

compassionate activism

Session 6 Video Transcription

Sandra: Hey, everyone. This is the sixth session of Compassionate Activism. In the last three sessions we were actually covering the third practice of gentle mindfulness and compassion: self-accountability. We spent a lot of time on it just because that's really the center. That's the pivotal practice of all five of them.

The first two are actually building up to the point where you can engage in mindfulness and compassion: self-accountability. Once you're there, the rest of the practices flow from that. You'll see why that is in a second.

I want to first go over – let me switch my screen – I just want to give a quick refresher because these are practices that are not something that we've been taught how to do. We've been taught the opposite: of running away from our feelings, running away from the pain, pretending that they don't exist, denying them, minimizing them. Basically taught that our needs don't matter.

This is something that we haven't been taught how to do. We don't see models for us or the people around us - our families growing up or caregivers or teachers or the adults in our lives. Not surprisingly, as we got older we still didn't know how to do them. Even though technically we're adults. But when we get into emotionally-charged situations we get thrown back a lot of times to when we felt like we were powerless and helpless as a kid.

What I'm trying to do is share what I've learned in other places, particularly from Zen Buddhism. But also other programs that have been heavily influenced by Buddhism and healthy psychology and healing practices and modalities and just sharing that with folks, making that accessible. Teaching people how to let go of the toxic swirl of the make-believe world so they can be in touch with their reality and what's going on.

To give a quick review of this: the toxic swirl of make-believe world is usually where we are. It's that chatter in the back of our heads – sometimes semi-consciously, sometimes very present – telling us that we can't do something; we have to do something. We should. We must. Or else.

This can get really tricky. It can show up as being perfectionists. We're whipping and pushing ourselves and we're punishing and shaming ourselves around what we're

feeling on what we're doing or not doing. We're very resistant to what our actual experience is, particularly in these very emotionally-charged situations. It wants to make us feel like you shouldn't be upset, you shouldn't be afraid, you shouldn't be feeling, shouldn't do all these things.

As opposed to being like, "Yeah. I am angry. Oh, I am frustrated. I am feeling pain." Or how we look at other people. And we're like, "You shouldn't feel like this. You shouldn't think like this. Why did you do that? You shouldn't have!" There's a difference between having a preference – obviously, we prefer for folks not to act in harmful ways. We prefer for ourselves to be really in good places, feeling strong, feeling happy, joyful, at peace. Obviously that's our preference.

There's nothing wrong or right about that. It's understandable, of course. There's a difference, though, when we take those preferences and we turn them into coercive expectations and demands upon us. Of course we prefer to be happy and smiling and laughing all the time. Who wouldn't want to be?

But if we don't allow ourselves to feel that pain, that sadness, that anger because we can't – we have to suppress them. We can't cry; we can't show weakness. We can't do all these things. Then it becomes a really coercive demand upon us. And that's actually – as I think people have been experiencing themselves through our live sessions and I've been coaching folks – is that it's actually what creates the emotional charge around the situation.

Let me see if I can... There we go. Thanks, Josette.

This is how we normally are most of the time. And what happens is all your time and energy into this make-believe world where you really want it to be different than what it is in reality then you can't actually do anything about reality. You're actually left powerless because you're pouring all your time and energy into something that's not real. It's literally make-believe. You want things to be different than what it is right now.

What mindfulness helps – it's a tool, really. It's a tool to help us understand how we can just stay connected to what our current reality is, to the present moment. What we're talking about really is, instead of resisting and denying what's happening, we'd just be like, "Ok. That's happening." Not in like, "I want this to happen all the time. I feel upset all the time." Just, "Yeah, it's happening. Yeah, that's legitimate."

There's nothing right or wrong about it. When we feel upset, when we feel stressed or we feel shame, guilt, or pain it is what it is. The feelings arise. It's just there. We wouldn't make ourselves feel wrong for feeling cold yet we make ourselves be wrong for being upset. Instead what we can do is be like, "Oh. I'm feeling X. I'm feeling sadness. I'm feeling anger. I'm feeling pain. I'm feeling fear."

And that's ok. That's something we've been doing the last couple sessions, is just being like, "I feel X and that's ok." And it's not, once again, like, "Oh yay! I want this all the time," it's like, "Yeah, it's happening. That's happening." What makes this fundamentally revolutionary is the fact that this is not what systemic oppression has taught us. Systemic oppression has taught us that we don't matter. That our experiences aren't real.

Because it doesn't fit into that dominant narrative.

I would also argue that people who have lots of privileges also don't even fit into that dominant narrative as well. That's still a box that people feel the need to perform into. As opposed to just being in touch with how they're feeling, how they're doing right then and there and expressing that. Their authentic selves.

I want to help folks see the distinction, see the difference between how we normally are in the world because of how we've been taught to deny what we're feeling. You know, babies don't have this mess. Babies are like, "I'm here! I'm crying. I need these things." But as we got older, we kept getting told, "No. You shouldn't cry. No. You have to do this. No, you don't not like that person. Of course you love this person!" We kept getting our feelings and needs denied repeatedly and then judged and punished and shamed for them.

So we learned not to be in touch with our feelings. But if we can't be in touch with our feelings, how do we know what we need?

The larger perspective, the larger point of all this is not that we're trying to get to a place where we never experience stress, frustration, anger, whatnot. That's actually not the goal. The goal is not to have no feelings that are difficult for us. It's just that we know how to be with our feelings. We know how to acknowledge their legitimacy, their right to exist and identify the needs underlying them so that we can take care of ourselves. We can offer that compassion to ourselves and do something about that pain.

Because until we can acknowledge it, there's nothing we can do to take care of our pain. We keep having these open wounds on us and then as we go about the world, salt just keeps getting thrown on these open wounds by other people and by ourselves. There's never really a chance for us to heal and to feel empowered and to feel like we can do something about this. Instead, it's just constant reopening of the wounds, constant salt being thrown on them.

I want to stop here for a second and take a couple of questions. This is super important. This is really the pivotal difference that I want folks to be getting. I'm going to talk about in a second about the process; how do we shift this from the toxic swirl into mindfulness but I want to make sure that we're really clear about how they're different.

I know this is the fourth time I reviewed it but I find that people still have questions all the time. Even if you get it in one area, it's like another area pops up and you struggle with applying it to that area. So I want to open it up to questions. If people want coaching, they can get that, too.

Josette: Emily, if you can, feel free to either speak the question or type it in the chat and I will read it out.

Emily: Can you hear me? Is my mic on?

Ok.

Good morning. Or no, it's not morning. It's evening.

My question is actually about last weekend. I did a three-day retreat on regenerative somatics and so I see a lot of similarities in the approach. But I found myself this Saturday having a really extreme reaction despite all the training and coaching that you've been talking about the last few weeks and from that workshop. I'm not sure if there's a specific question here but I just – it kind of surprised me that it was so quick and easy for me to start getting into a really aggressive, ruminating mood about this particular experience.

What it was: I'm taking a substitute teaching course and in this particular session on Saturday they were talking about a law about discrimination. Basically making sure that all students have a safe learning environment and have everything that they need to academically achieve. I ask the question because I had seen some things there on that day that made me kind of uncomfortable.

This question I asked: is there a discussion going on in the Department of Education about the way in which gender comes into play in terms of discrimination. Whether or not the DOE is encouraging teachers to maybe stop using gender binaries in terms of separating the class into groups for discussion or for debate or for boys against girls in PE or something like that. Really trying to make space of belonging and acknowledgement for people who fit on different points of the gender spectrum.

I got a long answer of, "No." Polite, you know. A polite, roundabout way of saying, "No, that conversation isn't happening."

But about a couple of sentences into my asking of this question another student – maybe a man in his 30s, professed born-again Christian – scoffed at the question and said something either to himself or his fellow classmate. I already was super triggered by that and then at the end of my asking the question, during the response from the

instructor, he raised his hand and said something to the extent of, “Well, some of us feel very differently about that.”

In that whole exchange, immediately I felt the withdrawal in myself away from that student and feeling really defensive and angry. I started thinking of all the scenarios in which I could – “You know you’re lucky I can’t find you on the street right now! I would do some things!”

Then I just started spiraling into this whole thing of intense anger but also despair. “You are a person who is presumably going to go into there and start educating children. I feel sorry for the people who are maybe LGBTQ in your classrooms. You are contributing to their systemic oppression and why don’t you understand this?”

So just going through that whole thing but I was really surprised that after all this work and all this discussion over it, trying to incorporate, “Ok, let me just breathe. Let me just center myself, understand what I’m really feeling,” and then the moment comes and I’m just like, “Aah, I’m gonna tear your fucking eyes out!”

I don’t know if this, if I’ll have more help and control with this as we start getting into the other practices or what but yeah, I’m just at a loss myself. I lost myself in that moment.

