the game, and leads us to question deeply our own motivations and intentions in helping. Although it may sound dark this is another great way to discover more about your own nature, and helps you see just where you are at in the game. When the light of awareness shines here, it can often help us break out of selfish patterns and things like equanimity and humour will prevent you from getting caught in self loathing.

A most important element on the path is to cultivate a sense of humour. Not to take it all so seriously but to become more playful and open. Do not be afraid of making mistakes but rather keep returning to the practice of developing this greater awareness. The whole process will naturally unfold often in unexpected and surprising ways. Provided we are not attached to the form we want it to take, it becomes a very rich and rewarding journey that fills life with purpose and meaning, as we allow our heart to open, and for our lives to be directed by the intuitive heart of our higher self.

So who is helping who? Well if one has to play the role of therapist/helper it implies someone has to play the role of patient/helped. This approach puts tremendous pressure on both people to play those roles and stifles the interactions by forcing a form onto it. The seva yoga approach is everybody is helping everybody and that the interaction is a place in which everybody is uplifted. When we have to play a role, it is vitally important to remember, first and foremost, we are human beings. To try connect to the environment and people at this level first. See the divine in every aspect of creation. This will allow us not to take the roles to seriously and help us have a more genuine and uplifting experience in life.

So the qualities we aim to cultivate through our practice are basically the same as any yogic or spiritual path:

**Awareness** – expanding our awareness and deepening it, so that we begin to experience and tap into higher faculties like our intuition, and our natural capacity for love, empathy and compassion.

**Equanimity** – to cultivate balance, so that interactions that are charged both positively and negatively do not have such a strong hold over us. We are not trying to get high or avoid being low but trying to discover the freedom that lies in both of these experiences.

**Surrender** – Let thy will be done. To do our best at the time and then leave the results or fruits of our endeavors to the powers that be.

Through the path of service, we cultivate these qualities, gain insight into our nature, see where we are stuck and still have work to do, and ultimately transform all our acts and our lives into a creative work of the divine force that put us here in the first place. So once again I ask: Who is helping?

## THE LEADING EDGE OF MY COMPASSION



***Ram Dass' 2011 New Year's message***[5]

I began to grow into the true meaning of compassion when I saw Maharaj-ji for the second time in India. He was sitting on a stone wall and he called me over. I knelt in front of him. This was only the second or third time that I had seen him. He looked at me and said, "Do you know Gandhi?" I said, "Well, I don't know him, but I've heard of him." He said, "What do you think?" I said, "He was a great saint." "Accha. (That's good.) " Then he said, "You be like Gandhi." I said, "I'd like to be." He hit me on the head and then said, "Tik (OK)."

That was my edge. I can't imitate Gandhi. I went out and bought some little wire glasses but that was as far as I could go. I wasn't going to take up spinning and weaving cloth. But the way Gandhi felt so at One with humanity and the way he meditated deeply to hear the rhythms of the Universe so that his own actions came out of a deeper rhythm, I would like to grow into that. That would be good to do with my life. That's my leading edge, the instruction Maharaj-ji gave me about Gandhi as a model for compassion.

As we keep deepening this commitment to our fellow human beings, it starts to become a more natural part of our compassionate heart. For a moment you feel like you see just behind the illusion of separateness. You can see beyond it and you get this incredible feeling that you've just caught a flashing glimpse into the mind of God. True compassion comes out of that place.

Hanuman is known as the breath of Rām. He is so close to God he is as close as his breath. And at one point in the Ramayana, Rām says to Hanuman "Who are you?" And Hanuman says "When I don't know who I am, I serve you. When I know who I am, I am you." That's an interesting place from which to do compassionate action.

Three levels of compassionate action as I see them are: 1) you do compassionate action as best you can as an exercise, a way to come closer to God, to Spirit, to Awareness, to the One; 2) you begin to feel you are a part of something larger than yourself, and you are becoming an instrument of God; and 3) you become that identity where you are no longer doing it or trying to get there, you become a pure instrument of the Divine.

In that third one you lose self-consciousness and then you are God manifesting, you are part of the hand of God. You are not doing anything, it's just God manifesting. I can sense that third level even if I'm not there yet. That's really the leading edge. Meanwhile you do your work honoring the first two and being patient.

## SWAMI SIVANANDA – A GREAT SEVA YOGI – BY SWAMI SATYANANDA[4]



Swami Sivananda used to say that just as there is an education system from kindergarten to university, similarly there is a schooling system in spiritual life. God exists, so you have to think about Him. You have to meditate and pray. You have to purify your heart. I asked, "But how?" He said that the kindergarten of spiritual life is service. What comes next? Loving others. Then the next class is "Give, give and give." Don't say, "You give to me," say, "I give to you." This is primary spiritual schooling - serve, love and give. This elementary class of spiritual life will prove very useful.

After this, Swami Sivananda said that we should purify the self: purify the mind, heart, intentions and actions. Practise ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truthfulness), brahmacharya (sensual restraint), aparigraha (non-possessiveness), tapas (austerity), asteya (honesty), shaucha (cleanliness), santosha (contentment) and so on. Purification means that just as you clean your dirty clothes by putting them in detergent, so you put your heart in detergent. Soak it in detergent and clean it. How? Swami Sivananda said, "Suffering and pain is the crucible into which nature throws a man whenever she wants to make him a sublime superman." You have to accept pain and suffering. Don't be afraid of pain. Don't depend on the things of worldly life. Riches will not go with you! What did Jesus say? "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." I don't mean that you shouldn't become rich, but you should not depend on wealth as your security in life. Security in life is purification.

After purification, Swami Sivananda spoke of meditation. He said that meditation is like going to college, it is higher education. In meditation or prayer you enter a state of shanti, peace or tranquillity, where you become one with God. There is only God in front of you, whether in the form of Rama, Christ, Guru or Govinda. Finally comes realization.

So, serve, love and give are elementary education. Purify is intermediate education and meditation is college education. Realization is postgraduate education. This is the curriculum of spiritual schooling. Swami Sivananda gave me the mantra: serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realize, be good, do good, be kind, be compassionate, bear insult, bear injury. This is very difficult, but it is the highest sadhana!

**Serve humanity**

Swami Sivananda's fundamental philosophy of life was social service, human service, seva. He used to place singing God's name at the top of the priority list. Meditation was at the end of his list, a long way off. Whereas you start your spiritual life with meditation, Swami Sivananda's spiritual life started with service and culminated in meditation. The beginning of spiritual life stems from service to humanity.

In Rishikesh, I had ample scope and opportunities for seva. Swami Sivananda used to call in the sweepers and scavengers, wash their feet and feed them. My response to that was negative. I found it useless and irrelevant for spiritual evolution. However, being his disciple I did render service. I cleaned, cooked and fed the scavengers, but my heart was not in it. There were many lepers in Rishikesh lined up along the roads and pathways. Once Swamiji thought of settling these lepers in proper housing. He was given some land by Tehri Maharaj on which he had some houses built for the lepers. He gave each one a goat. He also gave them bundles of bidis and told them not to go begging in the streets.

I was given the duty of going amidst the lepers and the sick to read and teach them the Ramacharitamanas and Ramayana, but my heart was not in the work. I used to accompany the doctors and distribute drugs and medicines among the lepers. I performed all the duties but not from my heart. However, when God inspires you to do seva, you take it as His blessing. The work and seva that are being carried out here now in Rikhia are not discharged as social service, but in compliance with God's will, in obedience to His command.

**ABC of love - acts of kindness**

Swami Sivananda's life was an example of compassion, charity and generosity. He was simple, devout, kind and compassionate. His life was very different from most of the sannyasins I have come across. His heart was very large. He was happiest when he was feeding and giving to people. His philosophy in life was that God is real and everything else is unreal. He was a very generous and large-hearted man; his heart was completely open, without any doors or windows. He was not at all interested in accumulating wealth. He would say, "Spend more than you have. Feed the poor. Give them medicine. Give blankets to the pilgrims. Make arrangements for drinking water during the summer and extend all possible help to the sadhus and sannyasins."

Swami Sivananda always used to think about others. Whenever he met people, he did not give spiritual lessons. He would always say nice things and he would give them clothes, food and medicine for their sickness and disease. He could remember the names of each one of his acquaintances from thirty-five to forty years back. If a man had become old, he would then ask, "How is your grandson? He was in the eighth class. Where is he now? What is he doing? He had a mole here. Is the mole still there?" You should know about the man whom you love. If I love you, I should know everything about you, especially your difficulties, problems, ambitions and desires. If I know nothing about you, if I don't want to know anything about you, then I can't care for you.

Love is very difficult because you don't know how to love; you don't know the ABC of love. Love is not being emotional and passionate. There is a clear-cut distinction between love and emotion. Love is an expression of purity that manifests when you become very strong within your own heart. That is why the saints have always emphasized love. Love is the feeling of oneness with others, feeling for others as you feel for yourself, to be able to feel the difficulty of another person as you feel your own.

You prepare yourself for love by little acts of kindness. The elementary training in love, the ABC of love, is little acts of kindness. What are little acts of kindness? Swami Sivananda used to say that if you can bear insult and injury, you are a very strong person. Swami Sivananda was not a miserly man. Whenever anyone came to ask him for something he would say, "Go on, give it to him." Once he completely cleaned out the whole ashram. We had no blankets because he had given them all away. The first thing he used to say was, "Namo Narayana, are you all right? Do you like chocolate?" The reply would come, "Yes Swamiji, I do like it." So he would say, "Okay Swami Satyananda, give him some chocolate." Then to another he would say, "Oh Buddhiji, how are you? I have a shirt for you."

**Love one another**

True love is the expression of your inner self in the language of purity and effulgence of heart. What Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, Zoroaster and other saints and sages have said about love is not easy to practise. The most difficult thing is to love your neighbour. You may have experienced your neighbour as your worst enemy. However, the saints were such strong people. They did not say, "Love thy distant neighbour," they said, "Love thy neighbour," because they knew that he is the one who always creates problems for you in your neighbourhood, fighting with you and consulting a lawyer over every little matter.

Love requires a lot of sacrifices: your comforts, your idiosyncrasies, your ego, your money, your life, everything. In love there is just giving, not taking. Love is an act of giving and giving and giving. In love, duality is fused into unity, two become one. When mankind learns how to love and serve one another, to be kind and tolerant to one another, to help one another and to share the problems, worries and ideas of others, then your family, your society and the world will be a better place to live in.

In everything he did throughout his life, Swami Sivananda maintained only one attitude - do good to everybody. His every action, whatever he did, the way he lived, was in itself a commentary on the great truths of yoga, Vedanta and tantra. Of course, he was my guru so I cannot compare him with other great saints, but I felt that he was unique because, although he lived on the higher plane of consciousness, he operated very efficiently on the normal plane of consciousness at the same time. Swami Sivananda was the humblest of the humble, the kindest of the kind, the warmest of the warm, the greatest among the great, and today his effulgence permeates and kindles the hearts of millions around the world.

## PRACTICES

A big help with being able to practice the path of service is to develop your own regular daily spiritual practice which in yoga is called Sadhana. Practices of yoga asana, pranayama, meditation and relaxation all help one cultivate awareness and equanimity. These qualities are essential for avoiding feeling burnout and from developing attachments to the service work. Some of the practices in the course are contemplative to help you explore your current feelings and thoughts on service. Other practices given are to help you cultivate more awareness of yourself so that you can listen more deeply for what is required and respond to your own hearts guidance on the path.

### FIRST STEPS

### ACT FROM THE HEART:

*Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are a hundred ways to kneel and kiss the ground. – Rumi*

*For many of us wanting to change things, it feels too risky to listen to our hearts. We lean toward the conventional, the sensible, and the efficient, and we miss the opportunity to contribute what is most important about us – our own understanding of what is true and unifying. Of course we need to be practical also, but only to serve what starts in the heart. This is the source of radical and enduring change. We need to listen for what we know to be true, and do what we love to do. – Mirabai Bush*

### LISTEN:

*The music of life is in danger of being lost in the music of the voice. – Gandhi*

*We need to listen fully. It is the basis of compassionate action. – Mirabai Bush*

*(below excerpt taken from Compassion in Action[2].)*

Pain and suffering may often seem to be calling us to jump in and fix things, but perhaps they are asking us first to be still enough to hear what can really help, what can truly get to the cause of this suffering, what will not only eliminate it now but prevent it from returning. So, before we act, we need to listen. When we do become quiet enough and "listen up," as we now say in the cities, the way opens, and we see the possibilities for action.

We give very little attention to learning to listen, learning to really hear another person or situation. Yet think back to the moments with other people when our hearts were engaged and we felt fed by being together. In those moments, weren't we hearing one another? In times like those, when we have listened to and heard one another, we have felt life arising from a shared perspective.

Each situation, each moment of life, is new. We and this other person or group of people have never been here before. Oh, we've been in moments like it, but the present moment is new even if we have performed the same action with the same person hundreds of times before. Of course, it's easy to think, "Well, it's just like the last time, so I'll do what I did last time," and then not have to listen to the new moment. But if we do that, our lives become boring replications of what we have always done before, and we miss the possibilities of surprise, of new and more creative solutions, of mystery.

For our often humdrum lives to retain the taste of living truth, we have to listen freshly—again and again. A human interaction includes both the uniqueness of each being and the unity of the two, which transcends the separateness. For our minds to take such a subtle process and trivialize it to "just this again" or "nothing but that" is to reduce us to automatons, to objects for one another. And for action to be compassionate, we need to eliminate the idea of object,

we need to be here together doing exactly what needs to be done to relieve pain and suffering in the simplest way we can. We need to listen.

Francis Giambrone, who has spent many years working with people with AIDS, tells how he began to learn to listen:
*"I remember my first case. It wasn't AIDS, it was cancer. It was my first death case at the hospice. I would come in and say, "Angelo, how are you?' and he would put on the television. Refused to talk to me. I would end up in his kitchen with his wife, and what was interesting was that I would think, Oh my God, here's my childhood. Dad is in the living room, won't communicate with me, and Mom and I are in the kitchen laughing and talking.*

*It was my parents Frank and Katherine and me, and it was Angelo and his wife and me. . . . And I thought, I'm going to do it differently this time.*

*"One day we were watching television and I lifted his foot and said, 'Angelo, look at your nails. They need to be cut.' And he looked at them and he said, 'Yeah.' I said, 'Do you want me to cut them?' And he said, 'All right.' And that, believe it or not, was the breakthrough. I sat there cutting his toenails and his fingernails, and slowly I asked him questions and I got him to talk.*

*"I had such strong ideas about what helping means. And what does it mean? It means listening and then doing. ... I had been thinking, Angelo, this is how you are going to die. These are the books you are going to read. But a lot of dying people are not concerned about how they are going to die. They want to stay alive! This experience had an impact on all my work—even my non-dying work. I discovered that I'm not there to impose my reality on other people . . . I'm there to be a listener."*

When we begin to act by listening, the rest follows naturally. It's not so easy, of course—it requires us to give up preconceived ideas, judgments, and desires in order to allow space to hear what is being said. True listening requires a deep respect and a genuine curiosity about situations as well as a willingness just to be there, to cut toenails and share stories. Listening opens the space, allows us to hear what needs to be done in that moment. It also allows us to hear when it is better not to act, which is sometimes a hard message to receive.
The music of our lives often gets lost in the music of our voices. We think that we already know what there is to hear. Sometimes we are simply moving a little too fast.

Recently the phone in a friend's kitchen rang; it was the organizer of a local project that was bringing Guatemalan village leaders to town for a three-week conference. "Yes," she said, before he had a chance to ask. "That's great. I have a house you could use for a gathering." "Thank you, that's very nice," he replied in his Puerto Rican accent that sounded like salsa music, "but what we really need is someone to drive them around." Ah, it's small, you may think, but there it is again—acting without listening. Isn't it at heart the same impulse that leads the World Bank to build a dam for villages that don't want the electric power it provides or the U.S. Agency for International Development to decide that a village needs a road to the market without asking the people if they have anything to sell there?

## ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENTS[7]

### CODES TO HELP CULTIVATE AWARENESS USEFUL WHEN EMBARKING ON A JOURNEY OF SELFLESS SERVICE.

The codes we have formulated are not intended to be moralistic. They are a means to an end. To reiterate they are suggestions by which you can start to consciously alter your attitude towards life's situations. They are intended to help you relax and delve a little deeper into your nature.
These codes are not supposed to change your lifestyle and we don't advise you to force them on yourself at all times. Only remember them as you go about your daily routine and their presence will help you from within, from your subconscious 'attitude centers'.

## CODE 1: ACCEPT OTHERS

Make the effort to begin to accept other people fully. Try not to see them merely as objects to be used for your own gratification. Try to accept others as also acting in accordance with their mental conditioning. What you see in them is only an external manifestation of their mental program. In this way they are no different from yourself, except their program may be a little different. You are now aware of your dependence on your mental conditioning; perhaps they don't realize it yet. If you can accept others more they in turn will start to accept you. Laugh at yourself, at your behaviour and at your antics.

## HEARTSPACE MEDITATION

This practice helps you centre yourself and discover a place of calm and balance, where you can explore and transform negative emotions and feelings into positive ones. It will help you feel more connected to yourself and everybody else too!

**Technique**

1. Sit comfortably on the floor or on a chair with your spine upright.
2. Place your hands on your knees with your fingers in Chinmaya Mudra.
3. Settle the body and then begin to observe your natural breath.
4. Observe the breath moving into the ribcage.
5. Keep watching the breath and discover a sense of space in the centre of the chest. It goes beyond the physical boundaries of the chest.
6. Breathe in and out feeling this space. Feel the centre of your chest expand with the inhalation. When you exhale bring your awareness back to the centre of this space.
7. Practise this for some time.
8. Then allow any negative feelings that you are experiencing to come up in this space and allow them to be transformed here, by focusing on feelings of love, peace, joy and balance.
9. If you have no negative feelings than just focus on the feelings of love, peace, joy and balance.
10. Practise this for some time.

## THE HEART OF SERVICE[6]

1. Take a quiet period of meditation to ask your heart about service. Sit and be silent for some time. When you are ready, pose the following questions inwardly to yourself. Pause after each one and give your heart time to answer, allowing a response from the deepest levels of your compassion and wisdom.
2. Imagine yourself five years from now as you would most like to be, having done all the things you want to have done, having contributed all the things you want to contribute in the most heartfelt way.
3. What is your greatest source of happiness?
4. What is the thing you've done of which you are most proud?
5. What is the contribution you've made to the world that brings your heart the greatest satisfaction?
6. To make this contribution to the world, what unworthiness would you have to relinquish?
7. To make this contribution to the world, what strengths and capacities would you have to recognize in yourself and others?
8. What would you have to do in your life today to begin this service, this contribution?
9. Why not begin?

