

The Boundless Abodes for Caregiving, Dying, Grieving

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There are four Boundless Abodes: 1) lovingkindness, 2) compassion, 3) sympathetic joy, and 4) equanimity. The phrases in this meditation are used in generating the energy of lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

You can radiate them to yourself, a benefactor, a friend, an enemy, one toward whom you feel neutral, and groups. Feel free to modify any of these phrases to fit your own situation. They connect us to the stream of basic goodness, and they connect us to one another. They are the qualitative basis for our work in being with dying. In some deep sense, strengthening the qualities of the four Boundless Abodes is the ultimate form of self-care.

Boundless Practices for the Caregiver

Balancing Equanimity and Compassion

These practices that bring together the strength of equanimity and the tenderness of compassion, the courage of presence and openness of surrender were crafted by the Buddhist teacher Sharon Salzberg and me, as well as those participating in Upaya's training program for health care professionals. Most particularly I want to thank Sharon for opening for me the great gift of the Brahmaviharas, or the Boundless Abodes.

They can live in the background of the mind and heart and nourish healthy caregiving practice as we offer our lives to the well being of others. When we lose balance, we can remember one or another phrase as a way to help us right ourselves and be present for others and face suffering, our

own and the suffering of others. And we can offer these phrases to those in our lives who are besieged by suffering.

In the experience of giving care, there is a delicate balance between opening our heart endlessly (which is compassion) and accepting the limits of what we can do and how we and others feel with equanimity. In dying, we need to both let go and be present for what is happening. In grieving, we need to touch our suffering and be present as sorrow washes through us.

Here are practices for cultivating the balance between compassion and equanimity. Compassion is the tenderness of the heart in response to suffering. Equanimity is a spacious stillness that accepts things as they are. The balance of compassion and equanimity allows us to care without becoming overwhelmed and unable to cope because of that caring.

The phrases we use reflect this balance. Choose the phrases that are personally meaningful to you and use those in your practice. You can alter them in any way you wish or create your own.

To begin the practice, take as comfortable a position as possible, sitting or lying down. Take a few deep, soft breaths to let your body settle. Bring your attention to your breath and begin to silently say your chosen phrase in rhythm with the breath. You can also experiment with just having your attention settle in the phrase, without using the anchor of the breath. Feel the meaning of what you are saying, without trying or forcing anything. Let the practice carry you along.

Meditation: Boundless Practices for Caregivers

May my love for others flow boundlessly.

*May the power of lovingkindness sustain me.**

*May you be happy and free of pain.**

*May all those who suffer be free of pain.**

*May this experience in some way be a blessing for you.**

*May I offer my care and presence unconditionally, knowing it
may be met by gratitude, indifference, anger or anguish.*

*May I offer love, knowing that I cannot control the course of
live, suffering, or death.*

May I find the inner resources to truly be able to give.

*May I remain in peace and let go of expectations.**

*I care about your pain and suffering; may I be present for it.**

*I care about your pain and suffering, and your release from
suffering depends on your choices and your karma.*

I will care for you and I cannot take away your suffering.

*I care about your suffering, and I cannot end your suffering
for you.*

*May I accept things as they are.**

*I wish you happiness and peace, and I cannot make your
choices for you.*

*May this experience open me to the true nature of life.**

*May I see my limits compassionately, just as I view the
suffering of others.*

*May I and all beings live and die in ease.**

**These phrases may be used by dying people.*

Meditation: Boundless Abodes for the Dying Person

Letting Go

All our lives our innate wisdom tells us to let go, to relax, and to relinquish fearful efforts to control. Our cultural

conditioning and personal history, however, usually tell us to hold on to people, experiences, and accomplishments in order to be happy. Many times our lives are spent in a battle between our innate wisdom and the culture's message about clinging and control. Being with dying is above all the time to turn to, trust, and rest in the voice of truth within.

In the following practices for the dying person, choose the phrases that are personally meaningful to you and use those in your practice. You can alter them in any way you wish or create your own.

To begin the practice, take as comfortable a position as possible, sitting or lying down. Take a few deep, soft breaths to let your body settle. Bring your attention to your breath and begin to silently say your chosen phrase in rhythm with the breath. You can also experiment with just having your attention settle in the phrase, without using the anchor of the breath. Feel the meaning of what you are saying, without trying or forcing anything. Let the practice carry you along.

