

# compassionate activism

**Sandra:** Alright, hello everyone. This is session number eight for Compassion Activism. And so we are coming toward the end of our online seminar. There are ten sessions total. So it's very, very exciting because we're almost getting ready to cover everything within the model. And, so we'll start because we only have a couple more sessions together, so let's really, really pack it in!

And today, we're going to continue our deep dive into our fourth practice of compassionate truth-telling and consciousness-raising inquiry. Right, so we had been talking about this actually for the last two sessions already, and the first session was more talking about the process, and the second session on this practice was more talking about how – like, what do we need to let go of, right? What's getting really in the way of doing this emotionally? And for this session, we're really going to be bringing it together and simplifying it. Because when you're in an emotionally toxic situation, obviously, there's not a lot of things you can remember.

So we're going to be trying to – we're going to be a lot more practice this time. We're going to be doing more coaching, and as well as just trying to get some other frameworks around how to bring this together for folks.

And so before we get started, as always, we are going to be choosing a situation. Now in order for us to be able to practice this a bit more, I want us to choose a situation that is very lightly emotionally charged. Right? Not even level four or five. Normally I ask you to do you something that is somewhat emotionally charged for you. I need you to do something that is very LIGHTLY charged for you. Right? And I'll talk about why – well I'll talk about -- the reason I'm asking you to do this is because what makes it difficult to engage in the conversation is the fact that we have so much pain ourselves. And so unless we go through the first few practices of applying it to ourselves, it's very hard to do anything with the other person. So because we're not going to be able necessarily to have you go through the entire process during the session, I want you be able to still practice with something, so choosing something that is easier for you to kind of let go of your toxic swirl and engage in that conversation.

So choose something that's more on the level of one to two. So not even four to five like we normally are. Definitely not nine or ten. (laughs) Just one or two. And so I want to go into a little bit more into what makes this so hard. Because we often think that when we get into these situations, obviously – there's, "It's microaggression; it's somebody dismissing our pain; it's somebody saying, no actually this ISN'T about sexism, racism, or transphobia, or ableism, or whatnot." Right? The status quo in our society is systemic oppression. And so it's just, in our day-to-day lives, if we were to really pay attention to everything out there, from the media, from people around us, from our own toxic thinking, right? There's going to be a lot of toxic messages. A lot of things

are going to be actually perpetuating systemic oppression whether we are cognizant of it. Right? And so it's very true in the sense that we are bombarded with it. At the same time, right, unless there's actually a threat of imminent physical danger or an act of physical violence – then reality is -- the external reality, is – there's just some words, or actions, or energies, being shared. And that's true in external reality. Right? And so what gets tricky though is that when things happen to us, our internal reality, our interpretation of that, the meanings we give to those external words, actions, and energies, they feel harmful to us. And they ARE harmful to us in our internal reality because they set off internal pain that we've had. Right? That we've been carrying from some trauma in the past. Usually comes from childhood but sometimes it comes from us as adults when something really bad, overwhelmingly so, happened to us. Right? But usually they're coming from our childhood, because when we're kids, when we're little, the emotional and the physical threats were really one and the same. As children we were physically really helpless. It was very easy for people to do things to us, to physically move us. And many of us were hit and physically punished growing up. And even for those of us who weren't, the emotional approval went away when our parents were disappointed with us, our caregivers were mad at us, on some visceral level there was a threat to our physical safety because if our caregivers aren't happy with us, are they going to give us what we need in terms of food, shelter, you know, support. So actually very much so is the importance, the us receiving emotional care, was tied to physically being taken care of. And so when that emotional care was threatened – right? – with them being mad at us somehow, then also our physical safety was threatened.

So this is like my own little speculation. I'm sure that other people have talked about this, too, but this is kind of what I think as well. And that's why for us a lot of emotional violence feels like physical violence even though there actually isn't in reality. It FEELS like that. And what that means is that, yes, in our internal reality it feels like that, but in external reality, it's still not physical. Right? It's still not physical. Which doesn't negate, it doesn't negate, the pain that we're feeling. The fact that it's just non-physical. Right? Our pain in our internal reality is still extremely important and very real. What it actually gives us is a tremendous power. Right? So what we have – I've been trying to teach folks in this course is that we actually have tremendous power over our own experiences, over our own internal reality. We just haven't been given the skills to be able to do that. Right? That's why we haven't been.

And so the reality – what happens is that – our – these external situations are actually really emotionally charged because we're resisting the fact that we're feeling pain around them because we want to get away from that pain that it's setting off. We then resist the fact that this is happening in external reality and we resist the other person. We say, "They shouldn't be doing this. They should know better. How could this happen? How could I let this happen?" Right? We – you know – "I just want it to stop." Right? And these are all obviously preferences. Right? That makes sense, right? Nobody likes these things to happen. But when we treat these preferences like they must be happening – they have to be different than how it is – that's when we get to make-believe world. Right? And all this distraction – because that's what it's doing, it's

distracting us from the pain that we're feeling – so what happens is if we actually take the time to pause and take care of that pain – right? - and take care of our internal reality, and we say like, “Yes, this is coming up. This is what's real for me. Oh okay, I'm going to take care of this. Like, I have this pain, I'm going to take care of it.” Right? And then be like, “Okay, you said this thing. And you felt that that was okay to say. Okay, you said – okay, that's true for you. I want to talk a little bit more about that with you then, because it really was not for me. It was really painful for me to hear that, even though in your reality I can see that that wasn't true for you. Okay. Can we have a conversation about that?” Right?

So what shifts when we can actually be with reality and not make-believe, and when I say reality, I mean all three realities -- right? – my internal reality, your external reality – I'm sorry – my internal reality, external reality, and the other person's internal reality – when we can be with all those different realities and acknowledge them all as being true, however different they may be from each other – right? -- then we can actually move forward. Right?

But when we're resisting it the entire time – resisting how much pain you're in, how much -- where the other person is coming from, that they should've said something different – right – that shouldn't have happened, I shouldn't be feeling this way, why do I have to do this...blah blah...well that's all make-believe, right? And like I've been saying, make-believe – when we stay focused on what -- how we want current reality to be different than how it is, we can't actually CHANGE anything in current reality. Because we're not even focused on it. We don't even necessarily know what's going on in current reality because we're not even there.

So like I've been saying, our initial reaction to situations are just that – they're initial reactions. They're the tip of the iceberg. We don't know most of the time what actually is happening in our own internal reality -- and it's those initial reactions help us, give us a red flag, being like, “Ding ding ding! Something's important that needs your attention! Please pay attention to me! I'm going to make you really frustrated and angry and stressed until you do!” Right? And then most of us get focused there in the initial reaction and get really stuck vs. “Okay, what's going on?” And sitting with it, and getting in touch with it, and then acknowledging that pain, and being like, “Okay, that's that pain, let me take care of it.” You have something concrete to work with at that point. So if we can start to do that with ourselves, we can also learn how to do that with somebody else. Right? Because just as clueless as you have been before this conversation, other people are clueless and they're not a part of this conversation so they have less skills than you do. Right? And it's this hard for you right now. Imagine how hard it is for them. Right?

So this is kind of a little snapshot of what – of the bigger picture – of what I've been talking about. Right? In terms of, people came in here because they felt so stuck in these emotionally charged situations. And so this, I want to – my point in this message right now is that it's not actually about the external situation. Because that's just some words. Right? That's just some words and some actions. Unless there is actually like

physical violence happening, it's just some words. Which doesn't mean they can't be painful, obviously they are. And obviously they carry a whole history of a lot of collective historical structural oppression that's also currently being carried out. Right? And at the same time this moment, your ability to how you relate to it is really going to drastically change how charged it is for you.