## AWARENESS OF THE PRESENT

This practice can be done several times a day to help re-focus and centre yourself in your being and develop more awareness.

1. Bring your attention to how you are feeling.
2. Check your energy level, are you feeling tired or energetic?
3. How is your mind and your mood? Are you happy, depressed, tense, distressed or calm?
4. Notice any body sensations - heat or cold, etc., and see if there is tension anywhere in the body.
5. Try to imagine what expression is on your face, what your way of walking or talking may reveal.
6. Check your body - is it still or active? Are you aware of its movements or are you unconsciously tapping your feet, scratching, or playing with your hair or fingers? Become totally aware of the body.

## MAKE CONTACT WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

This practice should be taken up in all situations when you enter into a new space.

1. Whenever you enter into a new space, situation or environment make proper contact with it.
2. Consciously connect to the space, push your awareness out through your senses, listen, smell, feel it, connect to it.
3. If there are people make contact with them, try at least make eye contact or even if they are not looking consciously acknowledge them being there.
4. Make friends with the space.
5. Be open and allow the space to make contact with you.

## THE WAY I'D REALLY LOVE TO HELP IS …"

1. Write down or say out loud, starting with "The way I'd really love to help is…." and keep going, when you get stuck then repeat the starting "The way I'd really love to help is…." Continue for as long as you feel inspired to.

Examples: *(taken from Compassion in Action[2].)*
One friend, who had been haunted by thoughts of people living in welfare hotels and on the streets, wrote, "The way I'd really love to help is to work with homeless mothers, because I know if I were homeless I would be scared and tired. But I don't know how I could be helpful. What I'd really love to do is use my camera to take pictures, but what good would it do? What I'd really love to do is be together as people, not relating to houses but to each other. What I'd really love to do is have fun together because I know that when you are stressed it's hard to have fun, but that doesn't sound right somehow. ..." These rambling thoughts became a small project, in which, after talking to homeless mothers about what they would want, she taught them to photograph their children. The photographs became a gallery show, which raised public awareness about the issue. To go with the photographs of the children, she created portraits of the mothers. The show was eloquent; people saw the beauty, the humanity, the joy, and the sadness of these families without homes. The young women not only gained treasured photographs of their children but developed the sense of mastery that comes from learning a new skill. And our friend was able to do what she really wanted to do.

Richard Sandier, by contrast, is an accomplished New York photographer who is, among other things, a stadium photographer for the New York Mets magazine. Richard is also a journalistic photographer who shoots in the street. One of his concerns is the number of homeless people and the number of people walking by them without paying attention. His extraordinary images of these two worlds coexisting inches apart without contact have been shown in a number of galleries. While doing this work, Richard also began to want to do something more and something different, and he began to play the saxophone in a place that needed the healing and had interesting acoustics: the

subway, where, as he says, "people walk around in a bubble of territorial exclusion" that is rarely penetrated. As he acted on this idea, two things happened: the music at times entered the bubbles, surprising and waking people up with its beauty, and the money that was dropped into his saxophone case he dropped into the hands of the homeless who were also hanging around listening. The best response, he said, came from people who weren't asking for it but who clearly needed it. "The smiles on their faces were something to believe," he said. "What is this? Who am I? Is this really happening? Is this New York? It was fabulous." He knew this wasn't changing city policy on low-cost housing or real estate development, but it was what felt right for him at the time. And who doesn't understand what healing music can bring into the world?

The way I'd really love to help is…

## SESSION 2: THE PATH OF SELFLESS SERVICE 2

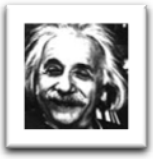
### MODULE INTRO

In this module we explore the path of service according to the yogic tradition. The path of Seva Yoga. We begin to explore the elements of the heart (Bhakti Yoga) and our actions (Karma Yoga). We will discover how to open and purify the heart, and then discover how best to express this open heart through our performance and action = Seva Yoga. We will see how applying certain principles provide us with a model we can apply in life so that our service endeavors have the desired enlightening effect.

### QUOTES ON SELFLESS SERVICE



*Let your actions be performed as a service to the evolution of all beings and you will enjoy a life of utter freedom, simplicity and bliss. - Swami Satyananda*



*Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile.*
*– Albert Einstein*



Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.
-Dr. Seuss

### STORY

#### THE CLOWN IN THE CHILDRENS WARD[3]

My idea was pretty simple at the beginning. I started to volunteer in wards with terminally ill children or burn victims—just go in there to cheer them up a little, spread around some giggles. Gradually, it developed that I was going to come in as a clown.

First, somebody gave me a red rubber nose, and I put that to work. Then I started doing some elementary makeup. Then I got a yellow, red, and green clown suit. Finally, some nifty, tremendous wing-tip shoes, about two and a half feet long, with green tips and heels, white in the middle. They came from a clown who was retiring and wanted his feet to keep on walking.

It's a little tricky coming in. Some kids, when they see a clown, they think they're going to be eaten alive. And kids in hospitals and burn units, of course, are pretty shaky. So it's always good to lead with some bubbles, just blow some bubbles around the ward. Then I'll move from bed to bed, just feeling out what's appropriate: maybe checkers, or blackjack, or go-fish. Or if they're lying there with tubes coming out of them, I'll hit the kids with riddles. Riddles are great.

Later, if they can manage it, I'll give them this paper bag that they can fit over their heads. When they put it on and sort of blow their lips together, they can make this crazy sound I call the Funny Mantra. They turn into a living kazoo.

I'll say, "If things get too tough, just take that paper bag from under your pillow and sound off. Maybe that'll help a little, and it'll sure surprise the nurses."

Because things do get very tough in there, I'll tell you. They were very tough for me at the beginning—very. You see some pretty terrible things in these wards. Seeing children dying or mutilated is nothing most of us ever get prepared for. Nobody teaches us to face suffering in this society. We never talk about it until we get hit in the face.

Like when I was starting out I was making the rounds one day at a children's hospital. The shade was pulled on this one room so I couldn't see, but I peeked in the door. It was a room with badly burned children in it. They had them in chrome crib beds with walls on the side, so they couldn't crawl out or fall out if it got too terrible in there.

There was this one little black kid in one of them. He was horribly burned. He looked like burnt toast. Pieces of his face weren't there. Pieces of his ears were missing. Where was his mouth? You could hardly tell who he was. There was no way of pinning a person to the face, what little there was of it.

It was just terrible, just mind-boggling. My jaw dropped, I gasped, and I came completely unglued. I remember flashing back to the antiwar movement. There was a picture of a napalmed kid I used to carry around at demonstrations. Suddenly here was that kid right in front of me. Unbelievably painful to behold.

I was overwhelmed. And my mind went off in all sorts of directions. "What's it going to be like if he lives?" "What if I had a child this happened to?" "What if this happened to me?"

So there we were, burnt toast and unglued clown. Quite a sight, I bet. And I'm fighting just to stay there, trying to find a way to get past my horror.

All of a sudden, this other little kid comes whizzing by—I think he was skating along with his IV pole—and he stops, and kinda pushes around me, and looks into the crib at this other kid, and comes out with, "Hey. YOU UGLY!" Just like that. And the burnt kid made this gurgling laugh kind of noise and his face moved around, and all of a sudden I just went for his eyes, and we locked up right there, and everything else just dissolved. It was like going through a tunnel right to his heart. And all the burnt flesh disappeared, and I saw him from another place. We settled right in.

"YOU UGLY.'" Right. He ugly. He probably knows how ugly he is more than anyone else. And if he's gotta deal with people hanging around with saliva coming out of their mouths, it's gonna be extra horrible. But if somebody just meets him in the eye and says, "Hey, what's happening? Wanna hear a riddle... ?"

So being able to look You Ugly in the eye . . . that's done a lot for me. Because once I do that, I can go on to see what might be done that can ease things up. And you get all kinds of inspiration.

Like, some of us were setting up to show Godzilla in the kids' leukemia ward. I was making up kids as downs. One kid was totally bald from chemotherapy, and when I finished doing his face, another kid said, "Go on and do the rest of his head." The kid loved the idea. And when I was done, his sister said, "Hey, we can show the movie on Billy's head." And he really loved that idea. So we set up Godzilla and ran it on Billy's head, and Billy was pleased as punch, and we were all mighty proud of Billy, It was quite a moment. Especially when the doctors arrived.

So I don't know. Burnt skin or bald heads on little kids— what do you do? I guess you just face it—when the kids are really hurting so bad, and so afraid, and probably dying, and everybody's heart is breaking. Face it, and see what happens after that, see what to do next.

I got the idea of traveling with popcorn. When a kid is crying I dab up the tears with the popcorn and pop it into my mouth or into his or hers. We sit around together and eat the tears.

## WHAT IS SEVA YOGA?

(Adapted from a talk by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati[1])



**Seva = saha eva = 'to be with that'**
To be with what? To be with that which is human, compassionate and loving. In other words, seva means to **connect with** the divine, transcendental nature **and to express** that nature in thought, word and deed.

Seva has been translated into English as service, but seva actually translates as the final stage of human involvement in the world while being in a higher state of consciousness. To arrive at this final stage, one undergoes **a process of refinement and purification of feelings, thoughts and actions. This process is the path of Seva Yoga.**

To do this you have to **let go** of the many identities and ideas that you hold close. This is where the concept of letting go or surrender comes in. Surrendering to the divine will and becoming the instrument of its peace is the outcome of seva.

One of the main purposes of seva is to purify one's heart. Purification of the heart comes about when expectations and attachments become refined; they are no longer sensorial or sensual, and do not carry any idea of gain or loss. Instead, you feel for everyone as you do for yourself.

It is a **shift of ideas from self-orientated to self-expressive**. Purifying the emotions through seva allows the expression of the natural qualities of the heart. This is further intensified with bhakti yoga practices.

Seva is developed through karma yoga (yoga of action) and purity of heart through bhakti yoga (yoga of the heart). Both go hand in hand.

From the above one can see that seva yoga is a path, process and expression of the spiritual development that leads one to an awakened state where the highest qualities of an open heart are expressed in the world.

There are steps and stages that lead to the experience of seva. The medium used to accomplish these steps is action (karma). The whole of creation, life and existence is based on the principle of action and response to action. No one is free from action. Just as one breathes in and out, action and the outcome of action is a continuous process leading to evolution. Action can be directed towards self-fulfillment or the selfish group of actions, or towards the selfless group of actions. Actions can be diverted in either direction. Although the possibility of channeling one's efforts and actions in either direction exists, due to the association of the senses and the mind with the environment, all our actions tend to be self-oriented.

It is these self-oriented actions that give birth to strife, expectations, desires, possessiveness, attachments and jealousies. They develop into a mental obsession, a personality characteristic, and go on growing. An attachment grows into obsession, into insecurity. Analyze how an attachment started in your own life. It is not enough to say that you are attached because someone is your father, mother, son or daughter. There is a point when attachment begins and subsequently goes through changes in a positive as well as a negative direction. How can we change the direction of our karma without creating an imbalance in life? This is where the attitudes of karma yoga come into play.

In normal situations, you neither observe nor try to guide your karmas. In all areas of life, we follow set performances, karmas, of the body and mind. A conditioned creativity expresses itself. It is this conditioned creativity that has to become unconditional by adopting the attitudes identified in karma yoga. Karma yoga helps develop immunity to the effects or results of karmas or actions.

In the practice of karma yoga, actions should be performed 1) with utmost perfection, 2) without any expectation, and 3) with total participation. If you can incorporate these three ideas in any activity that you undertake at any time, you will find greater happiness, peace and enjoyment. You will discover your own creative nature: a better way to fold paper, a better way to apply glue, a better way to dig. Activities will no longer remain mechanical or routine. Every

moment will become one of learning, knowing and realizing, of adjusting. When this begins to happen, your whole life becomes a sadhana (spiritual practice).

Work/act with the feeling of dedicating the actions to your guru, God, the universe, the divine force, fellow human beings. Whatever you do is being offered to them, and therefore you will not accrue the effects of karma.

The secret of managing karma lies in the above sentence.

When one can turn a self-oriented karma into a selfless karma, it becomes seva. The clue is simple. When you do something, remember that you are not the enjoyer. It may be pleasing to you, but you are working to achieve a level of excellence, perfection and qualitative expression in your life. That has to be the aim of your action. Whether you are a doctor, draftsman, gardener, stonemason, engineer, or anything else, the thought behind every action must be that it should help not one, but many. The action should uplift others, whether they are known to you or are total strangers. Such an action is dedicated to guru, it is dedicated to God, or perhaps a more expanded idea of the self.

When we come to an understanding that we are only a medium to fulfill a destiny, that there is something else playing us, the first level of surrender comes. "I am not the performer; I am only a box; like a harmonium. Somebody is playing me, sometimes in accord, sometimes not, but I am being played and with each melody, each piece, one part of my destiny is being fulfilled." The first level of surrender comes at this point: **I am not the doer.**

The commandment of yoga, ishwara pranidhana, is lived: **Let thy will be done**. Ishwara pranidhana is the first stage in transforming self-oriented karma into selfless karma. This leads to purification of emotions.

Swami Sivananda, in his practical eightfold path of yoga, has placed service on the first rung. He says that service, or connecting with those in need, helps to purify oneself. He says, do not fight your attachments because they are a part of you, they are you. He gives the example of drops of black ink put in a cup of water. If you want to clear the water of the dark ink, add more water. If your life is a cup and attachments are drops of ink, add more water. When the attachment is diluted and directed not to one but to ten, not to ten but to a hundred, not to a hundred but to a thousand, then the attachment for one is divided by a thousand. You reduce your attachments by including more people in the fold of your life.

When you include more people in the fold of your life, you experience the eternal human connection that transcends intellect, goes beyond feelings, and tells you that you are a part of that unified field called Consciousness. That is also the concept of ishwara pranidhana, leading to purification of the heart, because you have expanded your perceptions and awareness.

Using actions and awareness of the actions to change the attitude and understanding, and to sensitize our emotions to connect with others, eventually leads to seva. It is a state of participation in life at a higher level of consciousness. This state is not easy to come by because the ego always plays tricks.

In the Bhagavad Gita (18:61), Krishna tells Arjuna that in order to be a real human being, you should see everybody with the same eyes – Ishwara sarvabhutanam hriddesherjuna tishthati. Nobody is superior or inferior. See them all as emanations of that spirit and therefore as a complete being all the time. You can identify with them physically as small or large, socially as your friends or family, but in your heart of hearts see them as independent units living their own destiny. You are there to help, support and encourage them to live their destiny. Be endowed with compassion. When in association with people around you, be without any selfish motive and free from ego expressions. Be happy when there is comfort and pleasure and also when there is discomfort and suffering. In this way Krishna identifies the qualities of a person who lives in the world, but is not bound by the trappings of the world.

It may sound difficult or philosophical, but in reality it is not. Everything is how we perceive it. What you perceive will be explained differently by another. You have to begin where you are by observing your karma and participating wholeheartedly by putting your creative nature into it.

Therefore, when practicing seva, exposure is given to many different situations where you know that you are not the gainer, yet you try to express your efficiency and creativity, try to become one with what you are doing, not through the ego, not by saying that this is menial, this is high, this is low, but recognizing the tasks as actions that simply have to be done. Why should ego confrontation take place? Why not a gentle acceptance of the situation by being a part of it?

The change takes over and one becomes pure, free from desires and ego influences, but not from commitment. Actions become seva. You identify with your higher nature, and that higher nature expresses itself through you.

There is a story of a sannyasin who practised austerities for many years to have a glimpse of God. Finally God appeared in front of him and said, “Ask for anything.” The sannyasin looked at God and said, “I did my austerities to have your darshan. I don’t desire anything more.” God said, “But I have spoken, so you have to ask.” The sannyasin said, “You are insulting me by asking me to ask.” God said, “But I am bound by my word!” The sannyasin got angry and just walked away. As God watched him go with his shadow following him, he said to himself, “I will grant the boon of healing to his shadow.” That was it. The man did not know and he kept on walking. The shadow fell on a dead tree and the tree revived. The shadow fell on a blind man and he could see. The shadow fell on a dead person and he came to life. Unknown to the sannyasin, the shadow was working miracles behind him. That is the final example of seva, where you become only a medium of expressing God’s grace and will. That is the meaning of the word seva, where you are with that.

The translation of the word seva in English as service is passable, but in reality seva is the culmination of your having perfected karma yoga. It is the outcome of a state where you are able to perform karma yoga with three ideas only: perfection, participation and no expectation. If you can follow these three ideas, ishwara pranidhana will happen automatically. When you are striving for perfection, trying to do the best you can and improving every time, new expressions of creativity are seen. When there is total participation, one-pointedness comes. When there is no expectation, you let go and surrender comes.

The mind, emotions, and actions: head, heart and hands, become aligned; they are balanced. It is this balanced expression that is known as seva. And the world situation provides ample encouragement for one to move into the component of seva.

## SEVA STARTS AT HOME:

There was a young man who arrived at the ashram one day and told Swami Niranjan that he wished to kill himself. He felt that nobody in his family liked him or respected him. He felt isolated from his family members and that none of them helped him or supported him.

Swami Niranjan asked to do one thing before he committed suicide. In the next week, he asked him to do one thing for each of the family members to help make their day a little easier, without expectation of any reward. Just help for the sake of helping and not to even tell them what he is doing. He agreed.

On the Monday, for the first time ever, he went to the market to do the grocery shopping for his mother, giving her a break and some much needed time to relax. On Tuesday he helped his sister with her maths homework and she was able to go and play with her friends without worrying about schoolwork. On Wednesday he helped his father fix the fence and prune a tree, preventing his father from having a sore back from the hard labour. On Thursday he accompanied his grandmother to the doctors for a check-up and kept her mind off worrying about her health by asking her to tell him stories from her past. On Friday he helped the domestic worker clean the oven, so she was able to go home to her own family earlier that weekend.