The Practice

*May I accept my anger, fear and sadness, knowing that my vast heart is not limited by them.**

*May I be peaceful and let go of expectations.**

*May I accept my pain and suffering, knowing that my experience of illness does not make me bad or wrong.**

May I accept my pain, knowing that I am not my pain, not my body, not my illness.

*May I be filled with compassion and lovingkindness for myself and others.**

*May I be peaceful in body and mind.**

*May I be free from anger, fear and worry.**

*May I be open with myself and others about my experience.**
*May I receive other's love and compassion.**
May I be filled with compassion and lovingkindness for myself and others.
*I ask forgiveness from those whom I have harmed.**
*I freely forgive all those who have harmed me.**
*I forgive myself for mistakes made and things left undone.**
May all those I leave behind be safe and peaceful.
May I remember my consciousness is much vaster than this body, as I let go of this body.
May I accept things as they are.
May I realize the truth of impermanence.
*May I be open to the true nature of life.**
May I open to the unknown as I leave behind the known.
*May I live and die in ease.**
*May I, and all beings, live and die peacefully.**

These phrases can be used by caregivers or dying people.

Meditation: Boundless Practices for Grieving*

May the power of loving-kindness sustain me.
May I be peaceful in body and mind.
May I receive other's love and compassion.
May I open with gentleness to the pain of grief.
May I see my limits compassionately, just as I view the suffering of others.
May I come to recognize the gift of my loved one's death by opening my heart of compassion.
May I be free from suffering.
May those around me be free from suffering.
May I accept my suffering, knowing that I am not my suffering.

May I accept my anger, fear and sadness, knowing that they do not limit my vast heart.

May I let go of guilt and resentment.

May I know forgiveness.

May I offer forgiveness.

May I forgive myself for mistakes made and things left undone.

May I forgive myself for not meeting my loved one's needs.

May I accept my human limitations with compassion.

May I accept things as they are.

May I be open to the true nature of living and dying.

May I find peace and strength that I may use my resources to help others.

May I fully face life and death.

May I offer love, knowing I cannot control the course of life, suffering, or death.

May love heal my body and mind.

May I be peaceful and let go of expectations.

May I find the inner resources to be present for suffering.

May all beings live and die in peace.

**Note that many of these phrases can be used by caregivers and dying people.*

Transforming Grief

The practices that follow focus on two dimensions of grieving. The first aspect draws on the resources of the Four Boundless Abodes—lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity to strengthen ourselves as we surrender to grief. The second dimensions focuses on the importance of being in the stream of sorrow—to be touched by it, come to know it, and to be purified through the experience of being fully

washed by loss. In the practice of the Abodes, we use lovingkindness as a way to turn toward suffering with strength, resolve, and depth. In this way we can more fully realize the wisdom that is inherent in the experience of suffering. This is the very basis of compassion and the means of transforming suffering into wisdom.

The Practice

Being present for suffering:

May I find the inner resources to be present for suffering.

May I fully face life and death, loss and sorrow.

May I accept things as they are.

May I be open to the pain of grief.

May I accept my pain, knowing that it does not make me bad or wrong.

May I accept my suffering, knowing that I am not my suffering.

May I accept my anger, fear, and sadness, knowing that they do not limit the openness of my heart.

May I be open with myself and others about my experience of suffering.

Transforming suffering:

May sorrow show me the way to compassion.

May I come to recognize the gift of my loved one's death by opening my heart of compassion.

May I realize grace in the midst of suffering.

May this experience in some way be a blessing for me.

May lovingkindness sustain me.

May love fill and heal my body and mind.

May I be peaceful and let go of expectations.

May I find peace and strength that I may use my resources to help others.

May I receive the love and compassion of others.

May all those who are grieving be released from their suffering.

May I offer love, knowing that I cannot control the course of life, suffering, or death.

Forgiveness:

May I let go of guilt and resentment.

May I forgive myself for mistakes made and things left undone.

May I forgive and be forgiven.

May I forgive myself for not meeting my loved one's needs.

May I accept my human limitations with compassion.

Coming home:

May I be open to the true nature of life.

May I open to the unknown as I let go of the known.

May I offer gratitude to those around me.

May I be grateful for this life.

May I and all beings live and die peacefully.

At the end of this practice period, again let yourself rest in openness, inviting the feeling of gratitude to be present. How rare it is to open to the nourishment of basic goodness! Then dedicate the merit of the practice to all beings everywhere.