You can still be fiercely committed to circumventing this in the world, be fiercely committed to social justice and anti-oppression, AND not have it destroy your internal peace every single time something happens. It doesn't have to. Right? You can be like, "This is terrible." And you can be justifiably very angry that this injustice is happening and be moved into action around it? Right? Because it's coming from a place of compassion. It's coming from a place of, like, "Let's do something because we deserve better. We ARE better than this." Right? Versus this place where there's so much pain that's being set off by that situation and just pushing everything out, and we can't even move. We can't even say anything. Right? That's where most people are stuck in. And what I'm saying is that you can have the former, you don't have to stay in this latter position.

Okay. So I'm going to pause for a second, because that was a lot that I just threw out there but I hope it made sense. And if there are any questions about that?

Just the questions in the chat box?

**Josette:** We didn't have any questions but somebody did say, "So hard!"

**Sandra:** It is really hard if you don't follow the model! (Laughs) Right? I have this – I used to work in this organization where everybody there was older than me by at least a decade. And so – some people there were older than me by 20 or 30 years and I was helping them to shift the technology they were using. And it was very funny because they would say things like – because I was trying to get them to do all this different stuff – they were like, "Well, you know, at one point, I had this X technology, and I lost everything in this. I'm really scared about doing anything like that ever again."

And I was like, "So when was this?"

"Seven years ago."

Not relevant. That's not relevant. Anything less than two years ago -- any technology that you're using, any problems you have with it -- if it's more than two years old, that's not a relevant situation. That's the same thing with this. Right? So any situation that was emotionally charged that you didn't do the five practices with, and it was really, really hard? Yeah of course it was, you were doing it from toxic swirl. That's actually not relevant to how successful or how different it could be if you went through compassion activism instead. Right?

As you've been seeing in the coaching sessions we've been – the coaching I've been doing – in these sessions, right? People come in really stuck. Really emotionally charged, having a lot of pain, a lot of trauma, lots of deep stuff. Right? And when I move them through the five – or at least the first three – practices, they get to a place of ease. Of peace. Of feeling creative. And knowing, being like, "Yeah I can do this. I can do that. Yeah, I can just do it. Yeah, I can just ask that." Right? It's not so hard after awhile. Because they are coming from a place that's grounded in reality where they had to encounter their pain. And once they took care of their pain, they can move it. And there's some deep pain that people are sharing. Pain, trauma, from when they were very young, from parents' deaths, you know, to abandonment, to all sorts of very, very traumatic things. And in that moment, they took care of it, and then, then it became easy. Well, EASIER, right? There's always something. But there was an ease about them, if you saw – there was a peace, a relaxation that happened.

So yes, it is really hard if you come from toxic swirl. That's why I keep focusing, "Let go of the toxic swirl." (Laughs) And we're going to focus on that so you can identify what your specific toxic swirl comes into play. We're going to be doing some of that later today. Anything?

It's star-six to un-mute.

**Josette:** Yeah, folks are saying that there's some audio issues, and that your audio is going like soft, louder and stuff. I looked and I didn't see anyone, so I'm not sure what's up. But...

**Sandra:** I just don't like ear buds. Thanks for letting me know.

**Josette:** Yeah, thanks for everyone who mentioned that. If you ever hear anything technologically weird or see anything weird or anything like that, please let us know.

**Sandra:** Yeah, because usually it's okay which is why I don't normally do them. But every now and then my Internet can get wonky maybe. And it helps to get ---

[Puts in ear buds]

Alright, how's this for audio?

**Josette:** Sounds good to me. Everyone let me know if you hear anything weird.

**Sandra:** So this sounds good for folks? Alrighty then.

**Josette:** We have a funny comment I wanted to read out. [Laughs] Esther said, "Can Sandra come with me to my mom's house to help?"

[Sandra and Josette laugh]

**Sandra:** Hey, you know, I can do two people on a coaching call sometimes, too. So if your mother is open to having conversation with both of us. Or you can enroll your mother into the program. Just saying. Right? I've done other programs where people enroll their whole families into it. And it's true, because, you know, the more people around you have this – this framework, right? Then can you actually -- when you get stuck in a toxic swirl, you'd be like, "Oh, I think we're both in toxic swirl. Do we want to practice this together? Okay." Right? So it's actually a lot easier, this is why I give a group discount to folks. When you do it in community, it's so much more powerful, because your ability to continue doing this work is critical. You can learn it now, but it takes practice. That's why it's called the practices. Right? The five practices. Doing it together in a group is always a lot more powerful. So, we are doing a training on June 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, so if you have any family or friends or colleagues, you're like, "You could be so much happier if you did this as well with me." You know? Just saying.

Anything else, Josette? Nope? Nobody else? Okay.

So I am going to – okay – so can you see everything? Okay, perfect. So this is – I've showed this before – this is basically very common strategies that we use to talk with the other person that's said something that's made us upset. Right? So on the left we have "the toxic swirl." This is what happens when we come from a place of resistance. When we resist their internal reality and we instead are usually just trying to push OUR internal reality into them. Right? And we just want to make them stop. We want to change their minds. Right? We essentially want to control them, to put in not so pleasant words. Right? And so when I get questions, it's almost like, "Well, how do I MAKE them stop? How do I make them think differently? How do I make them--?" You're like, "Well, you're trying to MAKE somebody do something. That sounds kind of coercive. That sounds kind of controlling to me." Right? At most we can do is invite them. You know? Invite them to consider. Invite them to unpack their own internal reality. And – but what happens when we try to force our reality into them, they naturally resist. Which is actually, I think, a healthy thing. When somebody is trying to be coercing you into changing their minds, without really a dialogue even happening, I say that's actually a healthy resistance. Right? We don't like it when people try to force us to change our minds without even talking to us about what's going on, right? Kind of the same thing.

So on the right-hand side, we have what's a different way of coming from -- what's a different way of approaching people. If we approach it from a place of mindfulness, we're actually really trying to be in-touch, being connected to present reality, and unpack that and just be with it. Acknowledge it for what it is vs. resisting it, judging it, blaming it, trying to change it. You know?

We may not like it. I'm not saying we like what their internal reality is. We don't like what the external reality of what was said or what was done. We don't need to like it. That's not what acknowledging is about. It's just being like, "Hey, that happened. Oh that's what's real for you. That's what's going on in your world. That's where you're

coming from.” Right? That’s not right or wrong, it’s just -- it is what it is. My reality is what it is, I’m not wrong or right for having it, neither is the other person though.

So I want everybody just to read this fully and note which on the left-hand side of “toxic swirl,” which one do you do? And write it down. Write it down. And then note on the right-hand side of “mindfulness,” which ones do you tend to do?

And know that, you know, you’re going to get the Powerpoint later on so you don’t have to write everything word-for-word. You’re going to get it. Just, you know, do little notes.

And then for the left-hand side when you notice, say you’re somebody who focuses “they should know better.” Make a little note, like, “Let go of make-believe.” Right? Make a little note of what your alternative action could be. Right? Because we’re going to be talking about that in a second.

So I’m going to assume people have written it down. And I want to take any questions about this before we go break out, do a break out role. Where people are going to be discussing what is going on for them when they do toxic swirl vs. mindfulness. Does anybody have any questions about what any of this means?

**Josette:** There was one question and one kind of story, or like situation? I will start with the story.

Someone recently had a situation where they are going through a grief period, they lost someone – yes, they lost someone -- and there is, they’re screaming with the person who’s saying, essentially, that Akeelah, in this situation, her wishes for the funeral are not important because she’s not contributing financially. And she feels that her opinions about how the funerals and services should be handled are just as important and is a little bit invalidating, happening, and there is kind of a standstill right now. She doesn’t know how to – she feels stuck, and doesn’t know how to move on from that.