Sandra: Right. And that’s what you want to notice. It’s not about controlling. What you get from this is not that you have the ability to never get upset. It’s not like you’re going to do this and you’re never going to get upset. You’re never going to be angry. You’re never going to be stressed. You’re never going to be in pain. Never going to be afraid. It’s not about that.

It’s about knowing what to do once you’re there in a way that’s more productive. And honoring your feelings and where you’re coming from. Can you notice –

Student One: Can I jump in for a second?

Sandra: Sure.

Student One: I just had a response I wanted to make to Emily. There was actually something within what you said that struck me a little bit in a negative way and I wanted to express that. You said something that I come across a lot – saying that the person is a born-again Christian as way for explaining that person’s views or attitudes towards things feels to me pretty incorrect. I would identify myself as a born-again Christian and I think there needs to be a distinction made so that we’re not lumping everyone who identifies as Christian into certain categories.

Sandra: Ok. So that's a separate conversation than the one we're having right now, actually. That separate conversation, if you want to be having, that's possible. But that's not –

Student One: I just wanted to make that comment and that was all.

Sandra: Ok. Alright. That sounds good. So if you two want to have a separate conversation, that's fine. It's possible. It's just, right now, we're going to be focusing on the practice. And we can also use this moment to engage in the practice, which would be great, I say. Because this is real life.

Somebody says something. We feel like that's wrong. We feel like it's harmful. We want to do something about it. Then as we do something about it, there's a possibility there's somebody else who might have some feelings around it as well. And then hearing that person say it, somebody else might feel like that's harmful, too.

This is all possible; this is real life. The point is not that we want to be silencing anybody or ourselves but it's about how do we dig a little bit deeper underneath what is happening to actually get to the source of it. Because what we're saying is just some words at this moment in time. There's a lot more to that, as well, at the same time for us in our emotional internal realities.

This is actually – I would ask that everybody, if you want to, you can use this.

So Emily, if you can look at how you're relating to the situation, can you start to distinguish between what is toxic swirl?

Emily: What I get from my interpretation of toxic swirl is what I understand myself to do most often is ruminating. What happens is that I start going through all the arguments and all the points that I could make. Intellectualizing the whole thing and going about the best way to slice this and for me that's kind of like a protective mechanism for me so it takes me a little bit away from the deeper feelings of sadness and distress.

Just keeps me in that intellectual anger mode, defense mode.

That, I feel like, tends to be my toxic swirling.

And because – I live in Hawaii – there's my experience through the work that I do here is that there's a lot of resistance from people who identify as Christian or are Hawaiians and Christian. A lot of resistance to people who are LGBTQ and a lot of resistance to other issues but this issue in particular, since this is what happened on Saturday. To me, that's another swirl that I go through in terms of the way that missionaries...just the way that the whole mission's played out here, and the way in which they've shifted or supplanted more traditional views and traditional understandings of mahos in this case.

Sandra: Toxic swirl usually shows up in us resisting the fact that what happened happened. There's a difference between wanting to create a more inclusive world where this stuff isn't happening. Yet if we pull that and focus entirely on that being the currently reality should be different, then that's toxic swirl. They're trying to make reality different from what it is.

If you were to say instead, "This is his perspective. And that's his perspective," and just kind of acknowledging that as opposed to being like, "You should think differently. You should know better. It should be different."

Emily: Yeah, I wanted to have an argument. I wanted to brawl.

Sandra: Because you're committed to this inclusive world. This vision of an inclusive world. I'm just saying when you pull that vision of the future and try to force the current reality to be different; it actually makes you unable to change anything. Is that how you felt? Like you were unable?

Emily: Yeah. I felt the sense of silencing in a way. I'm not sure how other people in the room were perceiving that or how they felt one way or the other. But I felt, in one sense, that part of me that thinks, "Well, I should turn every moment into a teaching and learning opportunity. We should have this conversation even though this is a little tangential to the purpose of the training course itself.

But to me, if we're going to sit here and have a discussion about non-discrimination and reaching students who maybe deal with poverty or discrimination, why not talk about these other systems that are in place and how we as educators are supposedly supposed to empower kids to change those things. If that's really not what we're doing then let's be upfront about that, too.

Sandra: Have a conversation about it.

Emily: Yeah.

Sandra: Do you see, though, that if you resist the fact that this is how he feels and focus in on that, then you're not actually able to engage in the conversation?

Emily: Yeah. Because all I wanted to do was slash some tires.

Sandra: Right!

Emily: Not a step in the direction of a more inclusive world. Just take out the ones that are causing trouble.

Sandra: Right. And we're all messy. And we're all working with our unconscious privilege. And we're all doing the work.

Emily: Yeah.

Sandra: Yeah. We're just in different places around different things. What happens is... Sometimes when people say, "Oh, we shouldn't. What about acknowledging where they're coming from?" people think we're letting them slide. We're coddling them. We're enabling them. And we're saying that's acceptable.

That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that it is what it is. They said what they said. They believe what they believe. And just sit with that for a little bit. If I was like, "That's what he believes and that happened."

Let's try this. Are you willing to try a little bit? I'm going to have you repeat things.

Emily: Oh, goodness!

Sandra: I would like for you to repeat it. Let's try it out. Few times.

Emily: Ok... Wait, so I'm saying it's ok for him to believe what he believes?

Sandra: Well, he believes what he believes, and that happens. That happened.

Emily: Ok. He believes what he believes and that happened. Yes. Ok. He believes what he believes and that happened.

Sandra: That's good.

Emily: There it is.

Sandra: He said what he said and that happened.

Emily: He said what he said and that happened.

Sandra: Ok.

Emily: Ok. That happened.

Sandra: Right. It happened...

So how do you feel about it now? What do you notice coming up for you now?

Emily: I feel almost... I feel kind of unsure with this feeling of , "Let me just let that slide. I just dodged a bullet."

Sandra: We're not going to let it slide. We just –

Emily: That's why I feel kind of conflicted because part of me is thinking, "Ok, well, this is me just expressing, brushing it off my shoulders." But at the same time I'm like, "I don't want to let these people off the hook."

Sandra: But it's not doing that. There's a distinction between acknowledging what happened and the action we choose to take. With your feelings, when you have a feeling: So if I feel angry I can acknowledge my feeling, I can express my feeling, and I can choose how I'm going to manifest that feeling.

A lot of times people are afraid because they feel angry; they don't want to be in touch with it because they don't want to lash out and hurt somebody.

Emily: Mm hm.

Sandra: Those are two separate things. So having a feeling and taking an action are independent. They're related but they happen independently. I can acknowledge my feeling of anger and sit with it and be like, "Yes. That's what I'm feeling." And I could not say something, I could say something, I can yell, I can throw something. There are a myriad of different options.

It's the same with this. He said what he said, he feels what he feels, and you can acknowledge that and you have a myriad of options of how to respond.

Emily: Yeah. Then in choosing my method of response, is that something that I want to choose in relationship with what's the underlying feeling going on for me? From which emotion or perspective do I then choose as my method of engagement? Because I didn't respond directly to him after that and so I was thinking to myself, "Well, I don't know if I would've felt better if I would have said something instead of responding from a place of pain? I just recoil from the situation because really, if I don't recoil, I'm going to bitch out."

I acknowledge that the underlying feeling for me is – if I'm not feeling angry and intellectualizing the situation, trying to draw up all the reasons why. Anybody, whatever their religious leanings, anybody should want to be supportive of LGBTQ students in this place. And I go under those feelings and thoughts – the anger and the intellectualizing – really what I feel is the sadness, the despair, the hopelessness, the powerlessness; just the pain for future generations and systemic change, the possibility of systemic change at all.

Then I think, "Well, I just kind of want to curl up in a little ball." And then I think, "Well, let's just get out the armor. Let's go on the battlefield," kind of thing. It's just that whole mesh of underlying emotions and I'm not quite sure from where I want to respond. From

the place where I'm, "Ok, let me just take time for myself," or "Let me educate this guy"? "Let me just say what I need to say because I need to say it"?

All these different options that I'm not sure which one to believe, which one to go to.

Sandra: I have a wonderful answer for you.

Emily: Ok.

Sandra: It depends. I know, terrible.

There's no one answer to this. And I think when most people want to respond or do something about it, they want to respond from the toxic swirl. And they respond to themselves and their feelings from the toxic swirl and they respond to other people from their toxic swirl, which doesn't go very well. It doesn't go very well. Not for the other person and not for yourself.

Then we spend most of the time trying to avoid it because we don't know how to skillfully engage in it. Skillfully engaging in it means letting go of the make-believe world. You said for yourself, what I'm hearing is that you have pain. You have the pain for yourself and you have fear for other people; you have compassion for other folks stemming from seeing their pain.