Additionally he helped prepare some of the meals, made his own bed, and offered tea or coffee to the other people around when he was making for himself. By Saturday the attitudes of all the family members had changed drastically. He had systematically improved his relationship with his entire family and felt also a sense of belonging and purpose in life. His family talked more freely and confided more with him. He no longer wanted to take his own life, instead he saw how uplifting it was to help others and that all of his previous depression was directly related to him being too self absorbed. He continued with this unconditional service to his family, identifying their needs and seeing what he could do to help make their lives less of a burden. His family began to respect and treasure his company.

He continued like this and over the next year and gradually extended the size of his family to include others. He set up a children’s yoga fellowship, which is now one of the largest children’s yoga movements in the world and has helped thousands of children to become the best of what they are!

## PRACTICES

### FIRST STEPS[2]

### START SMALL:

*Small service is true service…. The daisy, by the shadow that is casts, protects the lingering dewdrop from the sun. – William Wordsworth*

*Each small act is part of a great fabric. – Mirabai Bush*

*Small scale operations are always less likely to be harmful than large scale ones. There is wisdom in smallness even if only on account of the smallness and patchiness of human knowledge. – E.F . Schumacher.*

### RESOURCES, SKILLS, AND TALENTS:

*It's all done with people. – Wavy Gravy*

(below excerpt taken from Compassion in Action[2].)
In the mountains of Sierra los Cuchumatanes in northwest Guatemala, a meeting was beginning. Many people from the community had come, especially those who were the official representatives of the many small *aldeas,* or hamlets, within the community. The meetinghouse was made of adobe and had a tin roof, which was cheaper and easier to install than the traditional thatch. Inside the room were some simple pine chairs and two long, narrow benches; on the wall were a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and a calendar advertising chemical fertilizer. The people were all Mayans, descendants of the people who gave us corn, the number zero, the Mayan calendar, and the Tikal pyramids. They had recently returned to their village after two years of hiding from the army, which had threatened to kill them during the violence of the early eighties. Now they were about to meet for the first time with some people from the North, who might help them with a development project.

Don Benito opened the meeting with a welcome to the visitors and with thanks to God. Then he began to talk about the situation: "Our houses were burned, our animals died, our land is fallow. Many of our men were killed. We have no tools, no seeds, no fertilizer. We have nothing. We are only humble campesinos."

Three years later, the people Don Benito had called humble, by which he meant useless, not modest, had created a healthy, productive community, with good harvests, a medical program, houses for even the widows and orphans, a weaving and tailoring project, and a library. All they had received from the outside was training and some cash to prime the pump. Overwhelmed by their needs, they had greatly understated their talents and resources: they knew how to grow corn, they knew how to build houses, they knew which herbs reduce pain and which flowers attract bees; they had a deeply internalized sense of community, which encouraged cooperation and increased productivity, and they were open to learning new skills, such as tailoring and preventive health care. They already had everything they needed, except a small amount of help from the outside.

We often underestimate ourselves when we think about what our resources are; we become "humble campesinos." But each of us has something valuable to offer the world. When thinking about how to help, we need to look at and appreciate what we have and who we are, including skills, talents, money, time, and other resources. If we take an unbiased look at ourselves (difficult as that is), we will find that, in spite of all our limitations and neuroses, each of us knows a healing herb or a farming technique or simply loves to hold babies —we all have something to contribute to the healing of the whole. It may not be glamorous or seem important, but don't overlook it: we are all in this ark for a reason.

## ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENTS[7]

### CODE 2: ACCEPT YOURSELF.

Know that your actions are the result of your mental makeup. For this reason don't worry about your deficiencies and problems. Accept your limitations. But at the same time feel the need **to** clean out the mind of its conflicts. It is our inability to accept ourselves that causes so much anguish in our lives.

### CODE 3: SEE THE DIVINE IN EVERYTHING

Whenever you interact with anyone or anything, try be aware of a deeper level awareness, where you recognize that the person or object you are interacting with is, as Ram Dass put it "My Guru in drag." See the interaction as a divine meeting. So on the surface level you are interacting with the person within the specific role you are playing, but at the same time understand that both you and them are both aspects of the same Divinity, allow that feeling to help guide you words, thoughts and deeds in the situation.

*"I see Jesus in every human being. I say to myself, this is hungry Jesus, I must feed him. This is sick Jesus. This one has leprosy or gangrene...I serve because I love Jesus." – Mother Therese*

## HEARTSPACE MEDITATION

As for session 1.

## EYE GAZING

Sit opposite another person. Keep the eyes closed and settle the body comfortably. Let everything soften, particularly the face and eyes. Letting go of all expression and tension around the eyes. Connect for a few moments to the environment through sounds, touch, smells, and taste. Then connect to the natural breath flowing inside of you. After some moments, gently open your eyes and make eye contact with the person opposite from you. Hold each other's gaze for some time. Be aware of your thoughts, feelings, sensation and experience.

Continue to gaze at each other's eyes and allow your heart to open, feel as if you are connecting to this person heart to heart, with the same intensity that your eyes are connecting. Again be aware of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and the experience. After some time raise your hands together in front of the chest and thank the other person. End the practice.

## AWARENESS OF THE SENSES 1

For a few minutes, whether you are sitting, standing, walking, eating, etc., give your full attention to what you are experiencing through your senses. Do not just look, listen, feel, smell and taste, but experience the sensations totally. Bring all your faculties to your impressions. If you hear a sound, discover from which direction it is coming, what its source is, what effect does it have on you? If a taste, how does your body and mind react to it?

Look around you and see if any particular object catches your attention. Why does it do so and what thoughts does it stimulate in your mind?

If a smell, what is it and from where does it come? Do you associate it with anything else? If you are touching something, how does it feel? Do you compare it with something else?

## REFLECT ON YOUR TALENTS

Spend some time reflecting on your skills, talents and offerings. Include everything even things that seem stupid or things you don't feel "qualified" to call yourself. Write them down.

## SELFLESS SERVICE STARTS AT HOME

Pick one member of your family, your partner, or if you live alone, a neighbour or a friend.

Try to find ways of doing things for them or helping them out, even in very small and simple things. Do not tell them what you are up to and do not expect anything in return. Just simply try do what you can to help. Also don't impose any of your own ideas as to what is helpful. Try identifying their needs and fulfilling them. Serve the person with the idea that you are serving the divine. Practice this for a week or longer and observe the way it makes you feel about yourself, and observe the changes in the relationship. If you find this beneficial then continue the practice.

This technique is a great way to help nurture and grow a meaningful relationship with your partner. Many relationships these days are give and take, often with more take than give, and also hugely based on conditions. If I do this for you, I expect this in return. Our love for our partner is conditional love. This technique will help you cultivate unconditional love for your partner through selfless acts of service. Serve your partner without expectations or being a martyr. You may find this the key to a deeper and more meaningful relationship that will teach you more about yourself and the human condition.  Try it and see if it takes you deeper.

Write down one thing you did each day for the next week and any thoughts or observations you make.

## SESSION 3: NATURAL COMPASSION AND REFLECTION ON SUFFERING

### MODULE INTRO

It is easy to become despondent and overwhelmed by the amount of suffering we see in the world. However if we look into the nature of suffering a little deeper we can begin to understand what a blessing it can be. Processed with the right attitude and understanding, suffering can be transformed into pure grace. That is not to say we learn to effectively avoid suffering, but rather it is possible that we cultivate attitudes that we apply to suffering so that it becomes less crippling to us and more something that we can work with positively. We look at why people suffer and how it can be transformed into grace. That is how people can use and view suffering, which is universal, as a means to awaken. Of course we do not run around telling people who are suffering, don't worry it is good for you. We do our best to alleviate suffering and yet at the same time we understand that suffering is part of life and has its reasons for being there. The ability to become less attached to suffering allows us more freedom to act and respond to it in ways that are more helpful and appropriate, rather than reacting to it, which tends to create more suffering.

It was the Buddha who first talked about three noble truths, namely that 1) all life is suffering (even if it is pleasurable at first, it ultimately leads to suffering because nothing lasts), 2) the cause of suffering is our clinging mind and our attachments to objects, and 3) by seeing and letting go of these attachments we can become free of suffering.

Along with reflections on suffering, our story focuses on the idea of natural compassion. That is to say that compassion is a natural expression of all life and that help and compassionate action can often come in unexpected and mysterious ways that prove we are never truly alone. That simply asking for help without expectation of how that help comes, allows the help to answer.

### QUOTES ON SELFLESS SERVICE



*"Suffering is part of our training program for becoming wise." - Ram Dass*



*I slept and dreamt that life was joy*
*I awoke and saw that life was service*
*I acted and behold, service was joy.*
*-Rabindranath Tagore*



*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*

### STORY

#### NATURAL COMPASSION[3]

I was in about forty feet of water, alone. I knew I should not have gone alone, but I was very competent and just took a chance. There was not much current, and the water was so warm and enticing. But when I got a cramp, I realized at once how foolish I was. I was not very alarmed but was completely doubled up with stomach cramps. I tried to remove my weight belt, but I was so doubled up I could not get to the catch. I was sinking and began to feel more frightened, unable to move. I could see my watch and knew that there was only a little more time on the (oxygen)

tank before I would be finished with breathing. I tried to massage my abdomen. I wasn't wearing a wet suit, but couldn't straighten out and couldn't get to the cramped muscles with my hands.

I thought, 'I can't go like this! I have things to do! I just couldn't die anonymously this way, with no one to even know what happened to me. I called out in my mind, 'somebody, something, help me!'

I was not prepared for what happened. Suddenly I felt a prodding from behind me under the armpit. I thought, 'Oh, no, sharks!' I felt real terror and despair. But my arm was being lifted forcibly. Around into my field of vision came an eye - the most marvellous eye I could ever imagine. I swear it was smiling. It was the eye of a big dolphin. Looking into that eye, I knew I was safe.

It moved farther forward, nudging under, and hooked its dorsal fin under my armpit with my arm over its back. I relaxed, hugging it, flooded with relief. I felt that the animal was conveying security to me, and that it was healing me as well as lifting me toward the surface. My stomach cramp went away as we ascended, and I relaxed with security, but I felt very strongly that it healed me too.

At the surface, it drew me all the way in to shore. It took me into water so shallow that I began to be concerned for it, that it would be beached, and I pushed it back a little deeper, where it waited, watching me, I guess to see if I was all right.

It felt like another lifetime. When I took off the weight belt and oxygen, I just took everything off and went naked back into the ocean to the dolphin. I felt so light and free and alive, and just wanted to play in the sun and the water, in all that freedom. The dolphin took me back out and played around in the water with me. I noticed that there were a lot of dolphins there, farther out.

After a while it brought me back to shore. I was very tired then, almost collapsing, and he made sure I was safe in the shallowest water. Then he turned sideways with one eye looking into mine. We stayed that way for what seemed like a very long time, timeless I guess, in a trance almost, with personal thoughts of the past going through my mind. Then it made just one sound and went out to join the others, and all of them left.

## THEORY TOPICS

### REFLECTIONS ON SUFFERING BY RAMDASS[5]



One of the things that makes relationships so difficult is the way in which we protect ourselves from suffering -- from our own and from each others. Because when you love someone you don't want to lay your suffering on them and your fears. Also you are afraid if you open your heart too far their suffering will overwhelm you. Because when you look at the world, you just see suffering everywhere. If you scratched the surface of every person in this room, you will find that there is some suffering. Some people who are walking around here smiling at each other and sitting down and having wonderful, gentle conversations, inside have very deep pain and deep fear. But they have learned so well how to mask it from each other. The culture reinforces that saying, *don't bring your pain to me. I only want your happiness. I'll put up with a little of it but not much of it because you will scare me*. Now just as I said before, if you are going to be able to deal with seeing someone else's beauty, you have to be able to acknowledge your own beauty. In a similar way if you are going to able to be available for someone else's suffering you have to be able to acknowledge your own suffering and be able to understand the nature of suffering in such a way that you have converted the quality of suffering in yourself. Gurdjieff, the Russian philosopher, said there is nothing that can be attained spiritually without suffering in life. But at the same time, if you are going to proceed on the journey you must sacrifice suffering. You hear the dual nature of it. You have to have suffered because the suffering is what burns through you and deepens the compassion and opens the door. Suffering

brings you closer to the mystery. At the same moment if you hold on to the suffering and grab at it and sort of wallow in it or cling to it, it stops the journey. There is an understanding of suffering such that you don't invite suffering into your life but when it comes you work with it and transform it. The extreme of it is the Christian monk who is saying, "God, God give me more pain. Give me more suffering because I want to get closer to you." And Maharaj ji saying, "Do you like suffering or joy," and saying, "I love suffering – it brings me so close to God."

To understand the nature of suffering is the precondition for being able to convert it, to see the way in which suffering is grace. Suffering is a gift that is given to you to allow you to come home. The understanding is contained in the Buddha's first three noble truths. First one is there is suffering. Birth has suffering, death has suffering, sickness has suffering, aging has suffering, not getting what you want has suffering, getting what you don't want has suffering. Even getting what you want has suffering because it is in time and it is going to corrupt. So there is fear even in having what you want. So there is suffering inherent in being in form. It is the base rule. It's just built into it. It's not that Buddha was a downer. He was just pointing out - because people are so busy denying it - he was pointing out that it is an inherent nature of form. There is suffering.

But then his second noble truth is the crux of the matter. He said the cause of suffering in all of this is the clinging of mind. It's like you watch people age. I can feel as I age that the suffering would come if I held on to my youth. But to the extent that I open to these new sensations... like if I could run the four-minute mile in ten minutes and then as I get older I can only run the four-minute mile in 20 minutes... If I am living in a culture which only measures my adequacy in terms of how fast I run the four-minute mile, do you realize that age is my enemy? Do you realize that what I am doing is making nature my enemy. I am making the nature of things my enemy? Do you see the inherent problem of living in a culture that worships youth that worships all of the qualities of power... It is a hunting tribe. So the peak years are 18-20 to 40, something like that and then from then on it is all downhill. And medical science allows us now to go on and on and on. So it is just slowly going down and down and down, if down is measured by these very narrow values. If you look at the advertising in our culture, except for IRAs and insurance, the numbers of images of older people are very very few. They are treated as a minority group and given a certain fraction to keep the retired peoples association from getting up in arms politically. But you can look at the essence of what the issue is. The issue is not the growing old. The issue is the clinging to a model of anything. Like you cling to a model of what beauty is. The fun I have is playing with that issue in the culture. I always say in my lectures I look at this hand. And you look at this hand now and it is all getting wrinkled. There are these blood veins and bones showing. There used to be all just skin. You never noticed all that stuff. Now it's all wrinkling. It's got spots on it. It's really incredible, just as an aesthetic experience. If I didn't think it was my hand, just looking at that, it's really quite beautiful. I mean it's got real character. I love these spots. They're really far out. I love that in the culture, the Porcelana ad it, says, "They call these aging spots. I call them ugly," says a woman as she's putting on Porcelana cream. It is interesting that as you flip your consciousness and just allow the processes of nature to happen and stop pitting yourself against them, you are able to say, "They call these ugly, I call them aging spots." There is a kind of relaxed appreciation of change instead of this feeling like it is all downhill. I used to be able to walk and now I can't walk I've got to sit. Interesting about aging. What have you been doing all week? You sit. You draw your awareness in from your ears and from your eyes and follow your breath. Look what happens when you get old. You lose your hearing. You lose your sight. You've got arthritis. You can't move. It is an absolute perfect time for meditating. It's as if God were giving you a little message saying, "Don't you think it is time you looked inside?" And you are saying *No, we're all young*! And you're busy being young. It is wonderful to stay vital and stay active and stay all that and take care of your body and treat it with respect it and enjoy it. If you look at the myths of old age in this culture, it is showing all old people acting like young people and saying isn't that wonderful. Well it is wonderful and it stinks, both. Because it is creating myths that create suffering and myths that create suffering are unfortunate because they increase paranoia and separateness. There is such unconsciousness in the way our culture works and when you begin to be a little conscious, you can hardly bear what you are seeing, that it's all different than you thought it was.

The second noble truth is the clinging to the suffering. The clinging of mind is what creates the suffering. You watch it in dying. If people are holding to life they are suffering about dying. If people are wishing they were dead they are suffering in living. If they wish they were rich they are suffering because they are poor. I have been with people now in

other cultures where it absolutely disoriented me. Many many times in India, when I saw people who had so little that they were so far below our poverty line in this culture and when I looked into their eyes, I saw a quality of peace and a quality of joy that I didn't see in the upper-middle class in America. It knocked into a hat the whole model I had that somehow there was an equation between economics and happiness. Now that doesn't mean that you deny that reality. There is a relative reality about it. For many people that is true. That's why you are going to recognize that different people suffer in different ways and for you to interpret someone else's suffering on the basis of whether you would suffer in that condition is a fallacy. You cannot assume that someone else is suffering just because you would suffer in that circumstance or the opposite. That is where it becomes interesting. When you have learned to convert your own suffering it is still not fair or appropriate to assume that someone else either wants to or can convert their suffering. And their suffering is very real for them. You have to listen in each case to hear what the nature of the suffering is and how you alleviate it. As long as you are identified with your suffering all you are hearing is your empathy about another person's suffering and your pity and your reactivity to their suffering not your responsiveness to their suffering. The game is to be responsive rather than reactive to suffering. So that once you begin to awaken you start to look at your own life as how will it help me grow. Then you see that the reason you are suffering is because of the way your mind is clinging. So suffering starts to be a clue to you of the way your mind is clinging and otherwise you wouldn't notice that clinging and since you would like to work with letting go of the clingings of mind you begin to treasure the suffering because it shows you. You treasure the anger because it shows you that a model you had was just disconfirmed. When you get angry, when you get frustrated, in all the ways you suffer, those are all clues to you that your secret stash of clinging of mind was just uncovered. You look and you say *ahh, caught me again*. In a way, like for me it is a dialogue with Maharaj ji like where every time I get caught in suffering I see He's just chiding me, saying, "Oh, you think you are so free, try this one on. Try this."

It is interesting especially when you start to deal with people who have dramatic life shifts where they get a diagnosis or something like that that changes the whole meaning of their life. The question of how much they'll suffer is how quickly they can let go of who they used to be and be who they are now. To the extent that Kelly holds on to a model of himself as having the same body as you have he is going to suffer. To the extent that he opens and says this is what I'm working with, this is it, it's no better or no worse, it is what I've got, then he doesn't suffer. That's a hard one. Your projection into him is he must suffer because of that body because you would suffer because of your attachment to your flexibility and freedom and so on. But can you imagine, from a bird's point of view we must all be suffering terribly. Look at those poor things. It's true a human body is suffering. Just coming into one is a real drag. You might be feeling light and all but wait, it will decay. And even when it's feeling light it's so limited. You can't do a lot of things with it. It's really kind of a ponderous process.