**Sandra:** Mm-hmm. So I could – oh, Akeelah, would you like some coaching around this right now?

**Akeelah:** Yes I would appreciate it. Yes. Please, because it’s so important and the funeral is coming up. So, yes I would appreciate it.

**Sandra:** Okay, great. Are you calling in? There’s no video for you?

**Akeelah:** Come again?

**Sandra:** Just curious, there’s usually a video for you. Are you on video or are you just on telephone right now?

**Akeelah:** Yes I am, but I just am a bit too upset to show my face.

**Sandra:** Okay, that's fine. Just wanted to check in.

**Akeelah:** Okay.

**Sandra:** Okay, so you can tell me a little bit? I know Josette described it a bit for me.

**Akeelah:** Sure, basically, it's actually my mom that passed away. And the conversation because I'm a \*\*, was that from a \*\*, I was thinking about how the ceremony, how the funeral, could take place because I'm just financially just not in a position to contribute. And the person who's taking care of it, which I very much appreciate it, who's basically taking care of it for most of it, I recognize who's very preoccupied with making those payments to arrange that. And in the meantime, I made phone calls around logistic and trying to also get to see where some other monies could come from and I could help in that way. And so I felt we had arrived to a point where maybe the financial side was more or less taken care of or it looked more stable. And then wanted to move on in terms of how the ceremony could take place – cremation, carrying the ashes, who carries the ashes? I found really important whether it is a him, you know, who was the partner, whether it is me as the daughter, whether it's us together, whether it's a religious person. And I was very quickly shut down in terms of how this is not relevant, how this is trivial at this moment, how there are more important matters, and we got in such a heated argument. And I was so aware of compassionate activism, of – basically – but I was just not able – I really was not able – and it left the situation that I had to say goodbye because it became hurtful. Distractive to both of us. Because we're both grieving. And we have not been able to talk since except for a couple of minutes because we now got the funeral date. And both of us are not approaching the subject now. It needs to be dealt with. And both of us I think are a bit afraid. So that's what it is.

**Sandra:** Right. And as you said, both of you are grieving. And there is so much pain. And losing your mother, and losing your partner that it's very easy – it's what's being talked about is not really what it's all about, right? It's not so much the details of that, but it's what's lying underneath it. And there's so much lying underneath the both of you. So this is – so that makes sense. It makes sense that, you know, yes, you've been doing compassionate activism, and it was hard to bring that to play, and that makes sense.

**Akeelah:** Yeah, it is. I mean, at least what is certainly the difference is that I was, at least to myself, able to acknowledge that the partner of my mom was also hurting. And he only could deal with was very practical safe tasks of, "We pay this. This is how we go about it. And plan this. And then the next step is that." And it is a very safe thing to do, and I recognize that.

**Sandra:** Yeah. Which is very, very powerful, actually, to be able to see his pain while holding your own pain. And so, as always, that's incredible that you can see that with him as well and your first responsibility is to your own pain. So I want you to tell me, you know, where you're feeling it in your body.



**Akeelah:** I feel it very much in my heart. Very much in my heart. Yeah. Tender heart. A very tender heart. Yeah.

**Sandra:** How else is it showing up in your heart?

**Akeelah:** It feels vulnerable. It feels tender. It feels there is a piece ripped out. It feels, or it looks like, far away there's a distance. And also the heart is seeing things that it misses. And seeing things that could've been. Yeah, all emotions coming up, but there's also kind of a – I don't know, it feels like an enforced distance somehow. Yeah, of a masking kind of being at work and certain people will say I'm alright, I'm coping. Which in many ways I do, but in other ways I know I'm not.

**Sandra:** And where are you feeling that in your body?

**Akeelah:** What, where I'm not coping?

**Sandra:** Well, or maybe the presenting that you are coping.

**Akeelah:** Very much in my head, in my shoulders. I very consciously stand up straight, pull my shoulders back. And my thoughts, I structure them very clearly in terms of compartmentalizing very consciously because I think I can only deal with so much at a time.

**Sandra:** Right. And on a scale from 1-to-10, how strong is that? 10 being most severe.

**Akeelah:** How strong is what? Sorry?

**Sandra:** How strong is this feeling? From 1-to-10, 10 being the most severe.

**Akeelah:** The feeling of coping or the feeling of tender heart?

**Sandra:** Well, which one are you feeling stronger now?

**Akeelah:** I think I've moved from the feeling of coping more to the tender heart now. To the, yeah, the missing piece.

**Sandra:** And how strong is that from 1-to-10?

**Akeelah:** That sways between from six to a hundred. Really. And that can happen in a span of minutes. And telling you now, probably it's about 75 percent.

**Sandra:** Wow. Right. And how are you relating to that pain? To that tenderness?

**Akeelah:** What I've been telling myself is for instance, to say, "Okay, today's a shit day, and that's okay." "Okay today you feel really vulnerable and lonely walking along the beach. And that's okay. It's totally okay. It's part of the grief. And what do you need right now?" And I've found that very hard to answer because what I need is my mom. And what I need is changes because if I want to be with people and then I find it too much, I want to be alone. Then I'm lonely. Then I'm aware this is part of it. Because also what I really recognize, see, my mom was a feminist. She was a fighter. She was also a very cynical harsh person. There's this admiration and celebration I want to give her. And there's also a lot of pain and what we couldn't have and where she placed her priorities.

**Sandra:** So I want you to close your eyes for a second.

**Akeelah:** Okay.

**Sandra:** And I want you to take a couple of deep breaths. Just breathe in and out. In and out. One more. In and out. And I want you to envision your mother in front of you. And all of her complexity. And all of her humanity. And all the ways that she was loving and all the ways that she was harsh. And all the real ways that she was who she was. With you. And what are you noticing coming up for you now?

**Akeelah:** Sadness. Sadness. Sadness. Tenderness. We somehow never shared it. Because she had to fight for herself. For us, to survive. The racism. The sexism. Be ahead of her time. And I'm so aware of how this fight took away the tenderness of our mother-daughter relationship that could've been. And for the time we were not sharing, we were not with one another, we were not—it was not possible. I'm so aware of it. That's the sadness. And that's the sadness I felt when I was speaking to the partner of my mom. I felt he pushed that all away. That's what he pushed away. The kind of giving the last respect. The ceremony. The honor. He pushed it all away. And that was so hurtful.

**Sandra:** And I want you to envision your mother walking toward you to come sit next to you.

**Akeelah:** Okay.

**Sandra:** And if you could tell her what was true for you. What is true for you right now. So she could understand whatever you need her to understand, what would that be?

**Akeelah:** I'm grieving. The first thing maybe what I want to say, I am relieved for her because she's relieved from suffering and pain. That is what I want to say first. And that –

**Sandra:** I want you to say it as if she could hear you. Right? So use "I." Like talk to her. "You, mom."

**Akeelah:** Okay. I want to say first of all, I am relieved that you're free. And that you're free to be the woman, the person, you can be without the constraints of the body. And what I really grieve for is the realization of the tenderness we could not give to each other. I recognize that you were fighting, you had to fight so much. I really recognize that. And I'm grieving for the time where maybe the fight was over and you no longer recognized that. And maybe the fight was for our love. For our – for the humanity between us. For you, that was very not often recognized, and you pushed away. I grieve for that. That maybe you did not allow yourself the tenderness.

**Sandra:** And what about how that impacted you directly?

**Akeelah:** Well, I saw –

**Sandra:** Tell her.

**Akeelah:** The fight I saw is, I saw your violence. The violence against yourself. The violence that you also shared. What I mean by that is not that she hit me – that she was ready to beat up people who were racist. Who were Nazis. And I'm proud of that. I'm kind of proud of that. Because as short as she was, you were FIERCE. And I loved that. I lost – I feel – there was – when you came into my life, when I was 11-years-old, I always reached out to you. I wanted a mother. And you wanted a strong black woman. I felt like I couldn't give that to you because, in retrospect, I understand that, because I just did not feel the love in the way I wanted it as a child. Needed it as a child. And I recognize how your love looked, and I had to learn it and understand it, and still do. And that actually makes me feel a bit calmer.