All this intellectualizing, all this blaming and judging, that's actually trying to change the fact that you have pain and run away from the fact that you have pain.

Emily: Yeah. That's my conditioned tendency, to intellectualize. I can say that my anger lives in my head and it's best friends with my intellectualism. It keeps me from wanting to cry.

Sandra: I think there's a big importance of grieving. We don't give ourselves the space to grieve in order to heal. And yet how are we supposed to heal if we don't grieve? Since we haven't been taught how to grieve in a way that actually is effective, it's not effective when we do cry.

Emily: Because yeah, you end up just reliving the trauma, trauma trauma trauma. There's no arc and then you wind up, there's no completion of the cycle.

Sandra: Do you want to try doing it with me right now?

Emily: Sure. I opened my mouth so I agree to do this.

Sandra: And you can always say yes, no, counter offer. Even if you volunteered initially, it's always consensual.

Emily: Yes. I agree to do this process. I'm not entirely comfortable but a very important process.

Sandra: Great. Can you close your eyes?

Emily: Ok.

Sandra: I want you to take a couple of deep breaths and feel your breath going in and out, in and out. I want you to remember that situation and feel, notice what's coming up for you. What are you feeling? What are you noticing?

Emily: I feel the recoil. I feel the fiery pain – the pain that makes you want to run away but also want to fight against. It's like a little child with a sword. Like sweet and sad but also really dangerous.

Sandra: Yeah. Yeah. Where do you feel it in your body?

Emily: I feel it in my heart, in my chest.

Sandra. Mm hm. Tell me a little bit more about it. How big is it?

Emily: It's like a blanket, I guess. Or like a sheer covering that just... I guess like a shield covering over it. It's almost wanting me to kind of pull my shoulders in and protect this little person inside and it's also wanting me to puff up and be against, defend. It's like a push and pull in my chest.

Sandra: Is it covering your entire body? Your entire torso?

Emily: No, it's just covering my shoulders, across the front of my chest, and kind of rooted in my back.

Sandra: Is it heavy or is it moving?

Emily: It's almost like a sheer piece of fabric but it's warm.

Sandra: On a scale of one to ten, how strong is it, ten being most severe?

Emily: I feel like it's a six or a seven. I feel really triggered.

Sandra: Right. So I want you to close your eyes.

Josette: Sandra, given the background noise of the wind, your audio is going out a little bit so if you can a little closer to the computer or something, that would be... Because the wind is making it so your audio is being cut.

Sandra: Thanks, Josette.

So, can you close your eyes and then put your hand where you're feeling it. I want you to just touch it and rub it. Give it some loving attention. Just gentle attention. Notice how it feels in your body. What are you noticing now?

I can't hear you.

Emily: It's bubbling. Bubbling down almost. Like turning into water but going down instead of up. It's feeling more of the sadness.

Sandra: And where are you feeling the sadness?

Emily: In my throat and travelling all the way down.

Sandra: Just kind of going like this?

Emily: Yeah. I feel it in a sense of my expressiveness, the association between your throat and the ability to express and I guess –

Sandra: [unintelligible] Tell me more about the sensation as it's happening, as it's flowing up and down.

Emily: It feels like a bubbling well and it's kind of getting deeper and darker, not necessarily in a negative sense. But I see darkness.

Sandra: Can you put your hand where you feel it the most in your body?

Emily: In my solar plexus.

Sandra: Just close your eyes and just feel it as you give it some gentle [unintelligible]. Whatever color... Just be with it and breathe with it... What are you noticing now?

Emily: I feel a branching out around my waist from my spine, around the back. And it's different; it's not a bubbling sensation or a warm, hot sensation but I feel weird transitions coming out of my spine, my ribs.

Sandra: Close your eyes. Where are you feeling that?

Emily: Where am I feeling that?

Sandra: Yeah.

Emily: Feeling it around my kidneys, my liver – anatomy lesson right here.

Sandra: Yeah. Yeah. And what kind of feeling is this?

Emily: It's kind of like a calm feeling or like a breezy feeling. But the emotion of it feels kind of neutral. It doesn't feel necessarily pleasant or loving but it just seems indifferent

in a nice way. I feel this breezy shift through these other parts of my body, other organs, that has me feeling more in a natural flow.

Not necessarily good or bad or judging.

Sandra: It's just there.

Close your eyes and [unintelligible]. And once again breathe into it. Just notice. And ask it: does it want to tell you something.

Emily: I feel like it's a concept of trust. It's not necessarily telling me to trust but I feel like maybe it's the embodiment of trust, in a sense. This flowing, breezy, maybe green-looking force that's moving is like the embodiment of trust, for lack of a better term. I feel like that can be a loaded term but I feel like that's part of it.

Sandra: Does it have something it wants you to do?

Emily: Relax. That reminds me of this little illustration meme that I saw that said, "Be the chill that you wish to see in the world".

Sandra: Right. So I want you to breathe into that, breathe into that trust and that shell and feel that energy that you have right now... Just breathe it in. Feel it. Breathe it out and in. What do you notice now?

Emily: The clarity of that and just being in that vibe and how the other sensations melt away or fizzle away. There's still some sensation but there's more into a fizzle and melting. Just changing form. Becoming different, different energy. Serving a different purpose.

Sandra: It's not stuck anymore; it's flowing.

Emily: Oh, I thought you said it doesn't suck anymore!

Sandra: Well, it doesn't suck, too! It's a little better now, isn't it?

When you look back at this situation, what comes up for you? What do you notice?

Emily: A feeling of not needing to struggle. That the important thing is my focus and my commitment and not on where somebody else might be in their focus on commitments. That the work and the value itself is the important thing. No need to judge where somebody else is at and how I interpret that manifesting in the lives of others.

My energy feels more centered and swirling.

Sandra: And how do you feel now?

Emily: Still kind of sad.

Sandra: That's ok.

Emily: Just appreciating the opportunity to reconnect with the thing that is important, the thing that is the commitment and the work.

Sandra: And now that you've reconnected with that, what is possible for you that wasn't possible before.

Emily: Maybe interacting with this person in the class.

Sandra: Look at that!

Emily: I had to interact with him in the class last night and I just kept thinking to myself, "This fucker! You are not on my side right now!"

Sandra: And now?

Emily: But now not worried about whose side I'm perceived to be on. Commitment to the values, commitment to the work itself.

Sandra: There you go. And that took maybe, I don't know, maybe 15 minutes? Hey?

Emily: Yeah.

Sandra: Yay.

Emily: I appreciate the time and the sharing and I appreciate the comment, too, about that. Of course not all self-identified Christians are like that, or Evangelicals or even born-again folks are homophobic or whatnot. Just bringing that into the conversation as a reflection for me I thought was welcome and very valuable, too.

Sandra: Yeah. And just a question: Did you feel comfortable? Were you in a place where you could state that previously, when you were still emotionally charged versus now?

Emily: Yeah, I tend not to be uncomfortable with discussing or acknowledging the nuances of Christianity and the ways people practice it. Because I have family members that are Christian and really dear allies that are Christian. And then I see the opposite end of that spectrum.

Sandra: The energy. I have no doubt that you probably would have said it.

Emily: Yeah, I mean it changes. It changes... My tone about it changes. Whereas in the beginning, in the moment, I would be defensive like, "Let me tell you how it is. Here's

whatever. Here's the history, here's the layout. Here's the real-life experiences and here are the nuances." It doesn't... I would be very much in that defensive, angry, intellectual mode.

Just that sensation of no more struggle. No more struggle, you know? It brings to mind that feeling of the work that we're doing in this generation and this stage of human history; everything should be done in celebration and ceremony. And to eliminate the word struggle from our vocabulary.

There's this Hopi elder who's talking about that very concept of eliminating the word struggle from our vocabulary. Coming back to that place continually. Coming back to that place of: this is ceremony, this is celebration. We have everything at our disposal to make the world that we want.

Sandra: Right. Yeah. And you see these things right now. In this 15, I don't know, maybe 20 minutes tops conversation, you had it all within yourself. I just asked some questions to help you get in touch with it but you had it all within yourself. And then your ability to have this conversation, to share that comment – which we know you would've said something similar before but from a very different place. It's not the world that you actually wanted to create.

But you are able now to say it in a way that could be heard differently. And you're relating differently. So that was a most perfect example of practice number four! You just went through all of that: one through four. That's beautiful. Wonderful. Thank you so much!

Because what I'm going to talk about today is how we can engage in consciousness-raising inquiry and compassionate truth-telling. So I couldn't ask for a more perfect, better coaching. Thank you so much. Alright.

And I see that it's 7:00. We're going to take a bathroom break at this very good time. And when we come back, we'll dive right back into it.