Dealing with suffering is hard work. I am not trying to make it all light and ha ha ha and isn't it all fun. This is damned hard work. These two quotes... One of these from Aeschylus: "Pain falls drop by drop upon the heart until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God." The awful grace of God. In other words that part of us which is separate is screaming about the suffering. The part of us that is awakening is working to extract the wisdom from it and it is an intense, a profoundly intense experience. And it is an experience in which suffering brings people closest to the possibility of awakening. That is what is so addictive to me about working with people who have diseases, that have all kinds of things, like I am working with AIDS people more and more, with people who are dying, as they are approaching death, because those are the moments when their models are collapsing, when they are most ripe for a spiritual awakening. That's the most exciting time. When everyone's got it going just right they are fast asleep into their models for the most part. It's interesting because it really flips the game around. You begin to see the ways in which suffering awakens. Then when you want to be an instrument for helping people awaken and want to awaken yourself through being with other awakening people you gravitate towards people who are suffering, not because you are sadist or because of anything, not from a psychological thing, but from a spiritual point of view because that is where the most living force is in human relations. Yet everyone out of their fear is making believe that it is not happening.

This is a very powerful letter from Lama Yeshi who died recently who was a very fine Tibetan lama. He became very ill. Here was someone who had deep spiritual practices and he had a hard time. I want you to hear it because I want you

to hear that it is not easy. But follow the letter through to its course. Some of the language is a little alien to you because he's written a letter to a fellow lama. I got this from Jack Kornfield.

*Due to my right and left channels being filled with the violent movement of thought winds and overflowing out of control beyond the capacity of my ordinary heart to cope with it, and in order to safeguard myself I was forced to place this difficult-to-find body of leisure and endowments in the hands of a strange doctor. Upon examining for half an hour he advised that I must definitely go into the intensive care unit of the hospital. Believing this was the case, I asked him to protect my life. Never have I known the experiences and sufferings which then followed. First, unending injections throughout the day and night. Second, because the capacity of my heart to pump oxygen was impaired and in order to breathe I used an oxygen tank from which a tube ran through my nose. This was never disconnected, the only way I could breathe, and caused great discomfort day and night. Third I had to constantly take other medicines sometimes more than 10 pills at a time many times a day. Due to this medication my body was powerlessly overcome by pain every two hours and my memory degenerated. I had no appetite for more than a month. Whatever food I did eat I threw up and suffered further. Some days I could not do even the slightest bit of my prayers. My cousin came to see me and I asked him to recite the mandala of the regeneration of the body and listened with great effort but often in my mind's confusion my speech would become garbled. I would laugh at myself and then weep and be sad. I experienced and understood the confused mind in the deepest way even in regards to the merest effort to say a sentence. It is extremely difficult to maintain understanding and balance without becoming confused during the stages of death when the inner elements are becoming absorbed. It was at this time that I felt the power of my mind really degenerating. When I tried to think about different things and ideas my mind became confused. It had been 41 days since I became ill. The condition of my body was such that I had become the lord of a cemetary. My mind was like that of an anti-god, and my speech like the barkings of an old mad dog. Now I still take 16 pills a day and because I must depend on others for moving about and sleeping and because my hand still shakes when I write, please my dear dharma brother read this letter depending on the meanings intended and not upon the mere words spoken. These experiences I am relating to you, my pledged spiritual brother, keep them from hard-headed logicians (in other words don't let people who wouldn't understand hear this). After my ability to recite prayers of ordinary words degenerated and after these great sufferings I considered what to do. Finally I began stabilizing meditation with strong mindfulness and introspection. I am grateful for the years of training I had. By the power of this there began to arise some clarity of mind. Within this state I continued stabilizing meditation with great effort and this was of much benefit though the enemies of lethargy and confusion often overcame my meditation. I was reminded of the time we received the teachings together my brother from our guru and all the kindnesses that have been bestowed on me in this lifetime. During this time though I received hundreds of letters I was not allowed to read them but thinking of you the strength of my mind increased and my problems have lessened so I end with a poem that I have written for you.*

*Practice and meditate, training the heart the sole remedy for coming to terms with our sufferings*
*The main object of cultivation of awe-inspiring yogis. The path followed by great saints of all ages. You need a happy mind, a conscientious mind and an open heart. Especially you must learn to cultivate the precepts of transforming bad circumstances, the experiences of your suffering, into the very path of awakening.*

And you can now understand what I've said before which was that why in the East all of life is seen as preparation for the moment of death. Because at the moment of death when you experience the earth element leaving and you feel the heaviness, when you experience the water element leaving and you feel dryness, when you experience the fire element leaving and you experience coldness, when you experience the air element leaving and you experience your out breath longer than your in breath – all these are happening. They are so profound unless your mindfulness is strong you will get lost into being thirsty or being cold and that is the way you will die at that moment and that is what propels you onward. And the art of dying in the present moment without the clinging of mind is exactly what the optimum game is when you understand reincarnation. But to do that you have to have been able to transform the sufferings along the way and to keep working with the more intense ones and the more intense ones. It is interesting that like when Maharaji took 1,200 micrograms of LSD and nothing happened. The reason nothing happens is that because His awareness - there is nothing for it to grab on to, there are no hooks there is nothing clinging. The sufferings only happen to somebody. If you are somebody you suffer. If you are not attached to your somebodyness

you don't suffer. It is just change. Change is flow and you are flowing with the flow. You are not busy being somebody. The minute you try to stand somewhere you're on tip toe. You will suffer.

Now in this quality of suffering and the clinging of mind and the 3rd noble truth of course is you let go of the clingings of mind and you end the suffering until you are just this awareness and these phenomena occur. It is just like pain is just strong stimulus until you label it as pain. Your awareness gets so quiet. And at that point you are really starting to be able to transform your own suffering. At that moment you look back at your history and you see the way in which the sufferings that have occurred in your life have been part of what allowed you to be here today. The way they burned into you and the way they deepened you and the way they made you ready so you didn't end up so superficial. It's extraordinary, it's bizarre, you almost feel like you're perverse when you look at people that aren't suffering in a life and you begin to feel compassion. It's really strange because they are staying at such a superficial level of life. And you don't wish suffering on anybody. And you are dealing with this paradox, this continuous paradox that suffering in yourself you don't want but when you get it you work with it and you see that it is grace even though you don't want it. And you grow with it. That you can handle. That's paradoxical but you barely can handle it. But suffering of someone you love or suffering of other human beings is a whole other ball game. You may intellectually know that suffering is grace but when your child is sick or when your partner is sick, or when somebody else is suffering it is extremely hard to say well it is all grace and your human heart wants to do everything you can to take away their suffering. And when you listen quietly inside you listen to that paradox and you live with that tension. You live with that paradox of the human heart, that the human heart is empathizing with suffering and is empathizing with suffering of a separate entity cause the human emotional heart is part of your separateness and when somebody else is suffering it rips your human heart to shreds and you want to do everything you can to relieve the suffering and there is so much of it. It is unbearable. And what you do is you armour your heart. You've got to protect your heart from the suffering. To the extent that you identify yourself only with your separateness you have to protect yourself. You protect yourself in two ways at once. One is you are protecting yourself from the pain of others because you can't take away their suffering and it hurts you so much to see them suffering. The other thing is you are protecting your separateness from the innate generosity of your heart which would give away everything. Because the heart doesn't know boundaries. The deepest heart isn't an instrument of separateness. The deepest part of your heart is an instrument of unity. The deepest part of your heart, your compassionate heart, your conscious heart, your intuitive, deep heart, it knows that we are all one. It lives in that universe. It is our minds that puts up the separateness. Our minds are the instruments of our separateness. Our hearts are the doorways to our unity, so that the heart unprotected will just keep you suffering. It is not your suffering it is our suffering. *Here, take it, take my house, take my car, take my life, take all of it, what difference does it make cause it is our suffering. How can I go on when it is our suffering cause there is no you and there is no me*. The mind is saying, *well wait a minute, think about tomorrow. After all, you have your separateness to consider*. So what we really have is a dialogue going on between the mind, our thinking mind, which is an instrument of our separateness and our compassionate heart, which is an instrument of our unity. So it is the dialogue between separateness and unity that is being fought out inside of ourselves between the mind and the heart. And the mind throws a fish out now and then by what is called professional warmth - of pity and kindness and doing good but doing good from a safe place, doing good so you don't threaten the integrity of the separate entity. But can you see that as you identify more and more with that in you which is part of everything the need to protect that separateness gets less and less and you can let yourself more into the stream you can start to swim you can go in a little deeper cause you learn to swim a little. You don't just have to wade at the edge. You can go into the water, the universe of suffering more.

I don't know whether I am doing it with defence or truth I really don't know yet because I just have got to keep listening and watching my body and my emotions and all that but in fact, in the past week or any week you take in my life I am dealing with the most traumatic experiences that human beings can face. People are calling me with crises and they are presenting them because I invite them. What I find is what I offer them is first my heart is breaking for their pain and I would take it if I could but I can't. But what I am is somebody that at the same moment as my heart hurts I have a very very deep appreciation of the lawful nature of things and that that is at some other level, not the human personality level, at another level, at a spiritual level, that is the curriculum that that person needs to have. It is optimum for them. It is not Pollyananish I can feel it is rooted in an absolute depth of understanding of dharma for

me, as deep as I have been able to get, a sense of the rightness of people's life experiences even as traumatic as they might be. And that is so deeply imbued in me now that I am able to be with someone who is suffering and they feel that my heart hurts because I am a human with them and at the same moment there is an equanimity in me and often that rubs off and they begin to relax a little bit because they begin to get a sense that there is another way of being with what is happening to them in a way that doesn't have to keep them doing themselves in all the time. It is an incredible gift to be able to offer another human being - the gift of equanimity in the presence of a trauma - the gift of a faith. It is faith really, it is not beliefs. It is a very deep faith in the unfolding of the law of the universe. What I do is I put myself in these situations and I am constantly watching that balance inside myself. I am very aware when some new one comes along and my heart gets so engaged that I feel I am losing my clarity. If you come down too much into the heart it breaks. It breaks again and again but I mean it gets muddy because you want so to take away their suffering and you are busy judging God. You say *you really screwed up giving this person suffering*. Yet if you get too far into the other place it is so cold. It is so impersonal. It's like someone falls down and you say, *karma*. It doesn't have the human heart in it. It is that balance of the heart and that higher wisdom, the human heart and the deeper heart is really what I would call it. That balance is where the saving grace is. Not to deny your humanity and not to deny your divinity and that is what you and I are here about. We all know our humanity all too well. That is why we put the focus on recognizing that part of us that isn't in the human-ness. Not to deny the humanity but to bring a balance about. Because that's what you offer another person. When I look at Kelly I see a soul that has taken an incarnation that has a curriculum. When I look at some of you and I know you have problems with addiction and problems with sexual obsessions and problems with loneliness and problems with anger and problems with diseases and problems with frigidity and tightness. And I look and I see the whole sea of stuff or you tell me about it. And I just see curriculum after curriculum after curriculum after curriculum. And I just see a group of beautiful souls on earth each having its own karmic work to do. At the same moment when you present it to me, my heart hurts. You don't protect your heart from breaking because in a way a broken heart is like cracking a shell to let the deeper heart come forth. Because compassion is like the monk who is crying because his son has died and the student comes up and says, "What are you crying about? You know it is all illusion." He says, "Yes but the death of a son is the greatest illusion." And Maharaji crying when I was hurting. You don't close off your humanity by any means but you balance your humanity and if you don't balance your humanity you burn out. And if you don't balance your humanity you armor your heart and if you armour your heart you starve to death and that's why you burn out because you are not getting fed.

You have to avert your eyes from the suffering of the world. You can't look you can't look at the have-nots in the world. You can't stand it. You have to look away all the time. You have to avert your eyes from Central America and from India and from all those places because you just can't stand it. Because you feel so impudent to do something to take away the suffering. We're going to talk about healing and helping and all those things in a couple of days. If you are going to be free, your freedom means that you do not avert your eyes from anything, in yourself or in anyone else. Freedom means to be a free awareness with what is. No aversion no attachment. They say that for a saint, all the world are their children and you feel the suffering of another person the same way you would as if it was your own child. It's almost unbearable. What makes it bearable. There is a little statue of the Buddha and it has a little smile at the edge of its mouth and it is called the smile of unbearable compassion. Sounds like a paradox. The smile of unbearable compassion. It is the unbearable compassion. It is beyond bearing and if you were somebody you couldn't bear it, but you are the universe and that is what you are. You are all of that and it is that balance inside yourself. The smile of unbearable compassion. And that ability to embrace the suffering into yourself, to just keep taking it in and taking it in and look towards it instead of away from it, and look towards it and then take the way in which it reacts in you and keep doing that delicate balancing number, to balance that you still feel the humanity and at the same moment you allow, you don't sit around judging God like *what have you done to me I am a good guy what are you doing this to me for.* You don't apply your rational criteria to the universe because the way karma works is not understandable by your rational mind since your rational mind is a product of karma and a system cannot understand something that is meta to itself. It is a logical impossibility. You don't hear the full universe. Here's where the faith comes and the faith is deepened through your own practices, through your own direct experiences. It's not belief that someone hands you. It is faith that comes from your own direct experiences. So you learn to keep your heart open in hell. Finally.

Personally I took a chemical it was like a 10-minute acid trip. Somebody had this new chemical and I said I would try it. About 20 seconds after I took it, it came. I was right at the edge of the void. Then as I came back I began to be aware of the universe and the nature of suffering, the nature of what is called dukha, or suffering, and I experienced an involuntary process going on in myself which sounded like retching. And the people around me were getting buckets and all that and it was interesting because inside of me I was in a state of bliss first of all and at the same moment what I was experiencing was I was gorging on my consuming of the suffering into myself. It was like a mother embracing its children into itself. It was the most primordial experience and it lasted about three minutes. But I recognized exactly how that was an image of just what was going on in my life. And if you are going to be free you can't avert your gaze from anything. You can't even avert your gaze into pity or avert your gaze into kindness or into righteousness - they deserve to suffer. You can't avert your gaze at all. You just have to sit with the bare facts of the phenomena of what's going on. And when you look into the eyes of somebody who has done a lot of that work, their eyes look dead, almost burned out empty but very very deep and kind of timeless and just present you watch the eyes like Ramana Maharshi's eyes, eyes like that. Anandamayi's eyes.You look into those eyes and you just see that they can look at it all. They are eyes that look at the universe as it is. They don't have to dissemble in order to stay, to keep it together. That is what freedom is. Freedom is not all ha ha ha and yet it has bliss. It has an incredible quality of joy in it. That is what was so staggering to me that I was in bliss at the same moment this process of incorporating of suffering was going inside of myself. It was the bliss of intimacy. It was the bliss of being with the Beloved. It was the bliss of merging with the universe. It's the way you would take on the suffering of someone you loved if you could, in which you just become the whole organism, just all of it, it is all inside of you.

When you hear the statistics like there is enough food in the world to go around and yet people are starving, you get a sense of our confusion as an organism. Our confusion. That we got so frightened that the fear led to greed and the greed led to separateness and the separateness led to protecting the king of the mountain status and that led to such suffering in other people and that suffering in other people leads to terrorism and to violence and that violence threatens the establishment more and so the whole game goes on and so you see what you have to do to change in yourself to become an instrument for the change of all that. Because physician heal thyself. If you would have the world peaceful you better be peaceful. If you would have the world non-reactive to suffering, other than to relieve it where it can, you have to really be that way yourself. You see what the agenda is. The agenda is incredibly profound and it starts with you. It starts inside. It starts with you dealing with your own suffering.

## PRACTICES

### FIRST STEPS[2]

### DO YOU HOMEWORK:

*Believe those who are seeking the truth. Doubt those who find it. –Andre Gide*

When you decide what field and direction your selfless service is going to take, take some time to research the area. You will find many people have walked the path before, and you can avoid some obstacles and problems by learning from their experience. Sometimes as you begin to research your idea, it will become complicated and tricky and it may not be as clear as to how to act. Talk to everyone you can find who is interested or had direct experience in the field. Talk to people on both sides of the issues and both sides of the needs you are trying to fill. Check out who else may be doing similar work in the area. This research will help you be more informed in your actions. Allow yourself however some mental spaciousness when researching all this. Allow time for the information to be absorbed and integrated. Some information will be meaningless until you start to work and get some experience. Also as there are many conflicting ideas about how things are done, and if helping is happening at all, and most times you must trust your own heart and feelings. Some things will simply feel more “right” than others, even if the information you have gathered is contradictory to this feeling. The homework is simply a process of getting in touch with information so that your choices are more informed and likely to have a greater impact.

## IMAGINE:

*When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies? To surrender dreams…this may be madness. Too much sanity may be madness and, the maddest of all, to see life as it is and not as it should be. – Don Quixote*

*Dreams lead us to act with boldness and love. That they may be impossible dreams does not matter. They are not goals; they are the inspiration within each act as we move toward the vision... Having such a dream doesn't mean that we should deny the present as it is, on the contrary, it means that we see things just as they are, including the obstacles and difficulties, yet act as if the realization of our dream is possible… Lead with your dream. Let it be present in every act. – Mirabai Bush.*

## ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENTS[7]

### CODE 4: OBSERVE YOUR HABITS AND REACTIONS

Watch your habituated reactions to people around you and to your environment. Watch how your attachment to the external can result in so much discontentment. Try to reduce your need to find happiness in outside things. This does not mean that you should not follow external attractions for this would result in suppression which causes more harm than good. It means that you should carry on your life as it is now, but if you don't get what you want then accept it with a shrug of the shoulders, with a sense of detachment.

### CODE 5: EXPLORE YOURSELF

Find out your greatest needs, attachments, desires, etc. Be as critical as you can. A good method of discovering your attachments is to trace the cause of your present anger or your present unhappiness back to its source and there you will find the emotional and mental attitude that caused the disturbance. Particularly notice how you react with people whom you distinctively dislike or don't get on with. These persons will help you to recognize and to eventually remove your emotional hang-ups. View the whole world and everyone in it as being your teacher.

## HEARTSPACE MEDITATION

As for session 1

## EYE GAZING

As for session 2

## SELFLESS SERVICE GROWS FROM HOME

This practice is the same as Selfless service starts at home but now begin to increase the number of people to include other members of your family, or people you live with, and then over time increase this to you work colleagues, extended family etc.

