



Compassionate Listening
Wise Attention
Forgiveness

Gen-La Venerable Thubten Tenzin

INTRODUCTION

This program is from a secular viewpoint, rather than faith-based. If we want to be forgiven, we need to learn to forgive. In all of our relationships, people can get angry, and we can learn to transform these situations. For interpersonal relationships, we could use these tips as skilful means. To help other people and ourselves in difficult times, we can apply these methods. If they are helpful, use them, if not, don't worry!

COMPASSIONATE LISTENING

According to Vietnamese Zen Monk Thich Nhat Hanh, "Compassionate listening is a very deep practice. You listen not to judge or to blame. You listen just because you want the other person to suffer less. The other person might be our father, our son, our daughter, or our partner."

Compassionate listening comes first - we have an open heart. We are open to the fact that the person who is angry, emotional, is having suffering.

We can think: "This person's anger is not about me so I don't need to be emotionally involved - I'm not a sounding board, I can use a method to reduce my emotions in the situation." Ways to reduce our own emotions in the situation include breathing and not focusing on the words but the person's suffering. See the section "Spiritual Advice for Coping with the Emotions using the Breath".

Patience and loving kindness are factors in compassionate listening - not getting involved, creating space, seeing how the person is suffering. We are not getting paid for our help and we are not listening so that we are liked, instead we want to be compassionate and reduce the suffering in the situation.

The basic idea is to see the person who is angry, or who is emotional, as suffering.

In order to stay present, we can be with the breath which is yogic, secular and simple, saying to ourselves 'breathing in, breathing out' remain in the moment.

Both for ourselves and the person who we are listening to, the pain of rehashing the past and the pain of future-preparing can be ceased in the present moment by coming back to the focus on breathing.

When we have seen the person as suffering and reduced our own emotions in the situation, we can be present with the person and bring them into the present: "Let's find a way to move on. Let's leave the past behind and let's find a way to be happy now, at peace and at ease. Let's be focused together to find forgiveness."

Spiritual Advice for Coping with Emotions using the Breath

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: if you are emotionally distressed, the only help is 21 rounds of breath, watching the breath. His Holiness says that when we are in the throws of an emotion, all we can really count on is the breath.

Meditation on the breath is important - become familiar with breath meditation. It is the antidote to getting carried away with our emotions. We can also take refuge in our own spirituality or the universe or Buddha or we can even take refuge in the breath, in the present moment.

As Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo says, you can't breathe in the past, you can't breathe in the future, you can only breathe in the present moment, so the breath brings us back to the present.

As Gen-La Venerable Tenzin says, the natural breath al-

lows us to come back to the here and now and to heal our emotions by simply allowing the emotion to flow away on the out-breath.

According to breath work, Tai Chi, Tibetan Yoga and Indian Yoga, when our emotions and our muscles tense, we tend to hold our breath, but if we can breathe through whatever stress, pain or difficulty we are experiencing, then we ease the secondary suffering and find it easier to cope with our situation.

My ideas:

WISE ATTENTION

Wise attention - this comes next - we have a clear mind. We ask ourselves "What is really going on here?"

Wise attention is hearing others and asking "What is the heart of the problem?" For example, is there anger which is covering grief or loss? Or frustration with a situation?

"The approach is to listen but not to get involved emotionally," Venerable Thubten Tenzin.

This means not allowing ourselves to be overcome by any emotion, not judging the person, but wanting instead to transform the suffering nature of emotions.

For some people, complaining about problems is also a symptom of deeper suffering and can be heard with compassionate listening and wise attention rather than problem-solving and frustration on our part.

Wise attention is helping to focus on what may be a deeper listening, helping others to understand that anger will not help their problem, without us buying into our own agenda - this means providing the space for discussions and the means for open-hearted understanding of our human condition.

In this process, we need to remain calm and if necessary, relocate to another space to calm down and possibly remove interferers.

We are being wise because we are practising patience, ease and calm. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, "Do not let the behaviour of others destroy your inner peace." Sometimes when we listen well to others, it brings up our own issues and negative emotions. If this is the case, we use our breath to bring ourselves back to the here and now.

If we feel exhausted from listening to others it may be because we are becoming emotionally involved. We can think, "I cannot help others when I buy into their emotions with emotionality myself, or when I am fixated on an outcome."