Alright. So just to let you know, we're actually going to spend two sessions on this practice of consciousness-raising inquiry and compassionate truth-telling. Just because there's a lot. There's a lot to it. And it really is a process. There's a flow to this. That's why it might feel a little repetitive that I keep talking about the third practice and everything. You're going to see why in a minute.

I'm going to jump right into it and do screen sharing. No, wait, no. This is not it. Wrong screen. Hold on. Give me a moment. Where'd –

Ok. Found it. I had too many things up.

So how we normally relate to folks. When we're in a charged situation how we normally relate to folks is not from the most humanizing way, to put it mildly, right? We normally make them wrong as a person, as a human being. Somebody says or does something and we write them off entirely. We judge them, shame them, police them, dismiss them; we treat them like they're disposable.

And that makes sense from our perspective. From our perspective they've done something that's caused a lot of pain. That pain will a lot of times manifest as anger, as frustration, as stress, as like, "Aaahhh!" and then we don't know how to respond in that situation. So we go even more like, "Aaahhh!" at them.

That's just because our pain and all those related feelings are so strong and we don't know what to do about them. So we focus on the other person and make them wrong for existing. Make them wrong as a person. The other thing that we do to them is that we resist what they're experiencing, what their internal reality is. It is what it is.

So we focus on what I've been calling the toxic swirl. We try to deny, minimize, what they feel. For instance, someone hurts me and I'm like, "Well, you hurt me," and the other person's like, "Well, I didn't mean to. I didn't intend to." Obviously that's upsetting because they're saying it in a way that, just because they didn't intend to, it should erase the fact that I feel harmed. And that's not true.

They didn't intend to and I still feel harmed. Then the flip side of that is then we try to erase the fact that they didn't intend to and that they had a different experience than we did. So as much as they're trying to erase our experience, we oftentimes are trying to erase their experience of what's real for them.

This is why it gets back to remembering there are three different realities coexisting at the same time. There's my reality. There's the other person's reality. And then there's some stuff that happened in between us. They can all be entirely different and they're legitimate. Instead of feeling like that – because we're operating from a place of toxic swirl where we're just trying to change everything because we don't want it to be what it is – we'll be like, "Well, you should know better. You should be doing something different. You should be feeling something different. You should believe something different. You should be doing something different."

Well, they're not. They're not. They're doing what they're doing; they believe what they believe. To focus on that is make-believe. That's the make-believe world. Because we are resisting the experience we keep pushing our internal reality on them and they're pushing they're internal reality onto us and then we get to this business.

Or we don't want to get engaged with this because that's going to cause further harm because that's just salt being thrown onto open wounds and so we silence ourselves.

Which also then creates more of a sense of harm and intensifies that pain and trauma that we have.

This is what we normally do. This is going to sound familiar. This probably sounds familiar because this is how we treat ourselves. How we treat ourselves, you can see the same dynamics are in play. With other people, we're resisting what's going on. We're denying what they're experiencing. We're judging them. We're shaming them. We're making them wrong. We're telling them they have to be something that they're not.

How we treat ourselves in these moments we will then also treat other folks. That's why I've been over and over and over again repeating how do we let go of this toxic swirl and just get reconnected to our internal reality. Because if we can't deal with ourselves, it's going to be very hard to deal with somebody else.

Because when we try to relate to someone else from the toxic swirl of make-believe that's not going to go very well. As Emily was talking about, she wanted to physically hurt the other person and was responsible enough to not do so. But that's an understandable response from toxic swirl. Whereas when she moved to a place where she was in touch with her internal reality and she was able to go through the different layers of anger, of sadness, and then calmness. That's her internal reality.

Then she was actually able to get to a place where she felt like she had some options. "I could have a conversation with this person now. Or I could not." She got back in touch with what was really important to her: Her commitment. Her values. And operating from there, she had choices. She's not coming from a place of fear. She's coming from a place of compassion for the suffering that people are experiencing from systemic oppression. And in her commitment to making a difference in that, which is then calling her forth into action.

The point of this is that we really need to focus. We deserve to focus on our own internal reality. We deserve to take care of ourselves. We really have the right to take care of ourselves. We have the right to take up space, to exist. Our feelings and needs have the right to be there. What we choose to do with them, that's our responsibility. But they're different, as I was talking about in that coaching.

What we feel is one thing. What we do about them is something else.

That's the same thing about how we relate to the other person. I want to give you another example of what this can look like when you come, not from the toxic swirl of make-believe but if we're actually able to come after being in touch with our internal reality and bringing mindfulness to their internal reality.

Let me stop sharing.

When, for example, I was recently – Not recently. Last year I was in an ice storm. Somebody was getting some glasses and I was with them. And I struck up this conversation with the person who does your eyes, the person who does the exam and helps you get the glasses. I don't know what we call them. Josette, help me out.

Optician?

Josette: Optomologist.

Sandra: It's not the doctor. It's the person who helps you. I guess the salesperson. The dude. I'll call them the dude. I don't know what else to call him.

So the dude and I started talking; I had to wait for a little bit, and interesting conversations often start when they find out what kind of work I do. Talking about Everyday Feminism. And this person – from what I can tell looking at him – is a white, cis, straight man, able-bodied and we were in, I think we were in Georgia. I'm not from the South. That's the first time I was actually in the South.

The dude and I were having this conversation. I don't know anything about him. Generally seems like he has a lot of identity privileges. And I'm like, "Oh, let's see how this conversation's going to go." You just never know. It was interesting because his wife works with people with disabilities and he started talking about that. And he started making some comments about how he would never want to have disabilities and how horrible it is. Just going down this path of saying a lot of really ableist things.

There are different ways that I could have responded. If I responded from the toxic swirl, I'd have been like, "That's so messed up. You shouldn't be saying this. Your wife even works with folks with disabilities and you're still saying this. You have this really stereotypical and stigmatizing, marginalizing way of looking at them." I could have been like, "You should know better."

I could have gone into the make-believe world. And then I had to make a choice about how to have a conversation with this person about it. If I had felt emotionally charged, I might have been like, "Aahh, I just want to get some glasses! That's all I want. Why am I being forced to have this conversation? I just want some glasses."

And then I could go, "Why am I not saying anything? I'm a bad ally."

Right? I could've kept going in all sorts of different ways. Instead I was like, "Oh. Oh. Tell me more." I was able to notice that: 1. He wanted to have this conversation with me and 2. That he had some real feelings around it related to experiences near his wife, maybe directly. Maybe he's gone to the school; I don't know.

And I was noticing my own level of energy around this conversation. It was not a great high. I wasn't at total peace around it, like, "Yes, I want to have this conversation!" But I didn't feel incredibly emotionally charged around it. I was like, "Alright. I feel like I want to engage in this conversation. Not like, "Yay!" but like, "I'm good for this conversation. I can have this conversation."

I was like, "Ok." And that came from my ability to be like, "Ok. That's what you're talking about. That's what you believe. Alright." Then I checked in with myself. "Ok, let's do this."

In that conversation I was listening. I was listening for why he was having this conversation. There was a reason. I noticed generally he seemed like a pretty good guy. Pretty decent guy, good values, and friendly. I was like, "So, what's going on that he has this – what he said – he felt like he had a repulsion?" He literally used the word repulsed. By folks. By disabled folks.

I asked him, "Where is that coming from?" I just asked him. Instead of being like, "God, I can't believe you think this way. How can you think this way?" I was just like, "Oh. What's behind that? Why? What's going on that you feel repulsed by them?"

He was like, "I just think how hard it would be. I just think how hard it would be if I had some sort of disabilities. I don't know what I would do. It'd be terrible."

I was like, "Yeah. It is. It is really hard. It is really hard because our society makes it really hard for folks who have different types of impairments."

I think that the focus should not be on trying to push folks with disabilities out and put them in the corner somewhere where no one can see them, which is kind of what he was talking about pretty explicitly. I was like, "I don't think that's the right way. I think we need to focus on changing society so society becomes better about how we treat people with different sorts of impairments. So it's not debilitating to their lives. So it doesn't cause all these problems. So we don't have to deal with all this shame and anger and resentment, misunderstandings, stigmatizing from other folks."

And he was like, "Oh!" You could see the lightbulb go off in his head. He was like, "Oh. Wait. Yes! Yes!" He was like, "Wait, so what are you doing after this? Are you available for lunch?" He really wanted to engage in that conversation.

Like, "Why are we having this conversation even?" There's something that he wants to reconcile within himself. I could notice that. I could see that in him. He felt repulsed and he didn't like that. He was able to say all these things with me because I was just like, "Oh." I was just curious. I was curious about where he was coming from, why he was

feeling what he was feeling as opposed to being really resistant to what he was feeling. I was just like, “Oh. What is that about? Why do you think that way? Tell me more.”

