

Making Peace with Helplessness

As we awaken each day to the latest report of violence, sickness, death, and a myriad of injustices, we are most likely also waking up with our own sense of despair and helplessness. We want so much to live in a peaceful world and yet often what we find instead is a jangled and uncomfortable sense of overwhelm that follows us like a cloud on a stormy day. Motivated by our commitment to practice, we may be sincere in our desire to proceed into the day as mindfully as possible, with a conscious effort to bring forward our best offering toward healing the pain in this world of suffering. And yet once we sit with practice scrutiny, what we may find instead of our altruistic intention is the pain of our own resistance to life as it is right now. Though our hearts know better, our minds are likely to succumb to the chatter of that old, familiar dialogue of resistance and victimization, or a perhaps a newer dialogue filled with slick spiritual override.

Questions swirl in our minds and touch our hearts as we face the stark evidence of our human vulnerability and an uncertain future. We can easily find ourselves caught in self-justification and the seductive drama of “us vs. them”. With a moment of awareness we may suddenly hear our own voice sounding mean-spirited and actually contributing to the great divide that promises further suffering, rather than the sense of peace that we crave.

As we catch ourselves in our own delusion, bringing forward the following practice points can bring us closer to making peace with our own sense of helplessness.

First remember to bring practice home to what is going on within you.

Notice how fiercely we tend to stay focused on what others should do rather than what we need to work on within ourselves.

Second, remember to bring forward your personal aspiration.

It is more important than ever to remind ourselves of why we practice. Just because this circumstance we are currently dealing with may feel especially painful, it doesn't excuse us from holding aspiration at the forefront.

Third, offer tender mercy and compassion for your own struggle.

Compassion for our own personal experience of suffering must be tended to before we can make room for authentic compassionate connection with those around us.

When we bring practice home to ourselves we are bowing to our own willingness to expose our discomfort. We use our physical and emotional reactivity as a cue to bring alert awareness to the dimensions of our pain. No matter how much we are tempted to resist, we must shine the light of present moment awareness within and decline the temptation to retaliate. It is worth noticing how many brilliant ideas we have *of what someone else should be doing to make things better*.

This is challenging to do in a world that reinforces taking control, being on top of it, spiritually overriding it, and holding tight to an answer. It's fairly easy to understand how we can get caught in being totally focused on the world around us as the one having the problem and miss the all important practice point..... To face the struggle within ourselves that is connected to and inseparable from the totality of the world around us.

When we remember once again to bring forward our aspiration, we can drop into (rather than move away from) our feelings of overwhelm and helplessness and let the dreaded fear of the depth of the unknown expose itself. Our aspiration can carry us toward willingness to return to experiencing what is going on within us, ultimately exposing our futile attempts to control others.

Compassionately opening to ourselves is the only portal we have to authentic peace with anything else. In order to make peace with now, we must gently and mercifully face our own fears that are shrouded in sleepiness, confusion and blaming, and ultimately contributing to feeding the fire of this enormous discontent. If we can't stay with our own fear, how can we expect others to understand theirs? If we are certain that our rage is justified, doesn't that make it more understandable that someone else's rage is also justifiable? Can we get a glimpse at the common denominator of the shared fear of losing control? Can we bear to witness our own inclination to fuel and spread anger? Are we willing to acknowledge both our own skillful and sometimes unskillful behavior?

In opening to our own layers of hard heartedness, we have the potential to access compassionate awareness and make peace with ourselves. As we witness ourselves we may notice a frantic desire to take action simply to avoid helplessness. Sometimes we can't stop ourselves, but sooner or later we are again confronted with fresh evidence that when we react from our fear based retaliation, fear follows us and we are left dealing with not only the original upset, but also our own disappointment in ourselves.

Compassionate resolve on the other hand, is never disappointing even when it doesn't bring the outcome we had hoped for. Compassionate resolve is always satisfying because it lives within us and is not dependent on what anyone else does or doesn't do.

In order to tap into our own sense of compassionate resolve, we must first bring forward a sense of tender mercy for our own struggle with whatever blocks compassion. One

breath at a time we muster up the courage to embrace our struggle by staying present to the anxious quiver of this mysterious life. With compassionate awareness of each breath we shine the light on our own internal struggle with our anger and our fear. We shine the light on the need to make peace with our own sadness; to make peace with our own uncertainty, and to make peace with our own vulnerability. Rather than struggle to figure it out, we can refrain from needing to figure it out and return to just letting it be.

When we find our courage to face the moment, we may also find ourselves *grounded* in the experience of *groundlessness* itself. By being merciful with our own struggle first, we create an environment within us for compassion to rise up. From this vantage point our hearts can soften and open to include the shared struggle of those around us.

Compassionate awareness has room for both us and them. Compassionate awareness allows us to find the courage to stay present one breath at a time to this shared experience of life that is so much larger than any one person's self-centered dream. As awareness of our interconnectedness is acknowledged, fresh resolve can reveal itself. Not with a promise of the ultimate answer, but rather with a clarity of our own best next step.

The best part is that when we take action from compassionate resolve, we are never disappointed. Compassion is satisfying in itself. Compassion does not ask or demand anything from us or them. Compassion extends itself without requirements or expectations and is already at peace.

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