## SESSION 4: BURNOUT AND HOW TO AVOID IT.

### MODULE INTRO

In this module we look at a very important problem that many people who get involved in selfless service, with the best intentions to do good, often experience – Burnout! The following are a few of the signs, signals and thoughts that we may have when we are leaning in the direction of burnout.

- I never dreamed it would be so hard.
- Forget it—you just can't change anybody.
- Why does it always have to be me?
- You can't beat the system.
- They might at least say thank you.
- It's like holding back the tide.
- *I* don't know how to say no.
- We're not helping anybody; *it's just* another business.
- I'm just going through the motions.
- I don't even know what help *is anymore.*
- *Hey, what about me?*

We also look at how to avoid burnout and what attitudes we should approach service with to help prevent it from occurring in the first place.

### QUOTES ON SELFLESS SERVICE



*Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others, cannot keep it from themselves.*
*- James M. Barrie*



*Everybody can be great... because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.*
*- Martin Luther King, jr*



The sage does nothing, but nothing is left undone.
- Lou Tsu



In the beginner's mind, there are many possibilities. In the expert's, there are few.
– Suzuki Roshi

### STORY

#### THE NURSE IN THE NEONATAL WARD[3]

I used to have to walk through it automatically. You don't bother to look. You certainly don't let much of it in. But it was the children themselves who began to open me up. Once it started, it began to pull me in gradually but steadily. It was very powerful, but you have to take it at your own pace. Because here, in a neonatal intensive care unit, you see incredible beauty and unbearable pain. And you have to figure out how to be with both.

The children are beautiful because you just get to know them. You can't nurse them, really nurse them, without knowing them. And you can't know them, really know them, without seeing their beauty. What can be more beautiful than innocence? And that affects all their features: their tininess, the eyes, the fingers, the sound of their heart—just their breath can move you with its beauty. Part of it seems to come from how fragile they are, how uncertain it is how long they'll be here—the cliché metaphor of the flower that blooms for a day. It's like a garden of that in here.

The picture on the surface, though, is also terribly grim. A room full of these little ones, many of whom are right on I the edge of life and death, and some of whose faces and "' movements are pretty distressing. And then their parents: there on the other side of the window, with the most desperate and stricken faces looking in, so helplessly, such pain. It's something to be inside a picture that's being looked at with such expressions. But you look back, just to let them know someone's in here.

It was the use of machines and extraordinary medical measures that moved several of us to see how much distance we were putting between ourselves and the infants. Even if the machines weren't there, though, there was that tendency to keep it impersonal, to keep your distance, and you knew that wasn't any good for the children—for the children least of all.

So a group of us began to talk about it, to open up to our feelings, to decide to be with the children more, and when it got too hard and we'd break down, we'd support each other and talk it over. The more we opened up, it just became natural that we began this new practice of holding infants when the time would come for them to die. It wasn't a decision as much as something we'd become ready to do. So at the end we'd take them off the monitors and into our arms in a rocker. And we'd sit with them in their final moments.

It tears you apart, because holding them, sometimes you can feel them go. And the death itself is different. On the machines, it's monitored as brain death. In your arms, it's the heart and the breath.

It's so—what's that word?—poignant. You feel ten dozen things at once. Terrible sadness, because you'd become attached to the child. But glad too, because their suffering is about to end. Maybe anger, at the world, at God, at whatever, for allowing this to happen. And such empathy for the parents. And something like awe and wonder; like there must be some kind of explanation for all this which you don't yet understand. But patience too, that things become more clear in time. And peace of mind, because you're doing the best you can. And humble, to be present at such a moment. All of the above, often at once.

You're sitting with these feelings, as well as sitting there with the child. In fact, you come to see that you're sitting with all of it on behalf of the child. You're doing it for yourself, simply to stay cool. But it's a final act for them as well. You're offering whatever peace you've come to. And it creates such intimacy, impossible to describe, you're so right with them.

It's unbearable and beautiful at the same time. How do you explain that? It's Just the part of you that's with them is getting ripped up. But the part of you that's, like, trying to understand it all ... well, that's beautiful because you see that you can be, we all can be, in the presence of great pain, but still appreciate life, even in its last moments. Especially then.

## THEORY TOPICS

### ON BURNOUT[3]

"It's not always our efforts that burn us out; it's where the mind is standing in relation to them. The problem is not the work itself but the degree of our identification with it. It's doers who burn out."

Be quiet and listen. Simply observe (never judge) how we are feeling. Once we can be quiet and observe what we are feeling, we might actually realize that sometimes our burnout is caused because of the expectations we carry into a certain service project….our motives that we bring with us. If those expectations are not met or our motives are self-driven, we will have a tendency to feel "slighted" or maybe like we "wasted our time", and this leads to a feeling of

burnout. Our own Ego gets us in trouble every single time. Until we are quiet and listen, we may not even realize how often, in the guise of service, we try to impose our values on others. Being the person that “should upons” takes a lot of our energy…really it does.

Another reason we feel burnout? Attachment to the outcome. I know I have felt this way and have asked this question of myself. “How do I know I am really making a difference?” ‘How do I know that what I do is really helping?” All this worry, when all we really need to do is act from a space of love, provide the service, and let it go. We cannot control the actions of others and the choices that they make. We can give the homeless person on the street some money. We can volunteer for an organization. But in the end, what happens beyond that is not up to us. The minute we can let go of that attachment, we will feel light and free and be able to give more of ourselves. It’s unconditional love at its finest. “We love each other. That’s enough.”

“To some degree or other, we have surrendered into service and are willing to pay the price of compassion. But with it comes the joy of a single, caring act. With it comes the honour of participating in a generous process in which one rises each day and does what one can. With it comes the simple, singular grace of being an instrument of Love, in whatever form, to whatever end.”

While it is clear that what we bring into a helping situation may lead to burnout, we ought not underestimate the external pressures. How often we find ourselves in environments or organizations that actually seem to make it harder to help others. What's natural and spontaneous has now been rigidified by bureaucracy, rules, or standards of accountability. All of this can be incredibly frustrating, because it seems to constrict or thwart the very openness and sense of possibility that those who are suffering most yearn for—and those who wish to help out as well.

At the very least it makes sense to call upon the Witness to "see how it all is"—to stop judging and reacting and simply take in the total picture. So we see how the administrators have to play it ... or the volunteer's predicament ... or the member of the board's game. As we observe these roles, we're able to get a sense of what it might be like to have to play any one of them. We appreciate how it all may have evolved, and the delusions that led to it, and the confusions that perpetuate it, and the accommodations that just plain had to be made, We see why it is the way it is, and at as many levels as possible— including the level at which it's utterly ridiculous and hopeless and how-is-everyone-even-going-to-keep-it-all-marginally- together-let-alone-help-or-be-helped.

Institutions are formalized mind-sets. These too can be witnessed. To become aware of those sets but see right through them from outside is the most reliable way not to get stuck or burned out by them. We master the rules, but we don't let them ultimately define us or narrow our field of perception. We encompass the craziness of the situation, so we can be skillful within it or playful when there's nothing to do but ride through the contradictions. Then we share a sense of the absurd with whoever else is inclined to see it that way. Whoever feels a little lost can find relief in our presence, in our tent, around our desk.

None of this means that we just suspend judgment forever: We observe ... but there is action to be taken too. If we are serious in our criticisms of the practices and habits of helping organizations, however, we've got to be light, free, and sufficiently above it all to see where we can untangle the knots and bring about change. Everything is always changing anyway. With the perspective of the Witness, we can see just which pressures, applied with the precision of a judo chop, can move the mass.

As frustrating and wearing as these situations can be, part of our service may entail taking some responsibility for them. The institutions we work in are going to reflect the sum total of consciousness invested in them at every moment. So it's "Our" problem. If it's "Us" who created it, it's probably going to have to be "Us" who'll shake it free. Or maybe not. We can never be sure. We'll watch. Maybe it's not the right place to be putting our energies now. Maybe the inertia of the system is too great, its effect too strangling. Maybe we just need a break, some breathing space, a walk in the woods for some renewed inspiration. Maybe we're just tired. It's always right to be watching for that, always right to care for ourselves when we're seeking to care for others.

So perhaps we quit, not knowing where to go next, but trusting that the right vehicle to express our desire to serve will appear elsewhere, later. Are we going to place limits of circumstance on the expression of compassion? Or

perhaps we stay. If we do, we try to make sure that we're as conscious of everyone's situation as possible, and as alert to how the ground is moving from moment to moment, now obstructing this possibility, now revealing another one.

There may be no single remedy for the frustration and burnout that arise simply from the constricting situations in which we are often required to care for others. What serves us best-is the expanded perspective that witnessing makes possible . . . and what it reveals from moment to moment. You do what you do when you can.

## AVOIDING BURNOUT.

Burnout is common amongst people working in fields that involve situations where the need is great and resources are limited i.e. most community outreach projects. As the suffering and demonic aspect of humanity is also much more visible it is easy to become overwhelmed, despondent, depressed and stressed, all leading to varying degrees of "Burn Out"

Of course one could say that the opposite is possible. Necessity is the mother of invention. Finding creative ways to solve problems and overcome these obstacles can be a very creative and uplifting process. The enormous human spirit that overcomes all is also there amongst the mix of suffering and pain.

So what factor is it that determines whether you "burn out" or become a creative and inspired human being? The answer is simple: Attachment or Non-attachment.

Overcoming burnout can be one of the most vital spiritual skills one can learn. How to stay open, loving, kind and compassionate but non-attached? Learn this and you are more than half way there. Of course in some situations this will be easy but there are always other situations where you will still get caught and the mind reacts and it exhausts you.

The main principles of Karma Yoga would help one go a long way to helping to avoid possible burnout or compassion fatigue:

Perform your actions:

**1) With utmost perfection**. In other words do your best. In each situation take a moment to be aware of what you are doing/saying. Notice if the action is half hearted or are you giving it your full attention. Your best may change depending on where you are at, how much energy you have at the time but it is the best you can offer at the time, each time, taking into account the circumstances around you. This is simple to understand. If you do your best, and know you have done your best, then even if it all goes wrong, you know that it was not due to your negligence or half heartedness. This frees you from feeling the guilt and responsibility for the outcome and will also help you to accept the outcome for what it is. You will not lie awake at night with a guilty conscience.

**2) Without any expectation.** In other words let go or surrender the fruits of your actions. You act, doing your best, the fruits or results of your actions are of no concern. This is the key for avoiding burnout. If you are attached to what you are doing it is difficult let it go. You do not leave the actions even when you are now at home with your partner you are still at work with your job. This very quickly scatters our awareness and exhausts us, as a dissipated mind is a stressed mind.

If you have expectations of outcome, and they are not met we can become depressed, frustrated and even angry. Over time we feel isolated and alone, we think that no-body understands what we are trying to do, and feel alone in the vision we have. This too will exhaust you very quickly. It can be worse if your expectations are met and you are attached or identified with them. You could fall into the trap of the ego being puffed up on achievement and then the inevitable fall from the high seat.

**3) With total participation.** Another key. If you are able to put all of your faculties towards the actions, your head, heart and hands all working together in an integrated whole, the body mind complex will enter into a deep state of concentration. You become one with the action. You are not doing one thing, thinking about something else, and

feeling a totally different emotion. This scattered state leads to stress and burn-out while being concentrated leads too relaxed alert state that is full of life and energy.

There is nothing more liberating than being able to do your best, and then to let go. See what comes and then to do your best with what has come and let go. This allows you to respond appropriately with your full awareness to each moment, adjusting to the reality of what is. Going with the flow and responding to the actual need of the situation, instead of trying to bulldoze an agenda of what your mind perceives the need to be. One way uplifts and creates a feeling of energy and aliveness, the other exhausts and depresses one if you are not able to create your expectation. This is not something you decide once, what is required is full awareness in each moment and dancing between noticing attachments and letting go.

## PRACTICES

### FIRST STEPS[2]

### STAY AWAKE TO SUFFERING:

*Do not close your eyes before suffering. Find ways to be with those who are suffering by all means, including personal contact and visits, images, sound. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world. – Gautama Buddha*

### WORK ALONE OR WITH OTHERS:

*All of us are interdependent. Whether we realize it or not, each of us lives eternally in the red. –Martin Luther King, Jr.*

(below excerpt taken from Compassion in Action[2].)
Working alone, we may have more time for reflection. We may be better able to work at our natural pace. We may feel safer in ways that help us take risks. Solitude may give us the space we need for artistic expression. And it can be a balance for the time we spend with others, allowing us to hear our own truth more clearly. Working alone is right for some of us some of the time. If we listen, we know when that is.

At other times, action in groups has a strong draw. Anyone who has been part of an inspired demonstration, such as a protest against nuclear weapons or a candlelight walk for women's rights, knows the exhilaration of being part of something larger than oneself, united with others for a cause. Even baking whole wheat rolls in a shelter kitchen or organizing an office to recycle its computer paper, people have experienced the satisfaction that comes from being part of community working for change. This basic sharing of space and purpose can remind us of the simple truth that we are all members of the world community, here to help one another on our common journey home.

Working in groups has the advantage of fulfilling our yearning for community. Many of us in the mainstream of this country come from dysfunctional, non-nurturing, unloving families. Our rituals and traditions are largely gone, and our sense of belonging has weakened; the emphasis in our culture on competition and individual achievement has eroded our sense of community and solidarity. No longer tribal, we still need support, loving care, and interaction with a variety of other human beings; as is better known among subcultures, it is rare for a single relationship or the nuclear family to satisfy all human needs.

Of course, whether you begin by working alone or in community, there will be difficulties. Compassionate action is, after all, part of life, and many wise beings, from the Buddha to Woody Alien, have reminded us that life is inseparable from suffering. Working alone can bring loneliness and boredom. You can become self-righteous. You can lose touch with the larger social picture; you may need reality checks. And working in community with others reveals other things: in many ways it is not as safe as a room of one's own. Limitations and attachments become obvious. You may discover emotional weaknesses, inability to get on with other people, desires for personal gratification, or impatience and arrogance. You may at times feel incapable of loving. Working with the poor and homeless, you may develop a

haunting desire for a bigger and more expensive place to live. You might disapprove of a board member's life-style and find yourself unwilling to listen to her proposal for a new project. Because you desire a team member sexually, you may overlook his incomplete contribution to the team.

But these challenges are what Tibetan teacher Chogyam Trungpa called "the manure for our growth." Seeing the truth in ourselves is part of the process of developing insight: as we grow, not only do we develop empathy for others who act in the same unconscious ways but we have the opportunity to change our behaviour so that it resonates with the principles we value and are working for. Since our lives are our message, the more peaceful and generous we become in our interactions, the more likely we are to help create peace and generosity in the wider spheres of our influence. And working on oneself, of course, fits within the guidelines for compassionate action: we can Start small, work right where we are, do something clearly within our own power, and be of benefit to the whole. And when we work on our problems in the presence of others and the suffering of the world, we are less likely to get lost in the endless mirrors of narcissism. Change is a gradual and continual process. Whether our compassionate action is done alone or in a group, inner exploration remains the complement to external action, and, with time and patience; it can lead to clearer awareness, action with more integrity, and a freer flow of the heart's breath.

## ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENTS

### CODE 6: LIVE IN THE NOW!

Try to live in the now. Don't live in the past by worrying about what has already happened or by reliving pleasurable past experiences. Don't anticipate the future. Plans can be made, but see the planning as being part of the now, not as really being for the future. Try to live each moment, each present moment as fully as possible by giving your attention to the now. In this way you will start to live life to the fullest. When you do anything, from taking a bath to eating food, or sweeping the floor to earning your living, try not to think of when it will be finished. Enjoy every action that you do at the time that you do it. Try to enjoy the fact that you exist and that an expression of your existence is in your every action.

### CODE 7: DISIDENTIFY

Don't identify yourself completely with your actions, your body or your mind. Though you are trying to change your mind, it is only part of you. It is not your consciousness—the witness that sees all events that occur in your life. Most of us identify ourselves completely with our minds and bodies. We ignore the consciousness that lies behind every-thing we do. As we purify our mind and body we will see and identify ourselves with this underlying consciousness.

## WHO AM I PRACTICE

Sit opposite a partner and establish eye contact, which you keep throughout the practice. Take 5 minute turns each, where one person repeats a statement of truth e.g. the sun rises in the east, over and over, while the other person answers from their deepest most heartfelt feeling of truth, “Yes.” After five to ten minutes of this, swap roles.

This is followed by a longer session where one person repeatedly asks the question, “Who are you?” and the other person answers with a different answer each time from the same heartfelt deep place of truth within them. This continues for some time and the person never answers the question the same way twice, yet each answer is true. Then swop roles and allow the other person to go through the process.

## RETURNING MEDITATION STAGE 1 AND 2

Stage 1: After settling the body and becoming comfortable in a meditation pose, become aware of the sounds in the environment. Be aware of all the sounds and the silences between them. Whenever the mind gets distracted by a thought or a sensation, see what distracted your awareness and then simply return to awareness of sound. Continue for 5 to 10 mins. Then proceed to stage two.

Stage 2: Focus shifts from sound to natural breath, and otherwise is the same as above. Simply return to the breath when you have become distracted after noticing what distracted you.  Continue for 5-10 mins.

## HELP SOMEONE HAVE A BETTER DAY

This is a continuation of the Selfless service grows from home. In this practice you include everybody who you meet in your day. You remain open and listen for opportunities to make someone's day easier by your actions. Again you keep it secret what you are doing, but make a conscious effort to help at least one person a day in this way. Come up with inventive and appropriate ways of creating this helping. It may be as simple as a well timed smile, or washing dishes, or as complicated as getting someone a job. Possibilities are endless. Record some of the things you did each day, as well as your experience, feelings and reflections on how you perceived each time.

## SESSION 5: GETTING STARTED AND TRANSFORMING YOUR HOME AND WORK.

### MODULE INTRO

This module deals a little more with how to get started in selfless service. If you look at your life you may notice that many things you are doing already are not actually for yourself. You may be paying for you children's education, looking after a garden and some animals, supporting your partner, doing a friend a favour. Much of the time we don't think of these things as actual service, but with a small shift in attitude, one will see that many of the actions we perform each day is done for others. Of course with these things we need to examine our reasons. If we are educating our children so we can lay a guilt trip on them later about how we sacrificed our lives for them, it is hardly in the spirit of selflessness. So if we let go of attachments, I look after this garden, not for me, but so that others may enjoy it or eat the fruits one day, then it shifts.