But I also recognized your self-destructive patterns and how much pain, destruction, violence, isms, schisms, you helped, that I saw destroying you. Where you destroyed yourself with alcohol, with harshness, with judgment, with rejection, with mortality...and I grieve for that. I grieve for that. Yeah.

**Sandra:** And what do you notice coming up for you now that you shared this with her.

**Akeelah:** I feel very calm. I feel very calm in the sense of, that I'm acknowledging her as a holistic person. And what I recognize is that I am recognizing her internal reality as she passed away even more. My internal reality, and then the outer reality that was kind of a barrier. It was a kind of barrier actually. Because the outer barrier is the one that placed – sorry, excuse me – sorry.

**Sandra:** No worries.

**Akeelah:** That placed the mounds of both of us in terms of how we had to behave. And put us both into constraints and I was aware my mother was fighting against that in so many ways. And full liberation. And I was the child that wanted partly what outer reality said a mother should be. Loving. Reading you goodnight stories. Cuddling you. Making you breakfast. Being there for you 24/7. Being smiling. All this. And the reality

was not like that. But I come to – I suppose what I want to celebrate – is a woman who was a human. You know? Like we all are. With all our strengths and weaknesses. And with all the humanity and the things where we maybe hate ourselves, I imagine. And hate others and lash out. And yet we're lovable and loving. That's what I want to say. I want to say that to my mom. I love you. You're lovable. And sometimes I hated you. And I know you hated me. And we shouted at each other. And we didn't talk. But I want to celebrate you as a woman. Yeah.

**Sandra:** Yes. And so checking in with that feeling in your heart. How strong from 1-10 is it for you right now?

**Akeelah:** I feel -- in terms of the calmness and acceptance -- and I think from what I understand from this exercise, I would say -- when I say the acceptance and calmness -- is, what was maybe 20% has moved up to I'd say 70% in the sense, of that, celebrating and honoring MYSELF with all the things I don't like. I hate the self-destructiveness I know I have, and moving through that and hence being on the course, learning from that. And it's interesting how I learned from this lesson to be able to communicate with my mom, you know? As she passed away.

**Sandra:** And as you think now toward her partner, in this situation, coming from this place that you are in right now, what is possible? What are some things that you might want to do?

**Akeelah:** Yeah. I think the first thing I'd like to do is acknowledge his pain. Is acknowledge my pain. Both. Actually say, "Look, I'm hurting. And I imagine you do as well." Maybe, therefore, also recognizing that his insistence of what is right for him, or what is important, was for him a measure of staying safe. Because I recognize that we talk about the ashes of the person you loved, and who carries it, and how that should be done, and with whom, and music or not, or walking – and all of that is very personal. So I think maybe it's about the acknowledgement that opens up a space where we can talk more compassionately.

**Sandra:** Right.

**Akeelah:** Yeah.

**Sandra:** And compared – did you feel – did you have this insight previously? And if you did, did you feel like you could do this easily before?

**Akeelah:** No. Before, I felt very – I felt afraid. I felt afraid that I might hurt because I felt a violence in me. I felt like I could really lash out. And I felt really enraged. And I felt that it would come out in the wrong way, either against myself or against the other person. And for the calmness is the new dimension that is giving me a space to articulate what I couldn't articulate. And I'm realizing also now what I did not realize is that in this conversation that I need to take care of my feelings and not shut down. Because I think that's what I was doing: shouting and then shutting down. We both

were doing that. And so maybe take care of my feelings and being aware: “This hurts. “ “This feels sensitive.” Something bad. Acknowledging that. And then seeing, or asking, inquiring, about the other person’s inner reality.

**Sandra:** Right.

**Akeelah:** Yeah.

**Sandra:** And how easily do you feel like you can do that? From a scale of 1-to-10, 10 being super easy.

**Akeelah:** It’s not going to be easy, no. But it’s going to be EASIER. And so I would say, easier in the sense of, maybe I would say... 5, 6. Which is significant.

**Sandra:** Right. Before you weren’t even on the scale, right?

**Akeelah:** Yeah, it’s significant. Yeah. And actually having the words -- I didn’t have the words before, I think I have them now. Yeah. And that’s important. Because when you’re enraged, you start to lose the words and your articulation. That’s how you want to lash out. Yeah.

**Sandra:** I just want to take a moment now. Everybody has been moved by your grief and just – we can hold you a bit.

**Akeelah:** Thank you guys.

**Sandra:** Everybody is sending you a big virtual hug, Akeelah. I know I am.

**Akeelah:** Thank you. My gratitude to you, Sandra. Thank you very much. And thank you to you all. Thank you very much. Thank you.

**Sandra:** And then there’s always a chat box to confirm.

**Akeelah:** I’ll go there now. I’ll go there now. Yes. Thanks.

**Sandra:** Thank you so much, Akeelah. That was – thank you for being so vulnerable, and that was very powerful. And now I’m going to dissect it a little bit, so --

**Akeelah:** Okay, that’s fine.

**Sandra:** This is a teaching opportunity because this is what’s powerful. This is what’s possible, right folks? That was -- Akeelah just incredibly modeled for y’all what I tried to say in the first 15 minutes of this session. Right? Obviously losing your mother is hugely painful and hard to even describe the words for that, right? And because she’s been a part of this conversation around compassion activism and these five practices, she was able much more quickly, I think, than perhaps prior to doing this course, to not

only be accepting, acknowledging her own pain and just sit with it and keep opening that space up to grieve and acknowledge it; she actually was also able to see the pain, the grief, in her mother's partner. And that that's where HIS reaction was coming from. Right? That was his initial reaction, the way he was trying to manage and push away his pain. Right? And so that was all possible because she was actually applying – you know—she was applying this work. And so it was so quick to go into the pain and move through it actually. This is something most people would run away for possibly even years. Right? And it was really powerful because you saw how she was stuck previously because of the charge. Because she was – because she was holding some space for her feelings, but she needed some extra support, which I gave to her. But it took so little from me, actually. It was just me asking a couple questions and she could move through it. Right? And she really did all the work herself. I barely had to do anything. Right?

And so it becomes easier with time. I could tell Akeelah has been practicing, she has been keeping this in mind. Bringing it into her consciousness. Because I would just give a little nudge, and she went and flew into it basically. And within maybe 15 minutes, she was on the other side. And not that it's going to be easy-peasy to have this conversation, but it's going to be a lot easier: 1) it's possible for us to have this conversation, and then 2) instead of five or six level easy. And this is obviously naturally really difficult conversation to have.

Right? I wouldn't expect it to feel like a nine or a ten. Right? And you saw how it wasn't – you know – the creativity, knowing how to engage in that conversation from a creative place, she – it just flowed out of her. Once she was got in touch with the pain and she was taking care of it, she missed her mom. She wished she could tell her mother certain things.

And so, I was just like, "Visualize your mom is in front of you and tell her these things." Right? She had a need, she wanted to talk to her mom. She wanted to tell her mom certain things. I said, "Go ahead. Tell your mom."