Kind of similar to the way I do coaching, when I coach y’all. But I didn’t do any kind of somatic body work. I didn’t go into his body and touch where it hurts. But I just did it in conversation. And he went there. In the end he goes like, “Oh, wait! We can just change society. That’s who we should focus on. Changing society so it’s not so harmful to people with disabilities.” And he was like, “Oh, I want to talk more!”

At that point in the conversation I was like, “We’re pretty close to getting the glasses and I’ve been travelling all day.” So I was like, “Actually, I have to go now.” I listened to myself in that moment. I was like, “This is about as far as the conversation goes. I’ve got you to a good place. And that’s about where I want to go. And to do more would be already taxing on myself. So, we’re good.”

I didn’t say that out loud to him. I was just like, “No, I’ve got to go, actually. But you should check out the website Everyday Feminism. We have lots of articles that you’d probably be really interested in.” You’ve got to refer it. I mean, the resource is right there. Everyday Feminism is there so you don’t have to do all that educative work for everybody. No, you can be like, “Here’s an article. They did it for you.”

That’s one way. That’s just one example of what it means and what’s possible when you approach a situation that would normally be emotionally charged for you. Instead, you’re able to come, not from the toxic swirl but being like, “Oh, that’s your internal reality. Let’s dig a little bit deeper.” It’s just like with your own internal reality. That initial reaction that you had is just the tip of the iceberg.

Anything else, the initial source of that reaction was under multiple layers until you got to that pain that you’re trying to protect yourself from. But when you try to protect pain through fear it comes out in all sorts of dominating, coercive ways. What we’re doing when we’re doing this mindfulness practice is we’re helping people get back in touch with the pain and then holding it with compassion.

I feel pain, I want to take care of it. I want to do something to relieve the suffering. That’s what compassion is. Compassion is being moved by the pain to do something to relieve it. Practicing with yourself, doing it with yourself, it’s not different with other people, actually. Because we’re all just human beings, really messy, not knowing how to do any of this stuff, and flailing about, and harming ourselves and other people along the way, unintentionally most of the time.

Sometimes intentionally. But even that, there’s more layers to that. Like why is that what they’re intentionally trying to be harmful about? There’s still some pain. Oftentimes

people who become very abusive and controlling is because they feel a lack of control. The way they deal with that pain and fear is to get controlling and abusive of other folks.

With everything it comes down to that. It comes down to what's the original pain that we're feeling. Let's not respond with fear; let's respond with compassion instead.

So I'm going to stop there for a second and take questions.

Josette: We actually have two questions coming in. They are similar but not the same so I'm going to do them both and you can respond. One of them was, "How to practice this when there's a power dynamic in play?" and then the other one which is similar, "How do you do this when the words they are saying are actively hurting you personally?"

Sandra: So when they're actively hurting you personally, this is where you... Your responsibility is to yourself. You're the only one that can take care of yourself. Each one of us is responsible for ourselves. We're not responsible for other people and if we have to try to make other people do what we want them to do, then we get controlling.

The most that we can do is invite other people into this conversation and invite them to talk about it and explore with us. This is why when I'm doing coaching with folks I say, "You can always say yes, no, counteroffer. Because I'm not trying to be coercive or controlling with you. Because I'm not responsible for you. I'd like to be supportive of you. But I'm not responsible for you. I'm responsible for myself. I take care of myself."

So if you're in a situation where you're being actively harmed then listen. Listen to yourself and what your response might be. Your response might be to take that ten-minute bathroom break. It might be to want to say something in that moment. It could be something entirely different. What matters is less what exactly you do and more the fact that you listen to yourself and you're honoring yourself and honoring your feelings. You're validating them. You're acknowledging them as real, legitimate and mattering, and then getting in touch with that pain and getting it taken care of in the way it needs to be taken care of.

What happens is that in the beginning because this is new, you're going to need to spend more time getting in touch with your feelings and prioritizing that. And as you get more practice with this and you heal more and more and more, you hurt less and less and less, actually.

As you practice this more, you get in touch with your feelings and then you're able to have a conversation with somebody coming from that place, as Emily showed us, of being calm. Of being centered, of being committed to your values. More times than not it's probably going to be really productive.

Not always. I can't promise that. Because they have to choose to respond and to engage, and they may not. But your chances are a lot higher than if you come at them with toxic swirl. I guess I'll give an example of this so people can tell or to even believe that's possible. [unintelligible] Because I think we don't believe it's possible. I really do think that. I think a lot of folks just don't believe that we'll ever heal to the point where things don't hurt.

I'm not saying that we'll never hurt. When hurtful things happen, it kind of makes sense that we'd be in pain. If we see violence happening, it's natural to feel pain and grieve and feel anger at the injustice happening. That's appropriate. It'd be suppressing your feelings actually if you saw terrible things happen and you had no reactions whatsoever. There's something, maybe not so much attached to your feelings.

To be human is to be compassionate. It's a matter of how quickly we move through that to respond. I think as you do this work you get back to a place of natural wholeness around these situations. And there are different situations.

It's about: In that moment, are you back in touch with your natural wholeness? To give an example, I used to get a tremendous amount of incredibly hostile street harassment. Not just like hellos and engagements and even an entitled smile. No, it was like, "Asian bitch, I've got a big dick. I want to rape you in the elevator." Just pretty obscene, intentionally violent words to me.

Starting from a very young age, when I was 14 looking like I was 11 I would get approached by older men in their 20s, 30s, and 40s – now reflecting back, all pretty much white men – asking, trying to flirt with me and trying to get me, have me go out with them, presumably to have sex with them. I was 14 looking like I was 11. The weird thing is...

Well, I won't go into any of that now.

So I have this long history. I have this very long history of this happening to me and over time, and I'm not a really silent person so much. I'm not really a non-responsive, well, actually, scratch that.

My response to this after a while was the desire to pistol whip them. So I was more concerned with about physical well-being after a certain point than my own because I wasn't concerned about – I know I'm confident in my ability to handle the situations. I was like, "I don't want to be causing physical harm or putting myself in situations where I have to deal with the aftermath of that."

I sat with it. I sat with that feeling of anger that I get all the time whenever something would happen. It happened very frequently. I sat with it. I got present to it. I unpacked

the layers just as we've all been doing with this course. I got in touch with the pain. And the pain was actually about me not being able to, me not saying anything, me not doing anything about it.

At that point in my career I was working in non-profit capacity building and I wasn't working on the ground. I was feeling like that wasn't right for me – that that wasn't where I wanted to be. So my pain, my anger was stemming from the fact that I did not want to... I wanted to do something about it because I wasn't positioned to do anything.

Fast forward a couple years – after I started Everyday Feminism and we talked about street harassment as well as all the things related to street harassment – and when it would happen again I would realize that I wasn't angry about it anymore. It wasn't even intentional; it was that I'd taken care of my pain. I'd taken care of my need to say something, to do something about this.

With that, I was back to feeling good.

I mean I'd done a lot of other healing work, too. But that was in direct relation to street harassment. I got to a place where it didn't feel harmful to me. It was just something that happened and I knew it was going to happen. I wasn't resisting it. I knew it was going to happen. I was like, "Yeah," and then I'd roll with it.

Now it's very interesting to see how I respond and I play with it. I play with it. So this one guy was like – I'm a great dancer and saw someone dancing and this guy came up to me and he was like, "Hey, you're the first chink I've ever met who could dance." I could've gone into the toxic swirl and been like, "How could you say this? You shouldn't have said that. How do you even know? Asian people can't dance? I can't even –"

I could have gone into resisting his reality, the fact that that's what he said. That's what he believes. I would have wanted to really change him in that moment. Instead I was like, "Oh, yeah. You said that, didn't you?" I was able to respond and be like, "Hey, dah dah dah dah." And just tell him, "You know that word, it's not really appropriate. It's pretty racist. Did you know that?"

He's like, "Yeah, well, you know they say it back in my country."

"Yeah, well, we don't say it here without it meaning something different. Blah blah blah."

He came back and was like, "You're the first Asian girl I've ever met who can dance."

I was like, "That's progress. We can work on this a little bit more, though." This type of stuff happens all the time. I've had situations where I'm talking to one dude about something and I realize I have a whole group of five other dudes listening in. So I'll move myself so I'm talking to everybody and I'll have them all rolling with laughter and

understanding why the best approach to an Asian woman is not to be like, “So are you Chinese, Japanese, what are you?” Not the best of approaches.

Yeah, I can do that and have fun with it. And then I have fun when I tell the story again. And you can see that. The thing is, trauma is just repetition. When something bad has happened to you, you remember it and it brings up all these feelings as if it just happened. Then you tell that story and it brings it all up again. This is a groove that you’ve been cutting into your body, into your brain.