Along with these things, we may notice how much of our time is spent in getting ourselves more deeply entrenched in our own comfort and self absorption. So we will see that a good place to start our selfless service is in the places we spend a lot of time. Our homes and workplaces provide very rich opportunities to begin to explore the service.

### QUOTES ON SELFLESS SERVICE



*It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life. No man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.*
*- Ralph Waldo Emerson*



*The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.*
*- Mahatma Gandhi*



*"Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you."*
*— Mother Teresa*

### STORY

#### THE PEACE OFFICER[3]

Now there are two theories about crime and how to deal with it. Anticrime guys say, "You have to think like a criminal." And some police learn that so well they get a kind of criminal, mentality themselves,
How I'm working with it is really pretty different. I see that man is essentially pure and innocent and of one good nature. That's who he is by birthright. And that's what I'm affirming in the course of a day on the job. In fact, that is my job. The "cop" part of it. . . well, they call us "cops"; to me, my job is I'm a peace-officer.

Now it's interesting how this works. For example, when you are holding in thought a vision of our unity in good, you frequently spot a criminal motive arising or evident in someone. It's a kind of spiritual radar. Crimes can be prevented that way—I've seen that. And not only that. At the same time, I'm holding to the view that such a person is complete already, and doesn't need to steal, and will be provided for from universal abundance. So I work not only to prevent the crime but to eliminate its causes—its causes in fear and greed, not just the social causes everyone talks about.

Even when it gets to conflict. I had arrested a very angry black man who singled me out for real animosity. When I had to take him to a paddy wagon, he spit in my face—that was something—and he went after me with a chair. We handcuffed him and put him in the truck. Well, on the way, I just had to get past this picture of things, and again I affirmed to myself, "This guy and I are brothers in love." When I got to the station, I was moved spontaneously to say, "Look, if I've done anything to offend you, I apologize." The paddy wagon driver looked at me as if I was to-tally nuts. The next day I had to take him from where he'd been housed overnight to criminal court. When I picked him up, I thought, "Well, if you trust this vision, you're not going to have to handcuff him." And I didn't. We got to a spot in the middle of the corridor which was the place where he'd have jumped me if he had that intention. And he stopped suddenly. So did I. Then he said, "You know, I thought about what you said yesterday, and I want to apologize." I just felt this deep appreciation.

Turned out on his rap sheet he'd done a lot of time in Michigan and had trouble with guards in jail. I symbolized something. And I saw that turn around, saw a kind of healing, I believe.

So what really happens if you're going to explore whether or not this vision of our nature really has power? Maybe people will say you're taking chances. But you're taking chances without any vision; your vision is your protection. Maybe they'll say you're sentimentalizing people. But it's not about people. It's about principle and truth. It's about how the universe is. Maybe they'll think it's idealistic; things could never be this way. Well, for me, things are this way already, it's just up to us to know that more clearly.

I see that my work is to hold to an image of who we all truly are, and to be guided by that. And I have been guided by that. To greater strength and security ... within myself and on the street.

## THEORY TOPICS

### THE PATH OF SERVICE BY JACK KORNFIELD[6]



One of the most important questions we come to in spiritual practice is how to reconcile service and responsible action in the world with a meditative life based on nonattachment, letting go, and coming to understand the empty nature of all conditioned things. Are the values we hold that lead us to giving and serving and caring for one another different from the values that lead us deep within ourselves on the journey of liberation and awakening?

In considering this question we must first learn to distinguish among four qualities central to practice—the divine abodes of love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity—and what might be called their "near-enemies." Near-enemies are states that seem to be very close to these qualities and may even be mistaken for them, but the two are not fundamentally similar. Let us consider them one by one.

The near-enemy of love is attachment. Attachment masquerades as love. It says, "I will love you if you will love me back." It is a kind of "businessman's" love. So we think, "I will love this person as long as he doesn't change. I will love that thing if it will be the way I want it." But this isn't love at all—it is attachment. There is a big difference between love, which allows and honors and appreciates, and attachment, which grasps and demands and aims to possess. When attachment becomes confused with love, it actually separates us from another person. We feel we need this other person in order to be happy. This quality of attachment also leads us to offer love only toward certain people, excluding others.

True love is a universal, non-discriminating sense of care and connectedness. In it we can include even those whom we may not at all like or approve of. We may not condone their behaviour, but we can cultivate understanding and forgiveness toward them. True love becomes a powerful tool for transforming any situation. Love is not a passive acquiescence. Love is inclusive and powerful, and when we touch it in our practice this becomes a direct experience for us. As the New Testament teaches, and Meher Baba put so well, "true love is unconquerable and irresistible."

There is no hardship and no difficulty that enough love cannot conquer, no distance that enough love cannot span, no barrier that enough love cannot overcome. Whatever the question, love is the answer. This is a universal law and a lesson in spiritual practice that our hearts must learn. The Buddha said it clearly: "Hatred never ceases through hatred. Hatred only ceases through love."

The near-enemy of compassion is pity. Instead of feeling the openness of compassion, pity says, "Oh, that poor person over there is suffering!" Pity sets up a separation between our self and others; it has a sense of distance and remoteness from the suffering of others as if we ourselves were different. Compassion, on the other hand, experiences the suffering of another as a reflection of one's own pain, "I truly understand that, I suffer too. It is part of our life." It is a sense of our shared suffering.

Compassion is the tender readiness of the heart to respond to one's own or another's pain, without resentment or aversion. It is the wish to dissipate the suffering. Compassion embraces those experiencing sorrow and brings them into our heart.

The next divine abode is sympathetic joy, which is the ability to feel joy in the happiness of others. Its near-enemy is a sense of comparison— concluding that our experience makes us superior, inferior, or equal to someone else. This is the force of assessing ourselves in relation to someone else's experience. We separate ourselves and in our separateness measure, evaluate, and affirm ourselves in relation to someone else's life. Comparison itself, regardless of the conclusion we draw, is a source of pain and delusion in the mind. When we touch the spirit of sympathetic joy in our heart, it connects us with the happiness of all life. Sympathetic joy embraces all those enjoying happiness themselves and brings us together with them. Their well-being is our own.

The near-enemy of equanimity is indifference or callousness. This can arise in regard to ourselves, our families, our work, or world problems. The voice of indifference says, "Who cares? To be spiritual is to be unattached. What does it matter anyway? It is all transitory!" This is the voice that fears commitment and finds it difficult to stick with a spiritual practice or a relationship or a job. Genuine spiritual life requires great commitment and a willingness to engage in a full and intimate way with our life. In a mistaken way we can use the attitude of indifference to bring a temporary sense of peace. But because it is an attitude of not caring and a withdrawal from experience, it actually separates us from the energies of life.

True equanimity is not a withdrawal, it is a balanced opening to all aspects of life. It is an engagement in the whole of life with composure and with balance of mind, seeing wisely the nature of all things. Although everything is empty, we must nevertheless honor the reality of form. As Zen Master Dogen says, "Flowers fall with our attachment, and weeds Spring up with our aversion." When we have touched equanimity in our heart, we can know deeply that the world of conditioned phenomena is insubstantial, and still be fully present and in harmony with it. Equanimity embraces all of life equally: loved and unloved ones; agreeable and disagreeable things; and pleasure and pain; touching them all with balance.

The near-enemies are ways of separating ourselves from life out of fear. True spirituality is not a removal or escape from life. It is an opening, a seeing of the world with a deeper vision that is less self-centered, a vision that sees through dualistic views to the underlying interconnectedness of all life. Liberation is the discovery of freedom in the very midst of our bodies and minds. A Zen master recently gave a simple talk on this teaching of non-separation at an international peace conference. He explained it by making his two hands into two different people. One he called Gertrude and the other Harry. He enacted a conversation between Gertrude and Harry about what they liked and what they didn't like. Everyone started to laugh. He went on and on about it. He said, "That's what we do. Somehow we actually believe we are Harry or Gertrude, separate from one another." This sense of separation creates all the sorrow and suffering in the world. In pursuing our spiritual practice we must learn how to put them all together, to bring the whole world into our heart. When we undertake this practice in a genuine way, we become what is called a bodhisattva, a being (sattva) committed to liberation (bodhi). Suzuki-roshi says, "Even if the sun should rise in the west, the bodhisattva has only one way." In the worst circumstances, even if our world turns upside down, the bodhisattva has only one way—to continue to express compassion and wisdom there too.

Once while in India I spoke with a meditation master named Vimala Thakar about the question of meditation and activity in the world. Vimala had worked for many years with the followers of Gandhi in Indian rural development and land redistribution projects. She was then asked by Krishnamurti, of whom she had been a long-time student, to teach meditation. After devoting years to teaching meditation, she has in recent years returned to development work and helping the hungry and homeless, teaching much less than before, I asked her why she decided to go back to the type of work she had been involved with years before. Did she find meditation too limited and feel a need for more direct action? In responding to the question, Vimala resisted any attempt to separate the two parts other life. She replied, "Sir, I am a lover of life, and as a lover of life, I cannot keep out of any activity of life. If there are people who are hungry for food, my response is to help feed them. If there are people who are hungry for truth, my response is to help them discover it. I make no distinction."

The Sufis have a saying, "Praise Allah, and tie your camel to the post." This brings together both parts of practice: pray, yes, but also make sure you do what is necessary in the world. Have a life of meditation and genuine spiritual experience and, at the same time, discover how to manifest that here and now. Realization brings a balance between understanding emptiness and having a sense of compassion and impeccability guide our lives. Seeing emptiness means seeing that all of life is like a bubble in a rushing stream, a play of light and shadow, a dream. It means seeing that this tiny blue-green planet hangs in the immensity of space amid billions of stars and galaxies, that all of human history is like one second compared with the eons of the earth's history, and that it will all be over very soon. This context helps us to let go amid the seeming seriousness of our problems, to discover what Don Juan calls our controlled folly and to enter life with a sense of lightness and ease.

On the other hand, the quality of impeccability entails realizing how precious life is, even though it is transient, and how each of our actions and words do count, affecting all beings around us in a profound way. There is nothing inconsequential in this universe, and we need to personally respect this fact and act in accordance with it. Even if a person meditates in a cave somewhere far away, it has a power and a value far beyond what we ordinarily assume, because what each part of this whole does affects the rest. We are not ultimately separate.

How can we actually bring together these two sides of practice—the development of compassionate and caring attention with the fleeting and empty nature of life? Taken separately, each point of view is compelling. One could make a very convincing case for just concentrating on meditation and nothing else, and then make another convincing argument for devoting oneself entirely to service in the world. Let's look at it from the first vantage point. Does the world need more medicine and energy and buildings and food? No. There is enough food and medicine, there are enough resources for all. There is starvation and poverty and widespread disease because of human ignorance, prejudice, and fear. Out of greed and hatred we hoard materials, we create wars over imaginary geographic boundaries and act as if one group of people is truly different from another group somewhere else on the planet. Although political and economic change is important, it alone can never be sufficient because the ongoing source of war and poverty is the power of these forces in the human heart. What the world needs is not more oil, but more love and generosity, more kindness and understanding. The most fundamental thing we can do to help this war-torn and suffering world is to genuinely free ourselves from the greed and fear and divisive views in our own minds and then help others to do the same. If we cannot do that, how can we expect it from others? Spiritual practice and transforming the heart are the most important task in our life. From this point of view spiritual life is not a privilege; it is our basic responsibility.

The other side of this question is also compelling. We have only to consider the recent horror of Cambodia, the violence in Central America, the starvation in Central Africa—situations in which the enormity of suffering is almost beyond comprehension. In India alone 360 million people live in poverty, where one day's work can mean that night's meal. I once met a man in Calcutta who was sixty-four years old and still pulled a rickshaw for a living. He had been doing it for forty years and had ten people dependent upon him for income. He had gotten sick the year before for ten days, and after a week the family ran out of money and had nothing to eat. How can we possibly let this happen? Each day we build more nuclear missiles. As you read this, forty children per minute will die from starvation while $ 15 million per minute is spent on weapons. Today there are hundreds of millions of people who are starving and don't have enough to eat, who are malnourished. That's happening this very day, to people like us—people with eyes, ears,

hands, bodies, stomachs, hearts. There are hundreds of millions of people who are so impoverished that they have little or no shelter and clothing to protect themselves from the sun, wind, and rain. There are hundreds of millions of people who are sick with diseases that we know how to cure, that just take a simple kind of medicine. But they can't afford the medicine or don't have access to it. Here today, on this small planet, these things are taking place. Clearly we must respond. We cannot hold back or look away.

At times we may have painful dilemmas about what path to take, where to put our energy. There are so many possibilities—even choosing which type of meditation to practice can be confusing. How are we to decide? It all requires an act of listening to the heart. There are two steps to this process. The first requires that we be willing to touch and feel directly the problems and possibilities in ourselves and the world around us.

This is the beginning of the teaching of the Buddha, and the beginning of our own understanding of the problem of world peace. Then the second step involves this same deep listening and touching of the heart and from it the allowing of an immediate and spontaneous response.

To look directly at the situation is not a question of ceremonies or religion. The mandate is to look in some very deep way at the sorrow that exists now in our world, to look at our personal and individual and collective relationship to it, to bear witness to it, to acknowledge it, instead of running away. But nuclear war, ecological devastation, broken families and even the unavoidable growing pains of our children and our own hearts are often overwhelming. The suffering is so great that mostly we don't want to look. We close our minds. We close our eyes and hearts.

Opening to all aspects of our experience is what is asked of us if we want our hearts to grow, if we want a difference. This means looking at the world with honesty, unflinchingly and directly, and then looking at ourselves and seeing that this sorrow is not just out there, but also within ourselves. It is our own fear and prejudice and hatred and desire and wanting and neurosis and anxiety. Our own sorrow. We have to look at it and not run away from it. In opening to suffering, we discover that we can connect with and listen to our own hearts.

This is the source of compassion and the basis for choosing a path with heart. Choosing our path is the second step, though it may need to be taken many times. Each time it is the same process: allowing sorrow to touch our hearts and listening to our hearts, listening to our individual response of wisdom and compassion. One of the difficulties with our busy modern culture is that we don't take time to listen to our hearts. Our immediate problems, our plans and thoughts, fill our minds and, lost in thinking, we lose our connection to our hearts and our true nature.

When we take the time to listen, from deep inside, we hear a voice that guides our journey. Some of us may respond by choosing the path of simplicity, developing an ascetic or isolated or monastic practice to purify our hearts. The hermit yogis who even today still live in caves in the North Indian Himalayas have chosen this path. And the exquisite silence and inner purity they cultivate is their powerful connection and contribution to the whole world around them. Others may choose a path of surrender and devotion, inspired by love of the Buddha or Jesus or Krishna and live a life of kindness and nonattachment through this devotion. Some may choose a path of service, of heartfelt and active social and community involvement, giving to others as their path to awakening. Others may choose a path that involves study, reflection, and a spiritual use of the intellect. There are as many paths as there are hearts to awaken. The spiritual journey does not present us with a pat formula for each of us to follow. It is not a matter of imitation. We cannot be Mother Teresa or Gandhi or the Buddha. We have to be ourselves. We have to discover and connect with our own unique expression of the truth. To do that, we must learn to listen to and trust ourselves to find our path with heart.

A great potential exists in the heart of each person for the realization of truth, for the experience of wholeness, for going beyond the shell of the ego. We can discover a wholeness of being that will express itself both through meditation and through sharing ourselves with others. When we listen to our hearts, the course to take can become clear and immediate. Whether it is an inner or outer path, it has enormous power to affect the world. For most of us, our practice will express both of these dimensions at different times. Initially many of us have focused our practice on inner meditation, retreats, and silent sitting. Through this comes centeredness, wisdom, and an increasing ability to open the heart. We can learn from our sitting the power of awareness and touch a level of purity and freedom

unknown in most human lives. But touching this wisdom is not enough. After years of inner practice many of us find awakening within us an urge to express our new understanding in the world around us. How do we know when and where to serve? There is no preset answer— the heart will tell us when we listen.

Even for those of us who are involved in teaching meditation full-time, other pans of our practice call. Some of us have been drawn to serve in other ways, working part-time as nurses, counselors, or aides to the dying.

A few years ago, when many thousands of Cambodian people were fleeing the violence in their homeland only to face starvation and disease in refugee camps in Thailand, some of us who had been deeply touched by living in those Buddhist countries felt, "We've got to go there," and so we went. We knew the people and even a bit of the local languages. We didn't deliberate much at the time about whether or not we should go to work in the refugee camps. It seemed as if it had to be done, and we went and did it. It was immediate and personal. Vipassana in the West has started by placing a great emphasis on inner meditation and individual transformation. Buddhist teachings have another whole dimension to them, a way of connecting our hearts to the world of action. Their first universal guidelines teach about the basic moral precepts and the cultivation of generosity. These are the foundation for any spiritual life. Beyond this, Buddhist practice and the whole ancient Asian tradition is built upon the spirit of service. For some, service may seem to be simply an adjunct or addition to their inner meditation. But service is more than that; it is an expression of the maturity of wisdom in spiritual life. Understanding of this spirit of service and interconnectedness grows as our wisdom deepens.

For many people service and open-hearted giving become the very vehicle for their liberation and are taken as their path or way of practice. A sense of interconnectedness leads to the realization that all our activity can be undertaken as service to the world around us. Following this path brings us face to face with selflessness and non-separation as surely as our inner meditation does. At its best, service becomes an art of selfless giving, of acting from the heart without attachment to praise or fame or even the beneficial result of the action. To act in this way embraces both compassion in our hearts and wisdom that sees that in the end we cannot own or possess a single thing. Our service is more a spirit of acting to the best of our ability with our full being and understanding.

At its best, spiritual service is not a giving from the ego-sense of "See what I have done." It is not even a way of bettering the world through achieving desirable ends. Nor can it be a new form of attachment. It is not that these are bad. We will certainly find these kinds of mixed motivations within us when we act. But the spirit of service asks us to touch and act from a deeper place, a chord of the heart that responds to life out of connectedness and compassion, independently of results.

The sense of service and attuning our hearts to a more selfless vision can be developed and practiced like any other part of our path. Service requires us to cultivate the same quality of attention and mindfulness we have turned inward toward the world outside. It is a development of kindness and nonattachment in action. Even without knowing it, this spirit is what keeps the world alive. The insects and bees in the Amazon jungle pollinate the jungle plants, which in turn transform carbon dioxide into oxygen and replenish much of the Earth's atmosphere. Our lives depend upon those insects. The practice of service for us as humans is a process of making this interconnectedness conscious and allowing it to mindfully inform our actions.

