

Employing Meditative Practices to Cultivate the Discomfort Resilience and Fierce Compassion Necessary to Uproot Racism

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"There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere."

Dr. Nelson Mandela

Meditative practices are inherently intended to help us experience liberation. This means that the goal of contemplative practice is freedom—which includes freedom from aversion, greed, attachment and delusion.

Diverse contemplative practices can bring us to the interior spaciousness we call freedom, including contemplative engagement with the arts and practices from varied cultural, philosophical and spiritual reference points. Listening to music, making art, gardening, walking, gazing at a flower and breathing itself, when done with the intention to land in the present with expansive awareness, are all roads to a sense of freedom. When we can engage our bodies, emotions, minds, as well as the ineffable aspect of self often referred to as spirit in our reflective practice, then mediation becomes a means to experience the totality of our being in every second.

With this level of awareness, we can set an intention and use our practice to actualize our intentions to grow. This is the fundamental labor that allows us to ground our efforts to uproot racism in profound insight. According to renown Buddhist educator Daisaku Ikeda, **"An ascending life, in which we keep striving to grow and improve—this is what is meant by human revolution." This human revolution, active engagement in the development of an expansive state of life, is the ground from which our efforts to end racism must rise.**

In his book, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, Dr. Murphy Shigematsu says "Heartfulness is a way of being based in mindfulness, compassion, and responsibility. Embracing vulnerability, we cross borders within ourselves and between us and others. Cultivating humility, gratitude, and acceptance, we become more authentic and kinder to ourselves and all other beings. Seeing and listening to others we believe in our oneness and connectedness with each other and with nature. Taking responsibility

for our own life, we seek to understand and realize our unique purpose in serving humanity. (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2018)”

With a heartfelt practice such as this, we realize that our efforts to engage with others mindfully and to end racism are not charitable offerings but rather means by which we recognize and enact our own humanity and interdependence.

Very few people experience meditative practices as always comfortable. We get bored, our minds wander, we wonder about the things we could or “should” be doing. Also, whatever form of meditation we are doing can become physically taxing to our bodies. Additionally, painful emotions such fear, grief, shame, anger and self-loathing often arise for us in meditation. It is for these reasons that developing a heartfelt meditation practice wherein we open to all aspects of ourselves is itself an exercise in gaining discomfort resilience.

Discomfort resilience refers to the capacity to experience discomfort with interest in the growth to be gleaned from pain or difficulty. Getting comfortable with discomfort becomes a pre-requisite for being able to develop self-awareness because it means we attend to and stay aware of the aspects of ourselves that we find painful. Discomfort resilience helps us engage more authentically with ourselves and others to dislodge racism because we develop the capacity to face the guilt and shame that comes with recognizing that our privilege is built on the subjugation of non-white people without becoming paralyzed by those feelings. Then we are able to have difficult conversations and engage in anti-racism endeavors with the awareness that the pains of doing so are *our own growing pains*.

Discomfort resilience is frustration tolerance with a heartfelt intention towards growth. With this intent toward experiencing the world with heartfulness, we can use the instruction from the poet Jalal ad Din Muhammad Rumi who said “You have to keep breaking your heart until it opens”. Developing discomfort resilience becomes a pathway towards heartfulness and practicing heartfulness increases our discomfort resilience.

Dr. Ikeda points out that “Compassion is often thought of as akin to pity, but whereas pity may be condescending, compassion springs from a sense

of the equality and interconnectedness of life. Because genuine compassion is about empowering others, helping them unlock strength and courage from within their lives in order to overcome their problems, it may sometimes appear stern or contradictory.”

Thus, counter to the notion of compassion as something that always feels good when being offered or received, we can recognize that compassion is meant to help move ourselves and one another past the limitations of complacency and privilege. It takes courage to offer fierce compassion and it takes discomfort resilience to receive it. We may know that someone will be embarrassed if we correct them for using an inappropriate term, yet our fierce compassion gives us courage to do so. If someone corrects us for using hurtful language and we have cultivated discomfort resilience, we will be able to receive and be grateful for the correction as it is a gift of fierce compassion offered by the person who cared enough to correct us.

Fierce compassion is rooted in respect for the inherent dignity and inestimable possibility of one’s own life and that of others and a desire to see that dignity and possibility triumph.

Practicing “right speech”, assuring that our words reflect the most fiercely compassionate intentions, is one means of invoking and embodying a heartfelt approach to unspeaking racism. Inclusive authentic language is a means of speaking white supremacy out of existence.

Here are some examples. Using the word “ethnicity” instead of “race” makes sense as we know that the first act of racism was to divide humanity into false categories called “races”. We can also speak about geographic locations from a non-colonialist perspective such as using the term “West Asia” as opposed to the term “Middle East” so as not to describe parts of the world based on their geographic relationship to Europe.

Using a term coined by Dr. Barbara Love “People of the Global Majority” (POGM) as a reflective practice of right speech enables us to cease using the language of enslavers and colonizers who labeled humans by color and evaluated people’s worth based on their proximity to whiteness. Using the term POGM rather than the term people of color (POC) eliminates the color

misnomer and in that sense is more accurate since we know that skin color varies widely in every ethnicity. In practice, saying "POGM" is also a way of shifting our awareness to notice that African, Latinx, Indigenous and Asian people are not "minorities" when viewing humanity in the global context.

Adjusting language can help contradict unconscious notions of white supremacy and serve as literal reminders that the majority of the global population is not of European descent (aka White). This is a language practice that can shift our cognitive distortions about how and for whom global resources should be developed and distributed.

Using heartfelt contemplative practices can enable us to develop fierce compassion and discomfort resilience. This will allow us to enjoy a more authentic engagement with our own interior life, with the lives of other beings, and with all that surrounds us thus bolstering our efforts to end racism.

In his most clarifying statement on the relationship between humanitarian love, justice and power, Dr. Martin Luther King says, "Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

Heartful contemplative practice wherein we strive to cultivate discomfort resilience will empower our compassion such that it transcends mere sentimentality and enables us implement justice by transforming racism in our interior lives, in our interpersonal exchanges and in the world around us.