She told her. You know? She had a pain. She had a need. She took care of it. And then she felt – it got released in that moment. Is it going to come up again later? Probably yeah. Grief of your mother takes awhile. Right? But she has the tools now. And when she can take care of that need, she was able to release it and move into action. She knew what she wanted to do. Not that it's going to go – you know -- a hundred percent according to what she plans or hopes for – but she feels like she can engage in it. Right? And it just flowed. And whereas before, she was just stuck. And that's true because – you know – when our pain gets set off, it's like that reptilian part of our brain, like , it takes over. And it shuts down, the more – I think it's called the prefrontal cortex I want to say – where it's just like our more rational or more like logical or longer picture thinking? I'm not a neuroscience major, I don't know these things exactly. But something along those lines. And so our reptilian brain, like, "Fight, flight, or freeze," kicks into gear. And our ability to assess a situation, make really reality-grounded judgment calls, is all compromised, actually.

This is, you know, I was sharing with somebody else in the coaching session that, you know, if you're in a fight, you often engage in insulting each other. There's a reason. You've seen this happen in movies, or whatever, you know. You often start trying to insult each other to get the other person pissed; because when the other person gets pissed their ability to, like, perceive accurately what's going on goes down. They get pissed, their reptilian brain kicks into gear, and they just start – you know – they just start lashing out physically. Not really paying close attention, “What is the other person doing?” “What's the next move of this person?” “What's the next move for me?” Right? So even if you're a trained fighter, if you go kick into anger mode and go reptilian on somebody, you actually are probably going to lose the fight if the other person stays in their more prefrontal cortex mode. Right? So it's the same thing when you're – when that part of your brain is triggered and you're stuck there -- which is what happens – yeah, you can't do anything, you're stuck. Right? Your judgment goes out the window, and it's actually really smart thing to, like, pull back and choose to not engage, as Akeelah did in that conversation, or as well as the partner did, because they knew if they engaged – they continued – they would just go at it with each other, harming each other when they're already angry. And they know that, right? And so they both pull back. That's a smart thing to do. Right? And what the problem is, a lot of people just pull back and don't deal with what's happening – with what pain they're carrying – in their internal reality. They just pull back. So that internal pain just sits and festers, and grows and grows and grows. Right? Because you kept ignoring it.

Thankfully she has these tools and she was able to actually sit with the pain so it didn't just fester. Now, with some support from me, she was able to move into it. And now that she's done that once, she can do it more times around the same issue. Right? And that's a muscle she's building. Right? And so she'll be able to do other stuff without my support. So she just has to remember that this is possible. So this is actually a really perfect modeling, I wasn't planning this – I never plan any of this, obviously – I never know who's going to show, what issue's going to happen, where they're going to be at. But this was actually perfect for this fourth practice. Because you saw how once you did the first three practices, this fourth one – right? -- a compassionate, truth-telling, consciousness-raising inquiry, just flows.

So were there any questions? Any comments that you want to share, Josette?

**Josette:** There was another set of questions that were unrelated. Is that what you were referring to?

**Sandra:** I don't know. I did want to go into the breakout room. So—

**Josette:** Okay, I can save that question for a later time.

**Sandra:** Okay. So I want to go back to this place. So, you know, Akeelah in that conversation with the partner, she was more able to not engage in toxic swirl, and she was able to bring mindfulness and acceptance and acknowledgment of her own internal

reality, and have a sense of what might be going on with the other person. Right? At least know that the grief was happening; just acknowledge that.

So that's how she was so much more easily able just to move into taking care of her pain because she wasn't caught up in the toxic swirl. As she said, she was saying, "I feel sadness. I feel grief and that's okay." She'd been repeating that with herself. So, always notice when you're in the toxic swirl because you've got to let that go and to shift to mindfulness.

So now that people have picked the ones that they do the most, I want us to talk – go into a breakout \*\* (1:00:10). So what are the common ways that you engage in the toxic swirl? And what's the impact? Right? Because there's always an impact on the other person, on yourself as well, when you do this. And alternatively, when – instead of engaging in the toxic swirl – what are some different ways that you could do that comes from a place of mindfulness? Right? I gave you some alternative options in that chart. Right? And also, what would the impact be, potentially, on the other person, and on me, if I came from a place of mindfulness instead. If I took those ways to approach it vs. the toxic swirl.

So I'm going to just copy and paste this into the chat for folks. And do we have any questions about this exercise? Everybody have – know which ways are for them – with toxic swirl and mindfulness?

I'm getting no dissent so I'm going to assume that everybody agreed.

**Josette:** Quick question. Just regarding – is it recommended to practice the conversation in their heads or in visualization before having the conversations?

**Sandra:** So that can be good. I actually do practice having conversations in my head of things that are charged. And sometimes it means that I don't actually have to then have the actual conversation because I – maybe it's somebody who's no longer here, actually – or maybe it's no longer relevant. Or maybe it's not appropriate, like it's not a safe situation to reenter. So sometimes – or maybe I just want to practice it because I want to see how it goes in my own head before I do it with the other person.

Alright so I – and remember, our minds, our thoughts create our visceral experience for us. Our thoughts inform, tell our bodies what experience to have. You know, when I ask somebody – when I ask you to imagine the tastiest food that you had. Think about eating it. Your mouth is going to salivate even though there's no food in your mouth. You're going to get hungry. Right? That shows you the power of your mind. Right? So practice, yeah, especially in the beginning. Practice it. But at the same time, notice if it's still difficult for you – emotionally difficult for you – then you probably need to be working still on the first three practices. You probably need to be bringing in more mindfulness and get in touch with that pain. Because once you take care of the pain, it naturally follows what you want to do, and you're going to be called into action. It's actually going to feel a lot easier.



So, if you feel like it's really hard, that's a sign that there's still something you need to unpack. Right? So if it feels hard, take care of yourself first. Right? Then move onto the conversation with somebody else. But you don't have to practice it out loud. Practice it with just yourself. You could just go into it in that moment. Right? But it might be helpful. And if the person's not there, or if it's not safe to engage with that person, then still do it. It's still powerful as you've seen. We've had two people who've had conversations with their deceased parents, and it was incredibly powerful for them. Right? Because it's not about the other person. All we have is our internal reality. It's about OUR INTERNAL REALITY. Like, I need you all to get that, it's not actually so much about external reality and the other person. It's actually –as long as we're not being physically harmed, it's actually really just about our internal reality and what we're doing and saying to ourselves. Right? So even though we have these, like, imaginary conversations, they're incredibly useful and powerful. Right? Because it's still all about our minds. Right? So I just want you to get that.

Okay, so we're going to do the breakout rooms. Before I go onto some other – okay, so – and if you find yourself in a breakout room by yourself, please just do the exercise and – by yourself – somebody might show up later. Sometimes it can take a minute for people to really get there. And yeah – that's it, I think. And if you have – if you're on telephone, just unmute yourself by doing star-six. Oh, and you have ten minutes! You have ten minutes.

[Caption: Please pause the video while completing the exercise.]

**Sandra:** Okay, so we are all back now. And given time, I would really like for folks just to actually type in the chat box what they learned in that conversation, about when they come from – about how they engage in toxic swirl when they approach someone about a situation and the impact vs. how things might be different if they approach it from a place of mindfulness.

So if folks could just kind of write that out in the chat box, that would be helpful, then I'll just read some of it for folks who are listening to the video later.

People are saying that how our identities can affect our realities.

“And I realize I didn't have to explain my – how I don't explain my internal reality. And how hard it is to leave the toxic swirl when it's about yourself vs. when it's with others.”

“When approaching from a place of mindfulness, it helps me not contribute to negativity.”

“The biggest thing I can do is give myself a little break.”

“That timing is important.”

“And how much energy the toxic swirl takes.”

“It helps a lot to take a breath before responding, gives yourself space to gather yourself and be present in the interaction rather than reacting.”

Someone says, “I think I turned curiosity into another toxic swirl.”

“Learning to pay attention to the toxic swirl and pause.”

“Afraid to see that – afraid of seeing the reality that I fear losing and not honoring my own reality.”

“That I can choose to be vulnerable and share my internal realities instead of wishing things were different and folks just ‘got me,’ quote unquote, based on the principles.”