Two thousand and five hundred years of Buddhist tradition has been supported by the understanding of this spirit of service. People have built monasteries, universities, and retreat centers, and supported monks, nuns, teachers, meditation, religious ceremonies, and an extensive variety of Buddhist social and peace practices and projects, all from the understanding of our interconnectedness in the dharma. But the path of practice goes farther than that. The way we drive, the way we use our money, the work we do, all of it can become a part of our path of service. As we live, whether as a plumber or waitress or physician or bookkeeper or beekeeper, we can learn to act with attention and caring. We can turn the actions of our life into the very heart of our practice. We become the server and the served, and the interconnection of it all is the heart of service.

One of the ways that our inner meditation can support and blossom into a life of service is through the cultivation of a strong and caring mindfulness and wakefulness. Equally important is the way that our inner practice brings us to look

directly at the powerful facts of birth and death, at the cycling of life. From understanding this we can discover within us a place of great fearlessness.

There are two great forces in the world. One is the force of people who are not afraid to kill. These people run much of the world from a political and economic and military point of view. People who are not afraid to kill run many of our modern nations. It gives a lot of strength to be unafraid to kill. The other source of strength in the world—of real strength—is people who are not afraid to die. These are people who have touched the very source of their being, who have looked in such a deep way that they understand, acknowledge, and accept death, and in a way have already died. They have seen beyond the separateness of the ego's shell, and they bring to life the fearlessness and caring born of this love and truth. This a force that can meet the force of someone who is not afraid to kill. This is the power that Gandhi called satyagraha, the force of truth, and that he demonstrated in his own life. In 1947, when India was partitioned into two nations, India and Pakistan, millions of people became refugees as Muslims and Hindus moved from one country to the other. The process was accompanied by terrible rioting and bloodshed. Tens of thousands of troops were sent to West Pakistan to try to quell the violence, while Gandhi went to what was then East Pakistan. He walked from village to village asking people to stop the bloodshed. Then he fasted. He said he would take no more food until the violence stopped, the insanity stopped, even if that meant his own death. And slowly the riots stopped. They stopped because of the power of love, because Gandhi cared about something—call it truth or life or whatever you wish—much greater than the person "Gandhi," and he was willing to commit his life in service to this. Discovering this fearlessness is the underlying spirit of our own practice, whatever form it may take. Living aligned with truth is more important than either living or dying. Understanding this is the source of incredible power and energy, manifesting through love and compassionate action.

One of the most exquisite experiences one can have traveling in India is going to the holy city of Benares by the Ganges River. Along the river-bank are ghats and temples where people have come for thousands of years to bathe as a purification, and there are also ghats where people bring corpses to be cremated. Because Benaras is considered a holy city, many people go there to die. One may hear about the burning grounds and imagine that it would be terrifying or depressing to be there. But when one actually goes and is rowed down the river in a little boat up to the ghats, it is quite different than expected. The river itself is very still, and as one approaches the temple there is mostly a feeling of an ancient and yet ordinary process. There may be eight or ten fires burning as friends or relatives of the deceased stand silently watching the body as the river flows by. Every twenty minutes or so a new body is can roll down to be bathed in the Ganges and then put on the fires as people chant, "Rama nama satyahai" "The only truth is the name of god." The experience is not dreadful at all; instead it is peaceful and sacred and very sane. There is a recognition that life and death are part of the same process, that death is simply what happens to each body, and that there is no need to fear it.

There is a deep joy that comes when we stop denying the painful aspects of life and instead allow our hearts to open to and accept the full range of our experience: life and death, pleasure and pain, darkness and light. Even in the face of the tremendous suffering in the world there can be a joy that comes, not from rejecting pain and seeking pleasure, but rather from our ability to sit in meditation even when it is difficult and open to the truth. The work of practice begins by allowing ourselves to face fully our own sadness, fear, anxiety, desperation—to die to our limited ideas about how things should be and to love and accept the truth of things as they are. With this as our foundation, we can see clearly the source of suffering in our lives and in the world around us; that is, the factors of greed, hatred, and ignorance that produce a false sense of separation. We can look directly at how we create and enforce separation. How do we make this world of "I want this, I want to become that, this will make me safe, this will make me powerful"? How do we create a world based on race, nationality, age, sex, ideology, religion, even on the name of God? Look at yourself and see who is "us" and who is "them." Does "us" mean meditators or educated people or Americans or white people? Who is your "us"? Whenever there is a sense of "us," then there is a sense of "other." When we can give this up, then we can give up the idea that strength comes from having more than "others" or from having the power over "others." When we give this up, we give up the delusion that love is a weakness, and we find the source of true compassion in all our actions.

The inner and outer aspects of practice are illustrated by a story about an old Zen monk in China who practiced meditation for many years. He had a good mind and became very quiet, but never really came to touch the end of "I" and "others" in himself. He never came to the source of complete stillness or peace out of which the deepest transformation comes. So he went to his master and said, "May I please have permission to go off and practice in the mountains? I've worked for years as a monk, and there is nothing else I want but to understand this: the true nature of myself, of this world." And the master, knowing that he was ripe, gave him permission to leave.

The monk left the monastery and took his bowl and few possessions and walked through various towns on his way. As he left the last village behind and was going up into the mountains, there appeared before him, coming down the trail, an old man carrying a great big bundle on his back. (This old man was actually the bodhisattva Manjushri, who the Chinese Buddhists believe appears to people at the moment that they are ripe for awakening. Manjushri is usually depicted carrying the sword of discriminating wisdom, which cuts through all attachment, illusions, and separateness.) The old man addressed the monk, asking, "Say, friend, where are you going?"

The monk told his story. "I've practiced for so many years, and all I want now is to touch that center point, to know that which is the essence of life. Tell me, old man, do you know anything of this enlightenment?"

At this point the old man simply let go of his bundle, and it dropped to the ground—and, as in all good Zen stories, the monk was enlightened. That is our aspiration, our task—to let it all go, to drop and put down our whole past and future, all of our identifications, our fears, our opinions, our whole sense of "I," "me," and "mine."

At this point in the story, the newly enlightened monk looks at the old man a bit confused about what to do next. He says, "So now what?" The old man smiles, reaches down, picks up the bundle again and walks off to town.

To put our burden down requires, first, that we acknowledge all that we are carrying: that we see our sorrow, our suffering, our attachment and pain, see how we're all in it together, accept birth and death. If we do not face it, if we are afraid of death and afraid of surrendering, if we don't want to look, then we can't release our sorrow. We will push it away here and grab it again there. Only when we have seen the nature of life directly can we put it down. And once we put it down, then, with understanding and compassion, we can pick it up again. To the extent that we let go, we can act effectively, even dramatically, in the world, without bitterness and self-righteousness.

A number of years ago the Menninger Foundation sponsored a conference at which Mad Bear, an Iroquois medicine man, spoke. After several days of meetings at which scientific papers were presented, it was his turn. He said, "For my presentation I'd like us to begin by going outside." Everyone followed him outside to an open field, and he asked us all to stand silently in a circle. We stood for a while in silence under a wide open sky, surrounded by fields of grain stretching to the horizon. Mad Bear then began to speak, offering a prayer of gratitude. He thanked the earthworms for aerating the soil so that plants can grow. He thanked the grasses that cover the earth for keeping the dust from blowing, for cushioning our steps, and for showing our eyes the greenness and beauty of their life. He thanked the wind for bringing rain, for cleaning the air, for giving us the life-breath that connects us with all beings. He spoke in this way for nearly an hour, and as we listened our mindfulness grew with each prayer. We felt the wind on our faces and the earth beneath our feet, and we saw the grass and clouds, all with a sense of connectedness, gratitude, and love.

This is the spirit of our practice: love—not the near-enemy of attachment, but something much deeper—infusing our awareness, enabling us to open to and accept the truth of each moment; and service that feels our intimate connectedness with all things and responds to the wholeness of life. Whether we are in the midst of our family life or in a remote monastery, whether we are sitting in meditation or sitting somewhere in protest, this is our practice in every moment.

## FIRST STEPS[2]

### REFLECT ON YOUR MOTIVES:

*Knowing others is wisdom; knowing the self is enlightenment. – Tao Te Ching*

You cross the street to avoid looking in the eyes of a homeless woman. Your heart is calling, but you don't respond. Why? Maybe it's because you learned not to be vulnerable as a child. You became afraid to be who you are, afraid to listen to your heart. It's too dangerous. Opening to this homeless woman, even for a moment of eye contact, may make you feel vulnerable as you become aware of what she needs and what you have. Questioning the status quo, however fleetingly, may seem just too difficult at this moment; your conditioned response may be to cross the street and avoid vulnerability. You haven't consciously thought these things, but you have made an unconscious decision, one of so many moments in an urban day. You pass on to buy the paper or get some lunch before going to your meeting.

This is us living the busy and unexamined life, acting from that complex of motives that takes us through the day. But when we don't pay full attention to our inner dialogue, to our feelings and thoughts, and we don't answer the call of the heart, we feel alienated from ourselves and from life around us, however subtly, and we don't experience the moment as fully as we might. As we pass by the homeless woman, life passes us by.

Compassionate action gives us an opportunity to wake up co some of our motives and to act with more freedom. It gives us the chance to put ourselves out on the edge, and if we are willing to take a clean look at what we see there, we can come to know ourselves better. We can't, of course, change what is arising in us at any moment, because we can't change our pasts and our childhoods. But when we listen to our own minds and stop being strangers to ourselves, we increase the number of ways we can respond to what arises. Then we know when we are resisting contact with a poor person because of something that happened in childhood, and we know that now we have nothing to fear either from the homeless person or from the examination of our place in the economic structure. We are here right now, and we are free. We can either walk past the person, talk to her, give her some money, and go on, maybe reflecting on the causes of homelessness and its relation to our hot tub, or we can cross the street because we are still carrying around fear and protection from childhood and don't want to deal with it today on the way to a meeting. Whichever we do, with increasing awareness comes an appreciation of our actions as they are, and then they begin to change. Even if we haven't acted compassionately toward the street woman, we haven't repressed the fact that she exists, and we aren't judging ourselves; as awareness and acceptance increase, not blocked by our fears, we tend to act more humanely. It happens naturally.

## START RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE

*….everything here apparently needs us, this fleeting world, which in some strange way keeps calling to us. Us, the most fleeting of all.*
*– Rainer Maria Rilke*

As you read this, there is something that needs to be done. Suffering can be reduced and help can be offered. Just look around. Many people find opportunities for service arising from their work and professions. Work is what we do every day; it is often what is most familiar to us. Some of us may lobby for a more equitable work space; others may find that our professional talents can be used to help outside. Each of us knows what is calling and how we can answer.

A few years ago, Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, the now famous makers of creamy Vermont ice cream, were becoming aware of the disappearance of the rain forests but were kept busy by their rapidly growing company. At the

same time, Jason Clay, the executive director of Cultural Survival, was working on an agro-forestry scheme; he hoped to introduce First World consumers to products that could be grown under the rain forest canopy in "extractive reserves," parts of the rain forest that could be farmed and thereby preserved. They met one night—the ice cream makers and the foundation head— and the idea of Rainforest Crunch was born. This cashew and Brazil nut brittle uses large quantities of nuts, which provide the forest people with three to ten times what they usually earn. And 40 percent of the profits from the candy go to rain forest-based preservation organizations, including Cultural Survival and the Rainforest Action Network.

Ben and Jerry have found a way to support endangered Amazonia right where they are—within the framework of their business. And, as is the way of creative ventures, it has continued to grow. As the nuts are prepared for the crunch, they give off "nut dust" at the rate of hundreds of pounds per week. Ben and Jerry began storing the dust, knowing it has nutritional value but not knowing what to do with it. Just as it threatened to overwhelm them ("Corporate Execs Buried in Nut Dust"), they conceived of the Rainforest Crunch Cookie, which could use the dust as flour. They had already proved that people will buy and eat sweets for a good cause, so they knew they had a market. And, to maximize the good effects, they connected with Bernie Glassman, abbot of the Zen Community of New York. The Zen Community had responded to the plight of the homeless in their area— Yonkers—by creating a holistic program that included job training at their Greyscon Bakery. Ben and Jerry's idea was perfect—the Rainforest Crunch Cookies could not only give livelihood to Brazilian cooperatives and raise money for other rain forest preservation work but could generate jobs and training for homeless mothers in Yonkers. A stroke of compassionate genius. And it all happened right where everyone already was—at work.

## ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENTS[7]

### CODE 8: OPEN AND HONEST

Try to be more open with people. Express your true feelings as much as possible. When we try to be what we are not, when we try to impress people and when we hide our inner feelings from others, we immediately experience mental tension and alienation. This tends to intensify our feelings of 'me against the world'. Remember also that even the most insensitive person can detect to a degree if you are trying to hide something, or if you have a guilty secret, for he might be hiding or have hidden the same type of guilty secret.

### CODE 9: SEE A MANS POTENTIAL

Remember that everyone has the potential to attain higher levels of awareness. A man's present attitude towards his environment or toward you is caused by mental programming. His present mode of living is temporary and will change and become more harmonious if and when he starts to understand himself and his mind. All of us have unrealized potential just waiting to be tapped. Try to see this potential in all people, no matter how difficult it may be.

## RETURNING MEDITATION STAGE 3 AND 4

Practice stage 1 and 2 as before.
Stage 3: Continue with stage 2 but now instead of looking at what may have distracted the mind from the practice, return immediately to the breath, as soon as you realize your mind has wondered. Continue this for 5-10mins.

Stage 4: Now be aware of the inner space you feel. The space of your true self, or nature, however you experience this now. In this space pose the question “Who am I?” Do not try answering it with the mind, or thinking about the question. Simply become identified with the answer. Be the answer. Experience the answer to the question “Who am I?” again whenever you become distracted or start thinking about this, simply “return” to the experience of being. Practice 5-10 mins.

After some weeks of practicing the returning meditation, try come back to your breath or to the experience of your true self. Whenever you get pulled away, simply return. This is especially useful when confronting difficult situations as it will help you remain present and responsive to the moment.

"Even the wise man forgets himself but what makes him wise is he knows how to return to himself."

## **W**HY DO I WANT TO DO THIS? – REFLECT ON THIS QUESTION

## SESSION 6: WHAT NEEDS ARE OUT THERE AND THE WAY OF COMPASSIONATE ACTION.

### MODULE INTRO[3]

To the question, "How can I help?" we now see the possibility of a deeper answer than we might once have expected. We can, of course, help through all that we do. But at the deepest level we help through who we are. We help, that is, by appreciating the connection between service and our own progress on the journey of awakening into a fuller sense of unity.
We work on ourselves, then, in order to help others. And we help others as a vehicle for working on ourselves.

“We are questions for one another. And service is exploring them and awakening through them.”

“So service is ‘an endless series of questions,’ puzzling and insistent. It not only raises questions, it helps to answer them. Service is a curriculum.”

“Separateness and unity. How interesting that these root causes, revealed in the experience of helping, turn out to be what most spiritual traditions define as the fundamental issue of life itself. Awakening from our sense of separateness is what we are called to do in all things, not merely in service. Whether these traditions speak of us as being cut off from God, Nature, Original Mind, True Being, the Tao, the Dharma–they call on us, in one voice, to undertake the journey back to unity.”

“Service, from this perspective, is part of that journey…..It is a vehicle through which we reach deeper understanding of life.”

### QUOTES ON SEVA



Serve, Love, Give, Do Good, Be Good, Purify, Meditate, Realise.
- Swami Sivananda



You say nothing is created new? Don’t worry about it. With the mud of the earth, make a cup from which your brother can drink.
– Antonio Machado

### STORY

#### ANTIWAR MOVEMENT[3]

We were standing at attention. Just a bunch of ordinary guys called up for this situation: a major demonstration in Washington against the war in Vietnam. Our job was to protect the Pentagon, which was a ludicrous idea to most of us—about as ludicrous but not as funny as this group of people over to a side who were doing this magical ritual in which they were going to levitate the Pentagon. They had chants and dances and they were into it and having a great time. I liked it. One guy actually yelled, "I saw it rise, I swear." It was hard not to laugh, even feel a part of it. I was rooting for it to rise too—why not? But I couldn't really be a part of it, at least at that moment. And it wasn't any easier because of how the rest of the demonstrators were treating us.

Anyhow, this girl approached me and placed this flower in my rifle. She didn't even look me in the eye. I might have been anyone. Then she stepped back, and everyone applauded and congratulated her, and she looked pretty pleased with herself. And they had this "Make Love, Not War" poster, but it didn't feel like love to me. It was like I wasn't even

there. But of course I was. Turned out there was a- picture to prove it. Right on the front page of the paper, with me standing there looking like a stiff and her all angelic. The Associated Press got hold of it and it went out all over the world. I felt used. Thing is, I'd been coming around to feeling the war was wrong. But that experience just pushed me back. There was nothing among those people in front of me that felt like they were inviting me in. If anything, quite the contrary.

So I stayed kind of noncommittal for a while afterwards. A year or so later, I went down to Fort Kenning to visit two Army friends who were getting ready to ship out to Vietnam. We hung out at this coffeehouse near the base. Very interesting place. New records, magazines, nice feeling, you could smoke a little out back, and just relax and talk among soldiers away from the base. I found out it was run by some antiwar activists, who had been setting them up at bases all around the country. Very simple idea. Just right. I talked to the guy who ran this one. He said, "Well, these guys are going to be doing the fighting. ..."

So there was an atmosphere of frank talk among the soldiers. And I heard how most of them really questioned the war, how low morale was out there, how guys were basically ducking and staying low. One guy said, "You know where the real peace movement is? In the foxholes. The guys who are just keeping alive and not diving into this whole mess. That's what's going to end this war." And it's true. It's still an unwritten story about Vietnam. That night, at that coffeehouse, was the moment I really decided to become active against the war.

I did some work with Vietnam Vets Against the War. That was when I went back to Washington for the first time since that demonstration when I was in the Guard. We went there to meet with congressmen and other officials and to establish this outside encampment which would be there as a statement in itself. It was quite something for guys to be huddled around fires again, only this time right at the foot of the U.S. Capitol.