When we have provided the space in a difficult situation, a space of compassionate listening, seeing the person as suffering, wanting to transform that suffering and the underlying issues but without our own agenda, then often the person can find their own solution. We may want to ask, "What is your own antidote to cut through your anger/sadness?"

Often people will have their own prayer, affirmation, mantra, understanding or special place or activity that helps them to overcome the emotions and transform the suffering. If there doesn't appear to be an antidote, we might want to ask if they would like to talk to a counsellor, which may include someone from their own faith.

FORGIVENESS

Why forgive?

One of the reasons we might want to forgive is because holding a grudge causes us suffering.

All of us are human beings and our purpose is to be happy - instead of holding a grudge which hurts ourselves and others, we can understand the person's suffering and develop some empathy or acceptance.

Holding onto pain from the past and not forgiving means continuing a circle of suffering that goes on and on, hurting ourselves, and we become stuck in the past that can't be changed. We want to move on but we can't. As Einstein said, "*Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.*"

In our society these days revenge, seeking justice and judging others are common dis-eases. However, holding onto the concepts of justice, judgement and revenge means we continue to hold onto the pain of anger. With forgiveness, we can let go of these thoughts and feelings.

Thinking that we are punishing the person by being angry with them is wrong - we are actually punishing ourselves.
- Bikshuni Thubten Chodron

Levels of Forgiveness

His Holiness the Dalai Lama speaks of three levels of forgiveness.

1. Higher Level - respect and compassion. The other person is still a human being so still should receive respect and compassion. We therefore harbour no ill-feeling towards the other person.

2. Middle Level - we make a distinction between the action and the person, e.g. the Christian idea of the sin as opposed to the sinner; justice without anger, without hatred. Forgiveness does not mean accepting the wrongdoing of the other person - seeking justice without anger.
3. Lower Level - letting go of anger for our own inner peace. Keeping anger makes an extension of anger, it becomes stronger therefore there is more suffering.

How do we Forgive?

Firstly, we stop rehashing the past. We begin to forgive others and forgive ourselves when we have regrets.

Secondly, we focus on what makes us happy in the present. Helping others, breathing, healing with meditation, all help us to let go and live in the present.

Thirdly, we use prayers of our own religion or secular meditations or affirmations to return to the present moment and forgive. We can try the Forgiveness Meditations outlined below.

As the forgiver, you can have peace of mind for yourself - you can't change the other person, it's how they are, but you can accept how they are.

Forgiveness Meditation based on His Holiness the Dalai Lama's three levels of forgiveness, edited by Gen-La Venerable Thubten Tenzin.

We begin by sitting comfortably in the meditation posture with the back straight, feet flat on the floor and hands resting right on left with the palms up and thumbs touching.

We breathe, focus on the natural breathing process, in and out. In the present moment we let go consciously of the outside world.

This particular forgiveness meditation is an opportunity to give up the painful feelings and grudges that we have been holding onto. We feel strongly that we are going to make the most of this special time.

Begin by considering how holding onto anger towards somebody just extends that anger, making more anger in ourselves and therefore more suffering. Notice how we have been suffering from anger by holding onto it. We can begin to have compassion for ourselves by letting go of that anger, breathing it out of the body with the out-breath. Letting it all go... Breathing the anger out...

Anytime during the meditation, if our emotions become overwhelming, we can just come back to breathing, watching the breath, and letting emotions go on the out-breath.

Next we can think of the person we want to forgive. We separate the harmful action they did from the person themselves. While we may still consider the action as negative, we can start to forgive the person. Releasing anger, resentment and hatred towards them, we start by breathing white light into our body, and releasing all

feelings of anger and hatred on the out-breath. We continue breathing in healing white light until our whole body and mind are filled with light and open-ness. When we are ready, we start to send white light to the person we want to forgive, healing any pain between us. Sending them white light, we understand that it is time to forgive them as a person.

Once again, we come back to the breath and let go of any painful emotions that might be arising from the practise of forgiveness, breathing them out as we exhale.

Lastly, we consider that the person we want to forgive is a human being just like us, who also deserves respect and compassion. We no longer want to harbour ill-feelings towards this equal human being. Instead, we accept them as a fellow human who deserves compassion for their suffering and as an equal, worthy of respect. Spend some time to allow feelings of acceptance, respect and compassion to arise.