Someone likes to say, “Your ego is not your amigo, which helps in not getting the toxic swirl.”

“Hard to hold onto my own reality, instead deciding to find out the other person’s reality. You need to learn to hold both at once without losing my own.”

“Easier for me to be in toxic swirl in email or Internet, and easier to be curious in person.”

So yeah, we should stop here, but yeah. This – what people – what I heard repeatedly, or what I read repeatedly, is just noticing when the toxic swirl is happening and just taking that breath to pause. In another session, I said, “I could boil this all down to two words, or three: breathe and listen.”

Breathe and listen.

Breathe and pause to pay attention to what’s going on with yourself. And then as we’ve been talking about, pause and listen to what’s going on with somebody else. Right?

And that’s all, that’s really what it’s about. Just pausing, breathing, and listening. Breathing and listening. And it can be hard to remember to do that. But the good thing is, that, when, if things are charged, you feel stuck, and you’re like, “Ahh!”: that’s actually a wonderful thing.

I know, but no one likes it. But it’s actually a wonderful thing because it’s a red flag going “Ding ding ding! Something is happening that needs your attention! I’m in pain! Flash, flash, flash! I’m in pain! Pay attention to me! Take care of me!” Right? So when that’s going off for you, pause, take a breath, and sit with it. Right? And you’ll notice that when you let go of the toxic swirl, you let go of resisting, blaming, judging, shaming, trying to change it. Then you just shift into, “Okay, this is where I am.” Right?

When you let go of all, you will be able to get in touch with it. So if you're struggling to get in touch with it, think about what you need to let go of. Right?

Because our bodies are designed to do this. It's fascinating for me to give – to talk about this with people – because I'm actually taking thousands of years of Buddhist philosophy – of Zen Buddhist philosophy – and putting it in an anti-oppression social justice context that people have no background in Zen Buddhism or anything like that, or have little if you are – if you do meditate or have mindfulness practice – and you're all are getting it. Right? You all get it. Y'all may forget about it two seconds later, but you are getting it in the moment. (laughs) Especially when I'm coaching you.

So you see that it just takes some questions from me for people to shift, to shift from their toxic swirl into being in touch with their internal reality, and then the release that happens once they do that. Right? So that shows you that your body is designed to do this. Your body WANTS to do this. Your entire life, you've been taught to not do this very thing I'm having you do. Right? You've been punished for doing this. For being in touch with your feelings. For crying. For expressing your pain. Right? You used to get punished as a child for this. And you still get punished as an adult. People look at you weird. "Why are you upset?" Right? "You shouldn't be."

But the minute that you have some space to do it, y'all go flying down that path. (laughs) So it's not about what you need to be doing – it's not about trying to get yourself to do something – it's just about, "What are you going to let go of? What do you just need to let go of to let yourself move down that path?" Right? That's why I wanted you to identify where you get stuck in. You know? What do you normally do?

**Josette:** Two quick things. One is: can you make me co-host? And two: we had a request for a quick break.

**Sandra:** Okay. I'll make you cohost. And we'll have a quick break. Come back in – it's 7:27 right now – sorry, echo – come back in 5 minutes, so 7:32.

Alrighty. Okay. So let's get crackin'. Alright so as I've been saying over and over and over again, apply this to yourself first, folks! You can only take care of you. Your entire experience of reality is only your internal reality, folks. So take care of you first. THEN think about the other person. Right? Because you try to come at them when you're in toxic swirl, you still haven't taken care of your pain, it's not going to go very well. And mostly it's not going to go very well for you. Right? You're trying to drag yourself through forward when you just really need to go in deep and take care of your pain. It's like you've been wounded and you want to keep running after the person that's hurt you instead of taking care of the wound that you got while you're not in the best shape to go after that person because your arm's been cut off. Might want to deal with that first. Just saying.

And the brilliant thing about this model is that when you practice this – when you are able to get in touch with your pain, you bring these three practices to it – then your

capacity to do that with somebody else is there. Right? Because you just did it with yourself, now you can do it with somebody else. Right? And when you struggle to do that with somebody else, that's because you're still struggling to do it for yourself.

Somebody I saw in the chat box, I was reading during the break, was saying, "Well, how do we say things in the right tone, in the right way, that we can express that we're not trying to be judgmental, that we're trying to be curious and open?" There's no "try" in this. I'm going to get all Yoda-like on you. There's no "try." It's a twist. He says -- Yoda says -- "There is no 'try,' there is only 'do.'" I say, "There is no 'try,' there is only 'be.'" Right? When we've talked about, "What is happening in external reality?" What's happening in external reality is: there's some words being said, there's some actions happening, and there's some energies being shared. Your energy is what's most determining what people's experiences of you are. This is why it's important to do things in person, for example. At least we're in video. You can get a sense of my energy. It would be even stronger if we're physically together. If I was just doing an email to you, the energy gets cut down. You only have words. That's why it gets confusing. This is why emojis are so important in text, because it conveys the energy. Otherwise you get misconstrued in a million zillion ways. And you do. You get upset over these texts. Right? Because we don't know what the tone is. We don't know what the energy is. Right?

So energy is highly, highly, highly awarded and it is the most vague of all of them because it's just a feeling, a sense, a vibe. Right? We don't know -- like -- concretely what's going on, that we have a sense, and that sense is so powerful. But how much of that is being emoted from the other person, or is it just from our past? Oohh. I don't know. This is why it's important to check in. But if you're coming from -- if your energy is coming from a place of curiosity, coming from a place of openness and wanting to learn, that gets communicated without you having to say the most perfect words. I can tell you -- you know -- how to perfectly phrase an invitation to share -- have them share their internal reality. But if your energy is coming from a place of judgment, and making them wrong as a human being, and not caring about what's going on with them? It doesn't matter how perfect the words are. It really doesn't. Which is why you've always gotta take care of yourself, so you are just being this. You are just being curious. You are just being humble about -- you don't know what's going on for them. You want to learn. Right? You want to help them unpack.

So I want to go kind of moving into sharing your truth. Right? This is about compassionate truth-telling. And the reason we do this -- people often think when I say, "Compassionate truth-telling," is compassionate for the other person. I'm not saying that. If you happen to say something and it happens to be compassionate for the other person, that's great. I won't rain on the parade. But that's not what this is about. This is about you and your own healing. What do YOU need? Right? What do you need for your own healing to be true to yourself? This is why when "compassionate" comes up in this model, it's around compassion, self-accountability, and compassionate truth-telling. You have been moved by your own pain to do something to take care of it. That's what compassion is. Compassion -- being compassionate isn't about letting

someone off-the-hook, it's not about enabling them to be harmful, it's not about – you know – diminishing your own pain. It's not what this is about. It is used sometimes in that way, and that's why I wanted to make that clear. Compassion is sometimes used to pacify and gloss over violations and that's not what I am saying. Compassion is about when you get present to pain and you're moved to relieve that suffering. And the person's pain I'm talking about is YOUR pain. That YOU are moved to relieve your own suffering. But that happens only after you get present to it. Right? And that's the critical part.

And what this is saying is that it's not about actually how they receive this. So everyone's been saying, like, "Well how do I change their mind? How do I make them stop?" Right? It's not about that. Yes, we would love for them to stop. No doubt. But it's not about that. Right? Because we can only invite them. We can only invite them to consider our perspective and unpack their own. Us telling our own truth? It's about us being compassionate toward ourselves. It's about us giving what we need to ourselves, that we speak our truth, that we stand up for ourselves. Right? That's what's most important because we're the ones who live in our bodies. Right? What they do over there, that's on them. They're the ones who gotta wake up every single morning, look at themselves in the mirror. That's not your responsibility. Your responsibility is to yourself. Right?