For me it was ironic too, because the last time I had been guarding the government, and this time I was talking to it. "Sir, here's what's going on out there...." And they listened. They had to. These were the guys who'd been there. And if the men aren't really behind it, and they're taking all kinds of drugs, and even potshots at officers, which was happening... well, they paid attention to us all right, and we just let the story speak for itself.

If people wanted to come by the encampment, we'd talk to them. If the media wanted to come by, we'd talk to them. The camp was a free zone for whoever showed up. And that was a powerful message: an army encampment open to all. I can't tell you what the net effect of it was. Who knows? I will say this: Everyone I met seemed deeply moved by something about it. I felt we had real strength and power and self-respect and other people's respect. There was truth in it. And I could see all that in the eyes of the officials. They recognize power when they see it. So we were a strong force just by our presence there.

Before leaving Washington I went over to where that demonstration at the Pentagon had been, several years before. I could see the whole episode like a movie ... including that flower child. I didn't have any bad feelings about her. She was just playing her part. The Pentagon still looked pretty solid, however. We haven't levitated it yet, although I definitely think we should go on trying.

A coffeehouse. An encampment. A free zone for whoever shows up. We're an environment, not an argument for social change. Our aim is to awaken together and see what follows, not to manipulate one another into this action or that.

## NON-VIOLENT CONFLICT RESOLUTION[3]

The train clanked and rattled through the suburbs of Tokyo on a drowsy spring afternoon. Our car was comparatively empty—a few housewives with their kids in tow, some old folks going shopping. I gazed absently at the drab houses and dusty hedgerows.

At one station the doors opened, and suddenly the afternoon quiet was shattered by a man bellowing violent, incomprehensible curses. The man staggered into our car. He wore laborer's clothing, and he was big, drunk, and dirty. Screaming, he swung at a woman holding a baby. The blow sent her spinning into the laps of an elderly couple. It was a miracle that the baby was unharmed.
Terrified, the couple jumped up and scrambled toward the other end of the car. The laborer aimed a kick at the retreating back of the old woman but missed as she scuttled to safety. This so enraged the drunk that he grabbed the

metal pole in the center of the car and tried to wrench it out of its stanchion. I could see that one of his hands was cut and bleeding. The train lurched ahead, the passengers frozen with fear. I stood up.

I was young then, some twenty years ago, and in pretty good shape. I'd been putting in a solid eight hours of Aikido training nearly every day for the past three years. I liked to throw and grapple. I thought I was tough. The trouble was, my martial skill was untested in actual combat. As students of Aikido, we were not allowed to fight.

"Aikido," my teacher had said again and again, "is the art of reconciliation. Whoever has the mind to fight has broken his connection with the universe. If you try to dominate people, you are already defeated. We study how to resolve conflict, not how to start it."
I listened to his words. I tried hard. I even went so far as to cross the street to avoid the chimpira, the pinball punks who lounged around the train stations. My forbearance exalted me. I felt both tough and holy. In my heart, however, I wanted an absolutely legitimate opportunity whereby I might save the innocent by destroying the guilty.

"This is it!" I said to myself as I got to my feet. "People are in danger. If I don't do something fast, somebody will probably get hurt."
Seeing me stand up, the drunk recognized a chance to focus his rage. "Aha!" he roared. "A foreigner! You need a lesson in Japanese manners!"

I held on lightly to the commuter strap overhead and gave him a slow look of disgust and dismissal. I planned to take this turkey apart, but he had to make the first move. I wanted him mad, so I pursed my lips and blew him an insolent kiss.

"All right!" he hollered. "You're gonna get a lesson." He gathered himself for a rush at me.

A fraction of a second before he could move, someone shouted "Hey!" It was earsplitting. I remember the strangely joyous, lilting quality of it—as though you and a friend had been searching diligently for something, and he had suddenly stumbled upon it. "Hey!"
I wheeled to my left; the drunk spun to his right. We both stared down at a little, old Japanese man. He must have been well into his seventies, this tiny gentleman, sitting there immaculate in his kimono. He took no notice of me, but beamed delightedly at the laborer, as though he had a most important, most welcome secret to share.

"C'mere," the old man said in an easy vernacular, beckoning to the drunk. "C'mere and talk with me." He waved his hand lightly.
The big man followed, as if on a string. He planted his feet belligerently in front of the old gentleman, and roared above the clacking wheels, "Why the hell should I talk to you?" The drunk now had his back to me. If his elbow moved so much as a millimeter, I'd drop him in his socks.

The old man continued to beam at the laborer. "What'cha been drinkin'?" he asked, his eyes sparkling with interest. "I been drinkin' sake," the laborer bellowed back, "and it's none of your business.'" Flecks of spittle spattered the old man.
"Oh, that's wonderful," the old man said, "absolutely wonderful? You see, I love sake too. Every night, me and my wife (she's seventy-six, you know), we warm up a little bottle of sake and take it out into the garden, and we sit on an old wooden bench. We watch the sun go down, and we look to see how our persimmon tree is doing. My great-grand father planted that tree, and we worry about whether it will recover from those ice storms we had last winter. Our tree has done better than I expected, though, especially when you consider the poor quality of the soil. It is gratifying to watch when we take our sake and go out to enjoy the evening—even when it rains!" He looked up at the laborer, eyes twinkling.

As he struggled to follow the old man's conversation, the drunk's face began to soften. His fists slowly unclenched. "Yeah," he said. "I love persimmons, too. ..." His voice trailed on".
"Yes, "said the old man, smiling, "and I'm sure you have a wonderful wife."
"No," replied the laborer. "My wife died." Very gently, swaying with the motion of the train, the big man began to sob. "I don't got no wife, I don't got no home, I don't got no job. I'm so ashamed of myself." Tears rolled down his cheeks; a spasm of despair rippled through his body.

Now it was my turn. Standing- there in my well-scrubbed youthful innocence, my make-this-world-safe-for-democracy righteousness, I suddenly felt dirtier than he was. Then the train arrived at my stop. As the doors opened, I heard the

old man cluck sympathetically. "My, my," he said, "that is a difficult predicament, indeed. Sit down here and tell me about it."

I turned my head for one last look. The laborer was sprawled on the seat, his head in the old man's lap. The old man was softly stroking the filthy, matted hair.

As the train pulled away, I sat down on a bench. What I had wanted to do with muscle had been accomplished with kind words. I had just seen Aikido tried in combat, and the essence of it was Love. I would have to practice the art with an entirely different spirit. It would be a long time before I could speak about the resolution of conflict.

## THEORY TOPICS

### GIVING[8]

Then said a rich man, "Speak to us of Giving."

And he answered: You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give. For what are your possessions but things you keep and guard for fear you may need them tomorrow? And tomorrow, what shall tomorrow bring to the over-prudent dog burying bones in the trackless sand as he follows the pilgrims to the holy city? And what is fear of need but need itself? Is not dread of thirst when your well is full, the thirst that is unquenchable? There are those who give little of the much which they have and they give it for recognition and their hidden desire makes their gifts unwholesome. And there are those who have little and give it all. These are the believers in life and the bounty of life, and their coffer is never empty.

There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward. And there are those who give with pain, and that pain is their baptism. And there are those who give and know not pain in giving, nor do they seek joy, nor give with mindfulness of virtue; They give as in yonder valley the myrtle breathes its fragrance into space. Through the hands of such as these God speaks, and from behind their eyes He smiles upon the earth.

It is well to give when asked, but it is better to give unasked, through understanding; And to the open-handed the search for one who shall receive is joy greater than giving. And is there aught you would withhold? All you have shall some day be given; therefore give now, that the season of giving may be yours and not your inheritors'.

You often say, "I would give, but only to the deserving." The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture. They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish. Surely he who is worthy to receive his days and his nights is worthy of all else from you. And he who has deserved to drink from the ocean of life deserves to fill his cup from your little stream. And what desert greater shall there be, than that which lies in the courage and the confidence, nay the charity, of receiving? And who are you that men should rend their bosom and unveil their pride, that you may see their worth naked and their pride unabashed? See first that you yourself deserve to be a giver, and an instrument of giving. For in truth it is life that gives unto life-while you, who deem yourself a giver, are but a witness.

And you receivers-and you are all receivers- assume no weight of gratitude, lest you lay a yoke upon yourself and upon him who gives. Rather rise together with the giver on his gifts as on wings; For to be over mindful of your debt is to doubt his generosity who has the free-hearted earth for mother, and God for father.

### THE WAY OF SOCIAL ACTION[3]

Sometimes it's enough just to share information with others: the number of nuclear warheads deployed and poised; the wage rates of women compared to men; the unemployment statistics for minorities; how many children starve to death in a single day. We trust these situations to speak for themselves. Injustice will strike others as injustice has

struck us. We're appealing to collective understanding and compassion. It's Us talking it all over, seeing what We need to do.

But much of the time we come into social action— knocking on a door with a petition, addressing a meeting, writing a pamphlet, showing up at a demonstration, or just talking informally—and we're just a little self-righteous. We're convinced we've got something to say, something we're "correct" about. We've got our ideology and our scenario: here's how the situation really is, and the facts to back it up, if you'd take the time to read them, and if we all don't do this there's going to be that, so you better get started, and right away, right now.

Some of the time this attitude is blatant; at other times it's more understated. But at some level what we're communicating is the feeling that we know, others don't, and we've got to Change Minds. Changing Minds is a tricky game, especially when it's being fed with urgency and self-righteousness. There's often an air of superiority in what we say. People instinctively back off. They feel like they're being told, being "should" upon. Social action, they understand intuitively, ought to be fully voluntary if it's to have power and endurance. But we're not quite leaving them enough room when we set about trying to change their minds. We don't have the inclusiveness, the steadiness, the real willingness to listen that is critical at the outset of any action. It's not quite Us - it's this one trying to move that one.

In that environment, concerned as we are with results, we call on tactics of persuasion, appealing to states of mind that get people going. We begin to manipulate consciousness. Play to anger. Go for fear. There's always guilt. These basic states of mind are always lurking about, looking to be fed. They find plenty of nourishment in the world of social action: anger at oppression, guilt at being "better off", fear of violence and the greater power of others. They make a good case for themselves, pointing to all the provocation and evidence right here at hand.

Sometimes these feelings get us going—just the kick in the pants we may need. And we can keep them in check, in fact work with them. We can turn anger at injustice into cool, steady resolve. We can flip fear of war into greater reverence for life. We can find in feelings of guilt a call to greater moral sensitivity and alertness.

Yet left to themselves, fear, anger, and guilt are unwholesome states of mind. *How many of us have them fully in control in our private lives?* They pull us into a cycle of reactivity and feed on themselves. We begin to lose sight of the conditions that might have provoked them in the first place. In addition, they tend to be addictive and toxic. History is filled with examples of how these attitudes, which initially may have stirred people to action, went on to poison and destroy well-intentioned movements for social change. These are powerful states of mind we're playing with. Intentionally set in motion, their effect is usually incendiary.

Moreover, these states of mind blur our judgment and blind us to tactics that might be more reliable sources of action. Caught up in these emotions, we lose our timing and make mistakes. Our hearts grow cold; we turn people off. We're too worked up to hear our own inner voice, let alone trust anyone else's. What benefit in that?

They also prevent us from calling upon deeper human virtues that often move us all to act. In anger, we may lose sight of love. In fear, we may sacrifice trust and courage. In guilt, we may deny self-worth and obstruct inspiration. Do we really want to lose access to all these? If we really care about social change, can we afford to sacrifice such sources of commitment and strength? Are we serious or not?

We need to explore ways to reach one another and get started that don't set us off on the wrong foot. The handbill that announces the first meeting of a local parents group . . . the fund-raising letter that seeks support for famine relief... the mood of the crowd as it awaits the outset of the march . . . the way you phrase a question to a city councilwoman who's a little astonished at all these people who've shown up at her office . . . these aren't incidental moments or trivial matters of presentation or public relations. We're communicating the spirit behind the initiative. That's usually the message people react to first of all, if not most of all. What spirit will it be? How will we come forward? We can share information and conviction: here's our passion, our sense of urgency. But if "people don't like to be should upon, they'd rather discover than be told," then our invitation will probably be most effective when it communicates trust and respect. And honesty as well: We have to stay conscious of the ways in which our own lives still lack integrity and consistency. We're strongest when we act from what we have in common. We usually have to listen for that before we can really begin to act. Even the slightest bit of self-righteousness can get in the way.

## FIRST STEPS[2]

### ENTER LIGHTLY:

*Flow with whatever may happen and let your mind be free. Stay centered by accepting whatever you are doing. This is the ultimate. – Chuang Tsu*

*If you don't have a sense of humour it just isn't funny. – Wavy Gravy.*

(below excerpt taken from Compassion in Action[2].)
If we are to help heal the world, we need to remember that it is a sacred place. Our actions need to be positive statements, reminders that even in the worst of times there is a world worth struggling for. We need to find ways to keep the vision alive, to acknowledge but not get caught in the dark side, to remember that even the worst aspects of suffering are only part of the whole picture. We need to enter lightly.

Entering lightly means not ignoring suffering but treating it gently. We don't want to ignore another's pain, but our becoming depressed or angry about it doesn't relieve it and may increase it. The delicate balance is in allowing ourselves to feel the pain fully, to be sad or angry or hurt by it, but not be so weighted down by it that we are unable to act to relieve it. It is a matter of ends and means again: to create a caring, loving, peaceful world, we need to act with care and love and peace.

Easy to say, you may think, remembering your heavy heart, tears, and anger when you first saw babies in Ethiopian refugee camps dying from malnutrition. But it is exactly at these times—in the presence of pain, injustice, and horror—that our equilibrium is most needed. How can we keep it? Meditation can help; singing or walking can help; talking with people we respect can help; simply being quiet with ourselves can help.

It is the continuing work of life: of learning to trust that the universe is unfolding exactly as it should, no matter how it looks to us; learning to appreciate that each of us has a part in nurturing this interconnected whole and healing it where it is torn; discovering what our individual contribution can be, then giving ourselves fully to it. Demanding as that sounds, it is what, in the spiritual sense, we are all here for, and compassionate action gives us yet one more opportunity to live it. It is an opportunity to cooperate with the universe, to be part of what the Chinese call the great river of the Tao. It is not a coincidence that Hanuman, who in the Hindu cosmology is called the "embodiment of selfless service," is the son of the wind god; when we give ourselves into becoming fully who we are by doing fully what we do, we experience lightness, we are like kites in wind, we are on the side of the angels, we are entering lightly.

Looking for lightness, we find there is one thing that can sometimes spring us out of the heavy places. What is *this* magic? In Woody Alien's *Stardust Memories,* the aliens, after looking around at life on earth, say, "You want to do mankind a real service? Tell funnier jokes." Laughter is healing, we all know that.

### TAKE THE LEAP:

*Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic too it. – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

The Journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. And we all know that the first step is the hardest. Once you have decided and done a little research into what you plan to do, then simply begin. There may be fear involved that keeps you taking that first step. Fear of failure, fear of success. But in the face of that, one must take that leap. Nothing is ever certain nor is action and the path fixed. The important thing is to walk the path. Each step requires you to listen, be aware, adapt, adjust, accommodate. In the end it is the journey that really transforms us and shapes us, not the goal.

In the great Hindu myth the *Ramayana,* Hanuman was challenged to serve: Prince Rama asked him to leap across the ocean between India and Sri Lanka, carrying Rama's gold ring and a message of love to the princess Sita, who was being held hostage by the evil, ten-headed Ravana. Hanuman, the "little monkey," was not sure that he would be able to do it, and he had no idea what might await him on the other shore. He hesitated, thinking that maybe someone else would be better for the job. But, as the story goes, "there was dismay and faint sorrow, and it was time to be strong." So Hanuman agreed to take the ring to Sita. He climbed to a high hilltop overlooking the vast ocean separating the two countries, and then, in the translation of William Buck,

He held his breath and sucked in his stomach. He frisked his tail and raised it a little on the end. He bent his knees and swung back his arms, and on one finger gleamed Rama's gold ring. Then, without pausing to think, he drew in his neck, laid back his ears, and jumped.

It was grand! It was the greatest leap ever taken. The speed of Hanuman's jump pulled blossoms and flowers into the air after him, and they fell like little stars on the waving treetops. The animals on the beach had never seen such a thing. They cheered Hanuman, then the air burned from his passage, and red clouds flamed over the sky, and Hanuman was far out of sight of land.

## ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENTS[7]

### CODE 10: DON'T AVOID DIFFICULT SITUATIONS.

Normally we shape our lives so that we interact with people we dislike as little as possible. We try to associate ourselves with people and situations which tune in with our emotional programming. As such we continue to live in a way that reinforces and satisfies our prejudices. Treat difficult situations and enemies as the greatest teachers. It is they who can show us most clearly the way in which our mental program works. It is our enemies who bring to the surface our emotional conflicts and prejudices. Very few of us are really aware of programming and conditioning. When we recognize it then we can start to deal with it.

### CODE 11: WEAR OTHER PEOPLES SHOES.

Try to put yourself in other people's shoes. Instead of blindly reacting in ways that you are programmed, try to see the other person's point of view. For example, if a person leaves the door open you may become angry. Instead of becoming angry ask yourself why he left the door open. Perhaps he was in a hurry. Perhaps he was thinking of some other business. Perhaps it is part of his mental programming to leave doors open; maybe he was brought up in a house that did not have doors. Also it is your programming to become angry when someone leaves the door open. Remember your reaction is purely automatic. Try to change your response so that doors that are left open don't cause emotional upsets. Apply this to other situations in your life.

## RETURNING MEDITATION

All stages as before.

References and recommended further reading


1) ***Seva in the Ashram***, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, Talk at Mangrove Mountain, Australia, April 2006, Yoga Magazine Feb 2008. http://www.yogamag.net/archives/2008/bfeb08/seva.shtml

2) Book: ***Compassion in Action****: Setting out on the path of service* by Ram Dass and Mirabai Bush, published by Bell Tower.

3) Book: ***How Can I Help?*** *Stories and reflections on Service* by Ram Dass and Paul Gorman, published by Alfred A. Knopf

4) Website: www.yogamag.net – archives of back issues of yoga mag.

5) Website: Ram Dass: Serve Love Remember - http://ramdass.org/index

6) Book: ***Seeking the Heart of Wisdom*** by Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield, published by Shambhala

7) Book: ***A Systematic Course in ancient techniques of Yoga and Tantra***, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Bihar Yoga School, Munger.

8) Book: ***The Prophet*** by Kahil Gebran.

9) Website: www.sevaunite.org


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