It builds; baggage builds from this trauma. When somebody says something that reminds you of that, it’s not just that thing – some words – it’s all of that from the past. Not just the thing that happened in the past, but every time you cut that groove again where you felt something and ignored it. You suppressed it. You got caught up in the toxic swirl again.

The good news about this is that repetition is the key to the game. That’s why I call it a practice. It’s something you’ve just got to keep repeating. For me, part of the reason why I tell that story about street harassment is because it’s cutting a new groove in my body. It’s cutting a new groove in my brain, my muscle memory.

I’ve noticed that my capacity to engage in these conversations grows. I actually kind of look forward to the next time that someone says something really racist and sexist to me because I’m like, “Ooh, what’s going to happen now? What’s going to come out of my mouth now? I don’t know.” And that’s actually the energy that I bring to it because I know what’s going to happen. We all know this stuff is going to happen. Status quo of systemic oppression. It’s pervasive. I just acknowledge, “Yeah, it’s going to happen. Hey, it just happened.” So I’m able to do that with folks.

Now does that mean there aren’t situations where I don’t get stuck; no, I still get stuck sometimes, too. I’ll just do the practice, though, with it. I’ll practice with it; get in touch with my feelings. If I’m really stuck, I’ll ask someone to talk about it with me, make sure I don’t go into toxic swirl, and then I figure out what I need to do.

That’s the answer to one question.

The other question was about power dynamics. I think power dynamics definitely make it trickier. That’s why I want to create Compassionate Activism for managers and organizational leaders because these are some places where there’s a very clear power dynamic at play. The thing to remember is that your manager probably, for the most part, doesn’t know what they’re doing and kind of knows that – subconsciously, at least – and aren’t mind readers about what you need.

It depends on how that power dynamic is going to play out. If you have an abusive, controlling, toxic manager that's not a situation where I would be like, "Yes, engage in tons of conversation with this person." I think you can try a couple, see how that goes. But people who are like that, they have tremendous pain and trauma that they're playing out on you.

Like I said, you can't force anybody to heal. No one can force you to heal. You can't force anybody else to heal. And that's really what's going to be needed for folks. Instead, if they're like that, go to their manager, I would say. There's kind of a different strategy if the manager has that level of abusiveness and toxicity and controlling. That's where you've got to engage different folks around it in the organization if you want to change it.

Presumably, hopefully, most of you don't have managers like that. You just have managers who are kind of bad at their job but would like to do better, are well-intentioned but terribly ineffective managers and therefore are not causing good to you. They're just another human being with a power dynamic. They really are just another human being and they really want to do a good job and they don't know how.

This is where communication is key. Communication is the source of our power, one of the sources of our power. If we don't communicate then we'll never know, we can never change anything. Using the same strategy, the same things we've talked about – and I'm going to talk more specifically in the next couple of minutes about the steps to take; you're going to get steps. Don't worry about that.

It's the same approach. And you can be transparent about your concern. I would say name the pink elephant in the room. Like, "I want to share something with you about how you've been supervising me and I'm concerned that you might get mad. I'm afraid of that happening. Can we talk about this?"

So just naming the pink elephant in the room and having some transparency about it, it calls upon you to have a certain amount of vulnerability. That's also what's going to invite them to be compassionate towards you. Compassion is when you're moved at the presence of pain and want to do something about it. I think compassion is natural; a very human response when we see somebody in pain.

When someone doesn't respond with compassion that means there's some trauma blocking them from doing it. That's what I'm saying. That's when people get abusive and controlling and whatnot. That's one way it plays out. There are different ways but that's one way it plays out.

Just remembering that. When you engage in this conversation, if you want to help move people to feel compassion to your situation, being a little more vulnerable. Sharing that

pain and that fear and inviting them to have that conversation with you. We're going to talk more about that in the next session explicitly because in this session we're talking more about how do we relate differently. Just know that we'll cover the compassionate truth-telling in the next session a bit more.

I want to pause there and check in with Josette before I move on.

Josette: Yes. We had a question that stated:

"Oftentimes people have a tendency to imagine a world wherein we can take violent, physical, or verbal recourse against an oppressor without consequence. They referred to this as the Batman syndrome. Type? Batman syndrome?"

"Or the tendency to use hyperbolic/hypothetical language regarding violence when it comes to a response. How do you sit with that kind of desire to either be violent or to use really hyperbolic language? How do we avoid that?"

"Because as Sandra pointed out a couple of times, taking on a more calm tone in discussion tends to set up better situations from change.

"I don't know if that was a good summary. Feel free to throw in anything, Aurora."

So in sum, there's an urge for people to be violent or to use really hypothetical language involving violence, I guess in attack mode, how do we deal with that desire? How we deal with that?

Sandra: Those are two things. There's the feeling – and there's nothing right or wrong about a feeling – and there's the action that we choose to take, which we have control over. I think we're responsible to not do harm to folks, to not inflict harm upon people. You can feel the anger and want to commit harm, want to lash out, want to pistol whip them, and that happens. But that's just an initial reaction.

Your initial reaction is oftentimes not actually about... There's so much more to what is going on than in that current situation. It's not just that one moment in time when somebody says something, because they're just saying some words. No, it's this pattern that you've experienced. It's this whole analysis that we have of the collective impact that we've seen. And the collective trauma that we've seen as well. It's all of that as opposed to just some words.

Sitting with that pain...sitting with that anger with mindfulness and just acknowledging it, not trying to change it, judge yourself for it, no toxic swirl. Just sit with it, acknowledge it, be with it. Honor it. It has a right to exist. Your feelings are real.

Then you get to the pain. Then you know what you want to do about it at that point. I just want to clarify that what I'm saying is not that you always have to talk really calmly to folks, that you can't express anger, or be really loud and fierce in how you talk to somebody. Oftentimes, you won't feel compelled to, honestly, after you've gone into this place.

You saw the shift that Emily made herself. She wanted to beat down this dude and now she's like, "I can have a conversation." She felt really calm. I wasn't trying to force her to feel calm. She just naturally shifted there. That happens a lot. Because when you're dealing with reality you have something that you're capable of doing.

You feel more empowered. You feel calmer, more at peace because you know once you've got reality you can do something. If you're stuck in make-believe world, nothing's going to happen there. So you struggle: you feel helpless, you feel powerless, you feel because stress actually you are. It's make-believe world. Nothing functional comes out of make-believe world in terms of impacting reality.

What you want to know, though, is that when you're actually in a place where you're with that situation and you're not coming from the past, you're not coming from that baggage and trauma. And you're just relating to this person right now, right here then you can actually realize, "Well, here's a potential response that will work," and then you see how that lands for them.

Then, depending on the response you get, you respond in kind. You respond in a way that feels appropriate. It's like a dance. It's like a dance back and forth where you're really listening to the other person and then you're responding. You're listening, responding, listening, responding.

Sometimes expressing frustration and anger is going to be the right response.

I've had a conversation with these two folks who run something that's feminist. They had been called out for being problematic in various ways and they had taken responsibility and apologized for it but not really. They didn't really get it, actually, and you could tell by the way they apologized.

I had a conversation with them because I knew them. I knew one of them. I had a conversation with them. They were really stuck. They were really stuck on some stuff. And I remember the exact moment where they were really stuck and how like, "But these people are our friends! Why did they come at us in this way?" with this public, angry callout on Twitter. "But why did they have to be so mean about it?"

I was like, "Look!" They're both white people and the callout was about how women of color felt they were being tokenized by them, being exploited for their contribution to

their work. I got pissed at that moment. I was like, “Look. People of color, especially black people, have been taught that they have to make sure everything is nice for white people no matter what. White people, y’all have to feel really damn fucking comfortable all the fucking time. Maybe that shouldn’t be your primary focus. Maybe you might want to think about this and consider their perspective.”

I don’t think I even said it as nicely as that. I think I was a lot more fierce about it. I can’t really recreate it because I don’t feel it right now but I said something like that. Something along those lines. In that moment, I was heated. I was pretty damn fucking heated. That landed. That got to them. Because they could tell how serious it was. They got how serious it was because I brought that energy and it was serious. It was fierce. It was very strong.

And I wasn’t making them wrong as a human being.

You can do that. See if that works. It’s one tactic.

Alright. So I’ve got 15 minutes. I’m going to switch over unless there’s a burning question happening, Josette.

Josette: There’s a question but I believe we covered it in the session so I’ll save it but if we don’t cover it I’ll bring it up.

Sandra: Ok. We’re going to talk about... Oh wait, that’s not it. It’s the next one.

Can you see all this, Josette?

Ok, good.

Folks, you don’t need to take notes on this stuff in the sense of write down everything I read that’s up here. You’re going to get that in a PDF anyway. What I’m talking about is fine but just know that you don’t have to copy all those words.