And knowing whether or not you want to do that, have that communication with somebody else, and how you want to do that as you've been seeing in all the different coaching sessions that I've done, it flows naturally once you get in touch with that pain, because I believe as human beings, our natural state is one of compassion actually. So when we can't be compassionate toward our own pain, it's because we're getting in the way of really being present to it. We're in the toxic swirl of it. Right? This is why I keep focusing on letting go of the toxic swirl. We'll naturally move through into our pain, feel compassionate toward it, and take care of it, and then everything will just flow from there. Right?

So that's about truth-telling. Right? It's about us. It's not about them. And this is the part that everybody makes really, really, really hard. (laughs) They're like, "How could they have done this? I don't understand. Why?" Well, you know. You could ask them why they did that. Things like, "How come they can't see why it was so harmful to me? Why don't they get why it hurts?"

Well, you can ask them to consider. Right? So this boils down to really just asking. Right? Inquire into their internal reality. Meet them where they are. Because remember as you live in your internal reality, they live in their internal reality. You want to go – you want to understand what's going on with them, you've got to ask them. Somebody also put a comment in the chat box that it's very hard to hold both realities true at the same time. It becomes hard when you haven't held – when you're not really in touch with your own reality, the deep pain. Not the initial reaction, that's where we are most of the time. But when we are not in touch with our – the deeper internal reality that's driving that make-believe toxic swirl, that's when we can't -- we're not in touch

with our own reality and so we can't be in touch with somebody else's reality. We've got to do it first for ourselves. Once we can do it with ourselves, we naturally create a spaciousness – Akeelah even used that word -- there's a space now – now that she got in touch with that pain – so that she can hold the space for somebody else. For the partner, for her mom's partner, right?

So this is really all that we're doing, is we're just asking. It's as simple as that. And if it's still really hard, that's because you need to go back and do this with yourself first and foremost. Right? If it's hard, do this. Practice with humility and curiosity. Practice distinguishing realities, acknowledging external reality. And practicing gentle mindfulness. Right? Get in touch with that pain and you'll move into compassionate self-accountability. And then you'll naturally have the space to feel able to ask. Inquire to meet them in their internal reality. Invite them to meet you in your internal reality. Right?

We're not doing this business. [Pantomiming fists hitting each other] Where my reality and your reality are pushing. No, it's just like, "Hey, you want to check this out? Okay, I'll meet you here. Oh you want to check this out. Okay. Let me meet you here." Right? That's what this is about.

And I want to cover some things – some tips – about what this is about. Right? The major tip is that whoever is more stuck in the toxic swirl, it's usually more effective if they share their internal reality first. Because they're stuck in the toxic swirl. Like, there's not – they're in their make-believe world, so you can't deal with reality until they shift. Until they shift from the make-believe world into reality. Into their internal reality.

And so you do the same things that I've been showing you through the coaching. Only you may not want to necessarily do the processing of getting in touch with your feelings, but you can if you have that type of relationship. You can with your partner, for example. That might be something you do in your relationships. If it's somebody else, like your coworker or a friend, who has no awareness of this, you can just ask them, you know, "What's going on for you? Like, I notice that you're upset about this. Can you tell me a little bit more about what's going on?" Right?

And if they keep focusing on the make-believe world, where they "shouldn't have" or "I can't believe they did that" and their blah-blah-blah, and they're in "resisting reality" mode, you can be like, "Oh, it sounds like maybe it was really hurtful to you because of this. Is that what's going on?" Right? You can do that. You can ask them questions around it.

Now if both people are really stuck in the toxic swirl, like I said, you have responsibilities to yourself first and foremost. So if there's not enough place to actually hold that space to be curious about what's going on for them, that's because you still have some pain to take care of. Right? Then go and take care of that. Right?

And one of the things I want to really make sure is that sometimes these healing practices and spiritual practices get, I think, misconstrued to tone-police and intentionally or unintentionally, to tone-police and to make people feel like they need to silence themselves and not, like, rock the boat. They just need to accept it. Right? And they can't express anger, and they can't be – you know – they have to speak in calm, sweet, gentle tones all the time. That is NOT what this is about. Right?

It's really about, "Are you in toxic swirl? Or are you grounded in internal reality?" Right? Because you can be – some people are in toxic swirl, but they are really skilled at repressing their emotions. So they can talk a big game and be really quote unquote "calm about it," but they're still engaging in all the resistance to reality and toxic swirl and not dealing with the pain they're feeling inside. So that's also not helpful. It's not helpful because they're in toxic swirl. Right? It's not about how calm or how angry their tone is. Right?

Because you can be really loud. You can be really fierce. You can express your anger, frustration, resentment, your stress. Right? In responsible ways, you know? Where it's not lashing out at them because you're not making them wrong as a human being. Right? You're focusing on the three realities. And you've got to be really clear that you're focusing on the three realities. You're like, "I'M angry." Right? "When this happened, I felt really angry about it because X, Y, and Z. What is going on with you when this happens?" Right? "I don't know what's going on with you. Why did you do that? I want to understand because it made me really upset." Like, you can say all that. But if you come at it where you're confusing their realities and you're saying, like, "You shouldn't have done this. How could you have done this? I can't believe that you would think that this is okay." Like blah-blah-blah. And like, well, they DO believe that. You'd prefer that they don't, yes, but you can say, "So I see that you think this is okay, and it's really harmful to me. So I want to know, why is this happening? What is going on?" You see how, like, you can still believe that you don't want this to happen and you can communicate that without being in toxic swirl. Right? And instead you're acknowledging that you have your reality and they have their reality. Right?

So it's really this shift in language which is really coming from a shift in your being, where I'm not focused on just making you wrong and punishing you. Right? And controlling you. You know? And making you wrong as a human being. I'm coming from a place of, "This is my reality and I'm furious. And you seem to think whatever happened was okay. So what is going on now, between us, that's making this so different for the both of us?" Right?

So that's the difference. And that's kind of complex. So I'm going to take questions about it.

**Josette:** Yes, we actually had a question that was kind of right up that alley. (Unintelligible) says, "Sometimes it seems to me that the only option available to me to stay engaged in a situation is to deny and/or suppress my emotions. This may happen when I feel overwhelmed, or how angry or upset I am, or when it seems to me that the

only way to relate respectfully to the other person is when I don't act on my emotions. Has anyone else come up against that? What do you do?"

**Sandra:** Right, so that's what a lot of us have been taught, particularly women, in terms of just kind of repressing those feelings. Actually men, too. I think, pretty much everybody, for different reasons, we've been taught to repress our feelings and our pain. Actually patriarchy did a number on making sure men didn't have access to their feelings either. So... (laughs) we've all been taught this for different reasons.

And the best modeling we've seen to not harm people is to silence ourselves, to not lash out. Because we've only – it's either silence ourselves or lash out. Right? So what happens is that it's important to take that moment. It is responsible to not lash out, to not try to hurt somebody. If you're feeling in a state where you just want to – you want to get back at them – yeah, that makes sense that you don't want to do that and so you pull back.

But don't just pull back. Do the practice. Get curious about what's going on underneath that initial reaction. And get in touch with the pain that's driving it. Right? Unpack it until you get to the pain. And like I said, the bathroom is a really good place to go. If you're at work, and you just need a moment for yourself, bathroom break. Right?

So take that time. And then, when you're ready, and you want to, you can have that conversation.

Any other questions?

**Josette:** Yes. Someone said earlier, "What do you do when you are in the position to ask and inquire. For example, if the person's already gone?" This is back to when we were talking about three practices and then do for yourself and then ask.