When we can equalise ourselves with others, we can respect them as we would like respect.

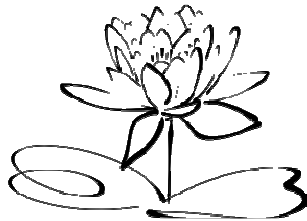
Thinking that we have done our best in these moments to release suffering and generate forgiveness, we enjoy any feelings of spaciousness and well-being that come about by this opportunity to heal.

When we are ready, we return our awareness to the room and finish the meditation there.

Forgiveness Meditation by Gen-La Venerable Thubten Tenzin

If the idea is to forgive with the heartfelt wish to let go of pain or guilt, we must be alone, find a quiet time and place, and begin with the breath. If we desire to let go of judging or blaming or guilt from the past, bitterness and anger towards others, we go through this process:

1. We start by giving up - let go and release all pain, breathe it out.
2. We seek no recompense or punishment. We breathe calmly in the present moment.
3. We forgive the behaviour (the action not the actor). We breathe and feel a sense of forgiveness.
4. We seek equanimity, knowing that everyone wants happiness and doesn't want suffering, just like ourselves. We relax with the natural breathing process.
5. We empathise with the action - have we also caused harm to others?
6. We allow compassion and respect to arise in our own mind. Coming back to the peaceful breath.



His Holiness The Dalai Lama offers wisdom about anger:

1. Anger is the real destroyer of our good human qualities; an enemy with a weapon cannot destroy these qualities, but anger can. Anger is our real enemy.
2. If we live our lives continually motivated by anger and hatred, even our physical health deteriorates.
3. Anger or hatred is like a fisherman's hook. It is very important for us to ensure that we are not caught by it.
4. We have a saying in Tibet: "If you lose your temper and get angry, bite your knuckles." This means that if you lose your temper, do not show it to others. Rather, say to yourself, "Leave it."
5. According to Buddhist psychology, most of our troubles are due to our passionate desire for and attachment to things that we misapprehend as enduring entities. The pursuit of the objects of our desire and attachment involves the use of aggression and competitiveness. . . . These mental processes easily translate into actions, breeding belligerence. Such processes have been going on in the human mind since time immemorial, but their execution has become more effective under modern conditions. What can we do to control and regulate these "poisons"—delusion, greed and aggression? For it is these poisons that are behind almost every trouble in the world.
6. Hatred can be the greatest stumbling block to the development of compassion and happiness. If you learn to develop patience and tolerance towards your enemies, then everything becomes much easier—your compassion towards all others begins to flow naturally.

7. Happiness cannot come from hatred or anger. Nobody can say, "Today I am happy because this morning I was angry." On the contrary, people feel uneasy and sad and say, "Today I am not very happy, because I lost my temper this morning."

* Through kindness, whether at our own level or at the national and international level, through mutual understanding and through mutual respect, we will get peace, we will get happiness, and we will get genuine satisfaction.

Although you may not always be able to avoid difficult situations, you can modify the extent to which you can suffer by how you choose to respond to the situation."

~His Holiness the Dalai Lama

"Compassionate listening is a very deep practice. You listen not to judge or to blame. You listen just because you want the other person to suffer less. The other person might be our father, our son, our daughter, or our partner [neighbours, friends, fellow shoppers etc]."

~*Thich Nhat Hanh*

"One must love oneself in order to love others. One must develop compassion for oneself to be able to feel compassion for others."

~*Lama Yeshe*

**The Buddha taught the following
to His son Rahula
(from "Old path white clouds"
by Thich Nhat Hahn)**

"Rahula, practice loving kindness to overcome anger. Loving kindness has the capacity to bring happiness to others without demanding anything in return.

Practice compassion to overcome cruelty. Compassion has the capacity to remove the suffering of others without expecting anything in return.

Practice sympathetic joy to overcome hatred. Sympathetic joy arises when one rejoices over the happiness of others and wishes others well-being and success.

Practice non-attachment to overcome prejudice. Non-attachment is the way of looking at all things openly and equally. This is because that is. Myself and others are not separate. Do not reject one thing only to chase after another.

I call these the four immeasurables.

Practice them and you will become a refreshing source of vitality and happiness for others."



Wellington Buddhist Centre
Tharpa Choeling Australia
166 Arthur St Wellington NSW
6845 4661 www.tharpachoeling.org