

City weekend retreat with Ayya Virañani

Karunā - Compassion

20 - 21 December 2025

1. Living within the Eight Worldly Winds

Our lives are grounded in the reality of the eight worldly winds: pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and disrepute. This constant fluctuation easily gives rise to inner instability, attachment to what is pleasant, and aversion to what is unpleasant.

Without inner training, this leads to difficult emotions, such as grief, despair, frustration, and reactive behavior.

For this reason, equanimity is essential. Yet this steadiness is supported and nourished by the other *Brahmavihāras*.

2. The Brahmavihāras as natural qualities of the heart

Loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity are not artificial emotions, but natural expressions of an open, non-dual heart. They do not need to be fabricated; they need to be remembered and cultivated.

Within their traditional sequence, *mettā* forms the foundation, followed by *karuṇā*, then *muditā* (appreciative joy), and finally *upekkhā* (equanimity). Although equanimity is often named last, it is present throughout all stages as a sustaining quality.

3. What compassion (Karuṇā) truly is

Compassion is defined as loving-kindness directed toward suffering: the sincere wish that another being may be free from pain, distress, or inner turmoil. It is not pity, not emotional sorrow, and not identification with another's suffering, but a stable, caring involvement.

Compassion arises from a balanced heart that cannot ignore or deny suffering, yet is not overwhelmed by it.

4. The enemies of compassion

There are two primary obstacles:

- **The far enemy:** cruelty, which ranges from subtle indifference and irritation to openly harsh words or actions. Even inner judgments such as “come on, don't be so weak” are recognized as forms of cruelty.
- **The near enemy:** sorrow or pity, in which one becomes stuck in “poor you” feelings, grief, or attachment to how things *should* be.

Genuine compassion naturally displaces both. Where true compassion is present, cruelty and sentimental sorrow cannot coexist.

5. The meditation practice: concrete and embodied

The practice originates in the early Buddhist tradition (including texts such as the [Visuddhimagga](#)) and is intentionally kept practical and simple.

The meditation unfolds in clear steps:

1. Grounding in the body, with awareness of the breath and physical sensations, cultivating a gentle and friendly presence.
2. Bringing attention to the heart area, optionally supported by placing a hand on the chest.

3. Choosing one person who is experiencing difficulty or misfortune - neither too close, nor abstract, and not “the whole world.”
4. Repeating a simple compassionate phrase, preferably using the person’s name (e.g., “May she be free from suffering” or “May he be free from distress”).

It is essential not to view this practice as something we “send” to another, but as a training of our own heart. The feeling does not need to be special or intense; repetition and intention are sufficient.

6. No agenda, no goal orientation

A crucial point is that compassion is practiced without expectation or outcome-oriented striving. It is not about fixing another person’s problem or achieving success in the outer world.

The measure of the practice is internal:

- Does hardness decrease?
- Does impatience or judgment soften?
- Is there more openness?

Even if the other person’s situation does not change, the practice is successful when the heart becomes gentler and freer.

7. Self-compassion and working with resistance

The practice inevitably brings resistance to the surface: self-criticism, frustration, distraction, or emotional pain. These are not seen as mistakes, but as part of the purification process.

When self-judgment arises, it is recommended to first cultivate *mettā* or gentleness toward oneself. The mind is like a puppy: it wanders, and that is normal. Training happens through kindness, not force.

8. Compassion in daily life

The practice does not stop at the meditation cushion. During eating, walking, social interactions, and even moments of discomfort (hunger, cold, fatigue), compassion can be carried openly into daily life:

“May we all be free from suffering.”

In this way, compassion becomes a living attitude rather than an isolated exercise.

9. Small moments, deep impact

Even brief periods of practice are meaningful. Just as a water jar is filled drop by drop, compassion gradually and sustainably transforms the heart. Through repetition, new mental habits are formed, making compassion increasingly natural.

10. Direction and deepening

The practice begins with one person, later extends to loved ones, to a neutral person, to a difficult person, and only much later - if at all - to all beings. Universal compassion is a profound path that requires time and maturation.

The essence always remains the same choice: responding from hardness, or responding from compassion.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.