**Sandra:** Then you can do what we talked about. Visualize it. People have been talking to their deceased mothers. That's real. Like I said, our internal reality is where we live. So it doesn't necessarily have to happen in external reality. Right? It's nice when it does. It affirms our internal reality when it does. So when you want to, you feel called for to do that. Please, go right ahead and do it. However, it's not necessary. What's necessary is for us to acknowledge our own internal reality which is the only thing that we have actually anyways. So if that person is gone, fine. Talk to them in your head. (laughs)

**Josette:** We had another question from Kai. Kai writes, "I have a hard time accepting that sometimes it's okay to prioritize myself and step back when I feel like it might be best for me. I feel like I have a responsibility to push myself to try to help the other person, to turn the situation into an opportunity for them to learn and grow."

**Sandra:** So that's an admirable desire, to want to help other people to grow and learn. And there's a difference between having, you know, a general desire, having that



general orientation, and having that be a coercive demand upon yourself that you are making onto yourself. Right? So if you imagine that somebody else came to you and said, "You have to treat every conversation that goes bad like this, or if there's a microaggression or whatever, you have to treat it as a mandatory opportunity to learn and grow for the other person, and you HAVE to talk to them about it. You cannot take time for yourself."

Like if somebody came to you and said that, you'd be like, "Fuck off." Right? "Who are you to tell me that? You can't make me do that." Well, same thing when you make yourself do it. Right? It's no less controlling and coercive and abusive when you do it to yourself. When you make yourself – when you punish yourself – do you make yourself wrong when you don't do something? It's no different if somebody does it to you or you do it to yourself. The thing that is different is that it's a lot easier for you to stop doing it to yourself in some ways because you control what you do. You choose what you do. You just need to know that.

And so the other thing is, the impact, even when we do something for the quote unquote "somebody's good," you have to whip yourself into doing it. You have to drag yourself into doing it. Right? And that creates scars on us. That creates wounds on us. Anytime we force ourselves into doing anything, that creates wounds on us no matter what the thing is. No matter if we think, you know, overall it's a good thing to do. Anytime you have to whip yourself into doing something, it hurts us. Right?

And so in the long run, right, it's not going to be good for us. The other person also senses that energy. That's what they're reacting to. They're reacting to your resistance. They're reacting to the fact that you're dragging yourself – you're whipping yourself – and so, that conversation probably isn't even going to go that well. Because they're picking up on that energy and they don't know what's going on, but they get this weirdness. They get something that's not just open curiosity and loving support. They're getting this other energy, too, and they're probably going to blame themselves for it, they're probably going to assume that you're judging them and shaming them. Right? That's very possible. That happens a lot. So it's not even very effective. And it makes it harder for you to want to do it later because you're continuing to wound yourself and build upon each wound each time you do that. So your capacity and your ability, your skill-level, goes down. It keeps going down each time you do that. So yeah, it's not a good long-term strategy. So it's just not effective. If you're not in a place where you can prioritize yourself and think that you're worth it, because that can take a lot of healing to get there, too. Right?

I remember when I was in a situation with somebody who was being emotionally controlling and abusive toward me. I, at that point -- my voice was so silenced and destroyed at that point, my sense of my own needs and prioritizations of my own needs, was so shot that I could see all of the things that were happening to me, that he was doing to me, and I couldn't stop it. I couldn't stop it for my own well-being. And so I used a crutch. I did it for my mom's well-being because I knew that she would never want me to be in that situation, to be treated like that.

And so I was able to not cooperate, withdraw from that relationship, out of my love for my mother. I couldn't do it out of love for me because that had been shot by then. That had been destroyed by that relationship. Well, on top of the other traumas that I had that had facilitated me being in that situation, too. Right? And him being able to take advantage of that.

So, anyhow – so, yeah, sometimes you gotta do it for something else, you gotta pick what's valuable to you, what's worth it. Maybe it's your kids. You don't want your kids to see you doing that. Right? Or maybe it's like you realize it's not helpful to the other person who you want to help learn and grow. Right? So use a crutch. If you're not there for yourself, use a crutch. Figure out what you care about and what will motivate you.

So it's 8 o'clock, unless there's another really great question –

**Josette:** No, I think we got all the questions.

**Sandra:** Okay. So we're going to do takeaways. And so people, just take a minute or two to think about it. So if you only had one main takeaway, what would it be? And then please, type it in the chat box, and I'll read them out loud for folks.

“That compassion is first and foremost for yourself.” That's the one that y'all walk away from this entire, entire, entire program. It actually would be that.

“That what's under the pain is about me and I can prioritize that.”

“In order to be a face of compassion and healing the world, we must attend to our own needs, our hurts, and desires. It's not an either/or, but a both/and.”

“My reality and their reality.”

“I can't assume that somebody knows my internal reality, and I can choose to be vulnerable and share that.”

“Compassion: there is no 'try,' just 'be.’” (laughs)

“It's helpful to recognize the ways I default to toxic swirl and the ways I can be mindful.”

“The key to start the process is to pause, breathe, and understand my own deeper reality.”

“That energy is more important than words.”

“I feel like I have to somehow confront a toxic environment of electronic and secondhand communication by asking for more face-to-face communication with humility and curiosity present.”

“How much I do the toxic swirl, stuck to myself.”

“Get back to steps 1, 2, and 3, when you get stuck in a swirl.”

“Get to the bottom of my pain in order to move forward.” Right?

That’s it, folks. And then, once again, compassion first and foremost for yourself. Really. You get there, you’re good.

Whatever’s going to get you there is just to be in touch with your pain. So let go of the toxic swirl, shift to getting in touch with your pain, you’ll naturally be moved to feel compassion toward it and to take care of it. So getting in touch with your pain is the lynch pin for all of this. Everything pivots on that.

Learn how to get in touch with your pain and all that means is let go of the toxic swirl and sit with it. It will arise. They call me “The Cry-Maker,” because I will say something, and you’ll just release what’s already been there the entire time. They just got out of their own way. (laughs)

Yeah, conversations with me are fun. There’s a lot of crying in them. (laughs)

So, folks, thank you so much for joining. And we will be moving onto the fifth practice, which is the more fun practice of shared envisioning and when you can’t do shared envisioning, we’ll give you the practice of non-cooperation. So, I look forward to seeing you there.

Just to remind you, there is a free web winner being offered on Thursday. So if you have any friends who wants to try it out, they can do it then. I also switched the “mindfulness healing circle” to “the web winner,” it’s actually the same thing, because I realized – we tested it and people just weren’t responding to it. I think it sounds too different? They don’t know what it’s about? “Web winner” sounds good to folks. It’s actually the same thing content-wise. I just changed the name. So, if you want to show up for it, please do, because we’re just going to do more coaching and practicing getting in touch with your pain, so it’s a great opportunity for that.

I’m going to figure out the schedule for that to see how regularly I will do that because it has shifted given the response and everything. So I’ll be in touch. But, yeah, if you have friends, or family, or colleagues who want to get a taste, we’re doing a 1-hour on Thursday at 1 p.m. eastern and 10 a.m. pacific, and I think 6 p.m. British time if you are in Europe.

And then also, I'll send out another reminder about the two-day training which is – I'm going to try a condensed version of this – for two-day training --two half-days, actually – and you get free access to it. So know that there's a coupon code that I will email out again for you all to enroll in.

The training is happening on June 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, so please enroll in that because you also get access to the monthly Q&A sessions. So even after this online seminar ends, your participation – our support of you in this practice – can continue if you stay enrolled in the next program, and that's free for you. So, there's really no loss unless you hate getting emails from me. If you hate getting emails from me, then don't sign up, but if you're fine getting emails from me, and you want to continue to get support around this, then yes, please, please sign up. And, like I said, it's free for y'all, so I don't know why you wouldn't want to do it. So – (laughs) – you already paid, so take advantage.

Alright. Thank you. Bye!

**Josette:** Thank you so much everyone!