Josette: Yeah. I actually just noticed that the bottom of the screen, like the bar was covering a piece of it so there actually is a piece of it that’s off the screen.

Sandra: Ok. What about now?

Josette: I believe that’s good.

Sandra: Alrighty.

I can’t see anybody. I had to open it up so I can’t actually see the videos or the chat or anything so Josette, if anything’s happening just let me know verbally.

Josette: Sure thing.

Sandra: This is a chart that's basically showing you how is it different when we come from toxic swirl versus just bringing mindfulness to that other person's internal reality. This is more reiteration of what I've already been talking about but it's something that needs to be repeated because as I said before it's a groove that we're cutting. It's a groove that we're deepening in our minds and our bodies so repetition is really important.

I want you to be thinking about a certain situation that you normally engage in toxic swirl around. What we normally do is focus on how they should not be what they are. They should know better. They never should have done what they did. As we've been talking about that's just more resistance. That's more resistance to reality and so when we stay focused on resisting reality and we stay in our make-believe world, nothing is workable.

We can't actually change what's happening right now in front of us when we're fixated on it being different. Because it's not different. It is what it is.

Once again it's just that practice of acknowledging that what happened happened. The other thing we do is that we assume we know what they're about. We assume that we know why, exactly why they're saying what they're saying. We think we know what their intentions are; where they're coming from.

I'm not saying that what we suspect isn't true. It might be. It very well might be. I mean, status quo is systemic oppression so we do have a lot of patterns that we can easily identify in folks. Folks that believe in the dominant narrative either because of their unconscious privilege or because of their internalized oppression.

You don't know how that exactly is manifesting for them. People are diverse. People are not just their identity. People are also their individual history. Things are much more complicated. We're more complicated than stereotypes. They're more complicated than their stereotype. We have stereotypes of everybody, including identities. Privilege identities.

What we want to know is that: we can speculate certain things and we might be right and we might not be. And when we get tripped up we treat those speculations like they're truth, like they're pure truth, like 100% truth as opposed to a likelihood, a possibility.

Instead, what we want to do instead of assuming and treating our speculations like they're truths we get curious. We get curious about what's going on with them. Just like for yourself you have an initial reaction to what you're experiencing to the situation and you get curious about what's underneath that. That opens you up to unpacking.

The other thing we obviously do is we resist. We make them wrong for whatever experience it is that they're having. But as we've seen, when we resist our own feelings, our own needs, one) when other people do it to us, that's dehumanizing. When other people deny us our own experiences that's really harmful. That's real oppressive.

Practicing not doing that with ourselves and just acknowledging our own experience and our feelings about what's going on and unpacking that, it's the same thing with them. They're just another human being. Messy, lost, trained in unconscious oppression just like everybody else.

There's nothing wrong or right about the experience that they're having, about the feelings that they're having. Yes, they didn't intend to. They're not right or wrong for having the intention to not cause harm even though they had the impact of causing harm. It is just what it is. That's what they experience. That was their feeling. That was their intention going into the situation.

It just is what it is.

And just like their lack of bad intention doesn't cancel out the harmful impact it had on you, your harmful impact does not cancel out their intentions. Your internal reality does not cancel out their internal reality. They both coexist distinct from each other. What we can do when we stop making people wrong for having the feelings that they're having we can start asking questions.

Take that curiosity and be like, "Hey, so you say you're repulsed by people who have disabilities. Where is that coming from? Why do you think this way?" Instead of being like, "You shouldn't think that. It should be... How dare you? Blah blah blah." That's how we feel. We have a preference they would not feel this way. But we can't enforce our internal reality upon them and make them change.

That's when we get into being coercive. That's when we get into being controlling. That's not the type of world we're trying to create. We're trying to free ourselves from coercion, from domination. Even when it's quote unquote "for their own good" it's still the same dynamic.

If we whip ourselves, and I see this. I see people who whip themselves to heal. They're like, "I have to do these things. Why am I not healed already? I need to be here. I'm going to do all these things because I need to be in a good place." That's just more whipping. That's just more controlling that we're trying to do to ourselves. Then we try to do it to other folks.

We have a preference that they would think differently. But when we try to push that upon them and force them to change, that's not going to go very well. What instead we

can do is offer some other perspectives, invite them to consider them. Anything, when it involves another person, if it's not invitational it's probably going to be coercive, to be quite honest. I don't know. I have to think about that but that's probably the situation.

That's not something that we practice. That's not something that's modeled for us in our society. It's like, "You have to do it." That's what we're taught as children. We had to do what our parents said or else. There was punishment. Oftentimes physical punishment. We carry out that model of policing people, punishing people, other folks, as opposed to just inviting them.

Because people don't know how to invite somebody – they don't want to coerce people, they don't want to demand things of people, they don't want to control and abuse people – they silence themselves. They don't know how to say something in a way that's not aggressive.

Instead, we can just offer another perspective and invite them to consider it. An example with the guy from the eye store, I didn't say, "You have to think this way. How dare you for not thinking this way!" It was just, "My perspective is that I think our society should focus on being better, doing better, treating folks better who have these different types of impairments so it's not so hard for them."

He was like, "Oh. Oh." He was invited in. Even if somebody normally agrees with that, if I was trying to control them and push them into it and make them wrong for not thinking that way, they're going to push back. That's actually a healthy dynamic. When someone tries to force you to do something, to push back, that actually is probably a good idea.

Because they're responding to that dynamic, that energy you're bringing to it, far more than they're responding to the point that you're making. Think about when you're caught up in your own. You're upset about something. Your ability to consider the intellectual points that somebody else is making is really low. You're not responding to intellectual points.

You may agree on some level or maybe later when you're calm you would agree. But in that moment, if somebody's trying, if somebody's ignoring, denying, minimizing your feelings and telling you you should feel something different you're pushing back on that. And that's a healthy thing.

The key thing about this is that when you're talking with them it's not just a "la la la la" conversation. No, you're committed. You're committed to alleviating their suffering. I think ignorance causes suffering. Because whether or not they're in touch with that, I don't know. But ignorance causes suffering because it causes this disconnection from reality, from other people, from themselves.

Systemic oppression is inherently disconnecting. It puts people in different levels, like, “I’m better than you.” So it is inherently disconnecting. We, I think, naturally want to belong. We want to be in community with folks. So when it happens listen for the pain. Listen to what is underneath that initial reaction.

Just how you are listening for your own pain, you’re unpacking the layers of a feeling. And you go from anger, frustration, sadness, fear, pain. You do the same thing with them. You do it just by staying with them and helping them dig deeper. You’re not trying to change them or trying to make them different; you’re just sitting with them, unpacking. The same way you did with yourself, listening for their pain.

How is it created? Where did it come from?

With that dude in the eye store, his pain came from the fact that he saw how people with different types of impairments were treated in our society. He saw the level of stigma, of shaming, perhaps even violence and he didn’t want that to happen. That’s legit. I, too, don’t want that to happen. I was then able to offer a different approach to it. I was more inclusive and also addressed the pain.

What I could see was his value; generally he was a good person. He wants people to be happy and do well. It’s just in this moment his pain was getting in the way of him feeling that way toward people with disabilities. I was able to offer a different approach that could both address the pain and honor his values, that was more inclusive. I told him, “Hey, you could just look at society, though, and change society. I think that’s the work for us,” and he was like, “Yeah, me, too! That’s great! Can we do lunch?”

I was like, “Nope. But here are some articles.”

I want to stop there for a second because it’s 8:00 and I’ll quickly take one question. One burning question but no coaching. Sorry.

Josette: We didn’t have any questions come up as far as I can tell in the chat. If anyone wants to add one there now, that’d be great.

Sandra: As we’re waiting – maybe nobody has any questions; that’s cool, too – for somebody who has a question they’re thinking about, the thing to note is that: When it comes to situations that are less emotionally charged for us it is easier for us to go into a space where we’re able to be curious and be humble about what’s going on.

To distinguish that, “There are different realities, yes, and they have another reality than mine and they’re valid in their own right. I don’t agree with it but it’s valid. It’s legitimate for them. Let me get mindful. Let me get in touch with what’s going on with them. Let me

help them unpack. Because they, too, are having an initial reaction and that's just the surface. That's not really everything for them."

That emotionally charged reaction, just like for you when you're having an emotionally charged reaction there's a lot more to you than that emotionally charged reaction. Same thing. For you, if it's less emotionally charged, just like, "Ah," and you can just let go of the toxic swirl and bring nothing into that conversation and start engaging from that point fresh.

Then bring in your anti-oppression analysis as you help them unpack where they're coming from. That's if it's less emotionally charged for you. If it's more emotionally charged for you, probably you want to unpack that for yourself. Because it's going to be very difficult to let go of the toxic swirl and engage with that other person. Sit with yourself. That emotional charge, FYI, is toxic swirl.

It's not the pain, actually. Pain sucks; I know. But that doesn't cause emotional charge. When you feel pain, you get called to address it. The emotional charge that makes you get stuck? That's toxic swirl. That's resistance to the reality.

I'm going to stop there for a second but I just wanted to make that clear.

Josette: We didn't get any questions but we do have a question that I was tabling for the next time. We're about out of time. So if you wanted it for next time. But it's called: "How do we deal with people resisting this honest, compassionate truth-telling? How do we deal with people who are resisting that?"

Sandra: We can ask them why. What's going on that they don't want to talk about this? Once again, it's not trying to change them. It's not trying to change their reality. It's just unpacking their reality, helping them dig deeper. And maybe they don't want to. The most we can do is invite them to have a conversation. We can't force them.

I want y'all to think about this, like you want to be real intense and force the other person. I get where that's coming from. But get present to the fact that you're trying to force someone, you're trying to coerce somebody, just saying.

Josette: Can I go? Can I ask?

Student 1: Sorry the lighting's super weird here. So what I was asking with that question in particular – because you gave the example of saying, "Oh, this situation is happening. Why is this happening?"

I'm trying to have this honest conversation. In particular I want to talk about this situation at my last job with my supervisor. I tried to be a very open, honest, transparent person and when I attempted to do that, instead – kind of like what you said, obviously there's

stuff going on with her that caused her to not respond – but in the end it just created this really unhealthy and emotionally abusive situation with my supervisor and got me fired in the end.

It was a really bad few months but thankfully it was only a few months that I had to deal with it and not longer.

So not in the sense that you're trying to force them but who you're trying to be – honest in that kind and compassionate way – they're not open to you and actually resist you trying to be your truthful, honest self. Not in an aggressive way. Just like, "Hey, these are my needs," and there's just...

I mean, it just seemed like a situation that was doomed from the get-go kind of thing. So, yeah, if you had any thoughts about that. Thank you.

Sandra: That happens. This isn't a silver bullet that will work every single time. At all. It just increases the chances that you'll have a different outcome than when you come at it from toxic swirl. Because you're dealing with somebody else's toxic swirl.

Oftentimes when we come, not from toxic swirl but from being in touch with our pain and being vulnerable and like, "This is what's going on," that will elicit compassion. They get interested and they want to be helpful. They want to engage in conversation. Sometimes not. Sometimes their pain and trauma is so big they shut down. They really can't have that conversation in various ways.

Then you're like, "Ok. They refuse to have this conversation and there's a lot more work they need to be doing in order to have this conversation. What else can I do?"

I had a job with a manager who – wonderful, sweet, generous, intelligent person. Loveliest person. Not as a manager. Was not, no. Was not good for me. I had multiple conversations with her about that dynamic. And I did I've been talking about: shared my needs, was vulnerable about the harm it was causing me and how it was affecting my performance, what I needed from her, and what did she think. Where was she coming from?

She was really clear that she was doing this because that's how she is and she just couldn't see a different way of communicating with me. There was nothing that she saw that she could do differently. Even when I suggested stuff she was like, "I can't do that." She said, "That's just not how I am."

I was like, "Ok. We've had this multiple times. Alright." And then I started looking around the organization like, "What else can I do? Who else do I want to manage me? Oh, this

other person? I want her to manage me. Hm. I want a different job in my organization. Let me make this happen.”

I made it happen. I got a new manager. I got a new job with a promotion and a salary increase. I’m not saying that’s always going to be the outcome. I’m just saying you acknowledge reality. It is what it is. “Ok. I acknowledge it.” If I’d spent my entire time going, “You know, I talked to her so much about this and she still won’t do it. I can’t believe that,” that’s toxic swirl.

Instead I’m just like, “Ok. That’s what happened. She won’t budge. I tried. I invited her. Moving on now. Work it out.” I worked it out.

That’s why it’s a dance. It’s a dance between this. You do something, reality happens, life happens. You’re like, “Ok, yes. Yes, life happened this way. And I’m going to respond like this.” It’s this “Yes. And.” Yes. And. “Yes” to reality and, “Here’s what I’m going to do.”

“Yes, this is the response,” and “Here’s what I’m going to do.”

If we say, “No, reality,” then we can start being, “No.”

Do something! Yes. And. Yes. And.

It’s 8:10. I’m going to stop here. And I want to go back to my PowerPoint. I’ve been giving you a lot of things to consider. That’s because we haven’t been taught how to do this so I’m really trying to break it up. I took this thing and made it five practices, which are secretly – really not so secretly – ten practices because there are two things in each practice.

I could simplify it to just: Breathe and Listen.

What does that mean?

By breathe I mean take that pause and just breathe. Do you notice that I ask people to breathe in and out, in and out when I do these things? When I do coaching? Take that moment to pause because that breathing will help reground you in your body again and out of your toxic swirl.

And listen. Listen to yourself. Listen to what is going on underneath. “There’s anger. Ok. I feel anger.” Listen for the next feeling. “I feel sadness. Ok.” Listen to that. Bear witness to that. “Ok. Underneath I feel pain. Now I have this need. I know. Now I want to do this thing.”

Listen. Keep listening to yourself. You’ll shift over time into action.

It's the same thing with somebody else. You're in a situation; you want to have this conversation. Ideally, you would have gone through with yourself this process but maybe, for whatever reason, you wanted to jump into talking with them.

So breathe and listen.

Breathe. If you go into toxic swirl about that person being different than how they are right now, listen to what they're saying. Really deeply listen. What is going on for them underneath? Help them unpack what their experience is. What is the pain that's underneath all that? Where did that come from?

Listen. Listen for what they actually wish for. The dude in the store, he wanted – I listened – he wanted a world where people with disabilities weren't treated that way. He didn't know what to do about it so he just wanted to push them aside. But I was able to listen for that pain, listen for that desire, for those values. I was able to offer a different way of thinking about it.

Try. Just breathe and listen.

Alright. Moving along because it's already 8:10.

Announcements: This is a new program, Compassionate Activism. We just launched it. You are the first people taking this course and there's been different thinking about how to really provide this, make it accessible for folks.

One of the things that occurred to me is that I want to be offering a Mindfulness Healing Circle. That's basically these biweekly sessions. They're free. They're only an hour, twice a month, where we do kind of what I do with coaching. Where we practice taking an emotionally charged situation and we bring mindfulness to it to get in touch with that pain and move forward and doing that in community. Creating a virtual community around that.

That's just to provide additional support to folks, particularly after this program is over for you.

The other thing is I know people were struggling with the ten week program because it's long. I know I struggle as well when it's long. So I wanted to create a short version of it. I'm going to condense it into a two-day virtual training that had six 90-minute sessions.

We'll see how that goes. It's going to have monthly Q & A sessions where I take questions and provide coaching to people who've been part of that program. That's going to be two hours. I'm going to be doing them monthly, Q & A. And that, for you folks, you can register for free.

Just let me know if you do want to take it and I'll send you a coupon so that you can also partake in that without any cost. Because we're constantly taking the feedback that you give us and integrating it into the program. We want to make sure that you benefit from some of those changes and that you get this additional support.

The other thing is: Testimonials.

If you feel like you've been impacted positively by this program – and I hope a lot of you do feel that way – I would love some testimonials. I'm going to shoot an email out to folks over the next couple of days and they're super helpful, showing people that it is possible for them to not be stuck in these emotionally charged situations where they feel like they can't do anything. They feel silenced.

It's really, really, really important to show, "Yeah, I was there like that. Now I have some tools. Now it's different. I have some experiences and it actually works."

Hopefully it's working for you. If not, there are coaching sessions you can also schedule with me. So I'll be sending an email asking for testimonials and I think that's about it. It's 8:15.

Closing takeaways, we won't do it in group but we'll do it privately. Take a second right now. If there's one thing you want to really make sure you remember from today's session, what would it be? Write in the chat. Write it in the chat, folks, so other people can hear.

Scrolling all the way down so I can see.

"Trauma informs trauma. We're all human."

"Breathe and listen."

"You can't force anyone to heal."

"It isn't about not getting into the toxic swirl. It's about what you do once you're in the toxic swirl."

"Asking, 'Where is that coming from?'"

"It didn't occur to me how much respectability politics affected me in the past. So focused on being nice and felt bad when other people called me out."

"When you come from a place of feeling vulnerable and talk to the pain you can invite somebody into the conversation."

"Get curious."

“Yes. No. Counteroffer.”

All wonderful things.

Thank you, everyone so much and once again we'll be posting this the video and the chat log, for you in the transcription. I'll send that email out when it's available. Thank you. Bye.

Josette: Thanks, everyone, especially the people who spoke up today!

Sandra: Yeah! Thank you so much!