

compassionate activism

Healing from Toxic Whiteness Transcript for Practice Session 2 — November 3, 2016

Sandra: Hey everybody. Today is November 3rd and this is practice session number two of the Healing From Toxic Whiteness program. Today is an incredibly important session. I mean, all sessions are pretty important but this one is really important, also. We're going to have the fun topic of talking about grieving.

I know; everyone's favorite.

Before I get started, though, I want us to take a moment to pause and check in with folks about where they're getting stuck in doing the Compassionate Activism. Because we are at least a month into the program now and people have gotten the full model, the practices.

The first part of the process is restoring internal justice. Hopefully folks have been able to try to have it show up in their lives and use it lean on when they get stuck in places. Particularly in conversations around racism but also it's applicable to any place where you get emotionally stuck because there's some sort of charge. Where you feel damned if you do and damned if you don't, kind of thing.

People have been sharing in the chat box and so, Josette, if you want to share, you can read them a bit.

Josette: Yeah. First of all, a wide range of folks in location. So that's exciting. I always love seeing folks across the country, across the world.

In terms of what people are getting stuck on, we have: calling my white friends on racism or racist statements in mixed groups. I often let it go when I should say something.

We have: getting stuck on calling out instead of calling in.

Ongoing issues in the past of being a rescuer and sometimes a bit of a white 'splainer.

Generally feeling very good about the practices introduced here. They fit pretty well with my prior practices, which is pretty exciting.

We also have: getting connected to my feelings and being open about them.

Getting stuck at anger when other white people say racist things.

We also have: trying to or wanting to win an argument and be right instead of trying to understand where they're coming from.

We also have: struggling with meaningful conversations with other white people when they do something racist rather than labeling them as wrong or dismissing them.

And another one states that: Not exactly sure how to formulate it but wanting to apologize to African Americans that I see every day. Saying "I'm sorry for all the racism you go through" but I feel the same urge to apologize to white people. And maybe African Americans want me to treat them like everyone else; ie, leave them alone.

Getting stuck at sadness.

Family. A lot of family came up with them, calling them out. The holidays are approaching.

Afraid of getting it wrong, causing harm, or silencing.

As well as knowing how to set boundaries: when, where, and how to do that within my relationships with skewed race and power dynamics where I hold more power.

That was a good range of concerns here.

Sandra: Thank you for sharing and summarizing that. Thanks to everybody who shared what they're going through.

I wanted to start there because this is where most people have a sense of what else is possible, from doing these training sessions. It's still really hard to move through these moments. Now, as I've said previously all roads lead back, not to Rome, but to you. I want to really emphasize it again because you only ever have your own experience of what you're experiencing, if that makes sense.

Everything that you're experiencing or happening, you filter through your own senses, of your personality, of your past, and all that comes with that. Everything is constantly being filtered. Understanding that it initially can feel very confining because it feels like

you're kind of trapped by what has happened to you and the pain of that and the trauma that you carry into this world.

It's only going to be like that if we do nothing but let it fester, if we ignore it, if we don't take care of it. If instead we bring our intention to it and gentle care and acknowledging it, then something else is possible. I want to posit that, when we find it difficult to be with somebody else, that's actually because there's something happening that makes it difficult for us to be with ourselves.

I was talking earlier today with somebody, coaching somebody about how and what was scary about having these conversations around talking about race and racism. When we traced it back, it was really that there was fear initially. There was anxiety. Not wanting to get it wrong. Which came back to that person not feeling that they were going to get it right, that they were always going to get it wrong. They should have known better and they didn't.

This can show up in different ways and I think that when you have individual trauma on top of systemic oppression trauma, it gets really compounded. But still at the end of the day, what we're dealing with is what you are experiencing and how you are relating to what is happening.

I say that because oftentimes when people come to these programs, they're very focused on the other folks. They always want to get to the other people and how are we going to talk to them? And how are we going to make them be different?

This program will talk about that. Half of the program is about that. But the first half of the program is really about you. Because until you're clear about where you are and where you're coming from and you're holding the wholeness of yourself, it's very hard to engage in a conversation with somebody else in their wholeness and all that they are.

I think there's a very valid reason as to why people may not want to look at themselves and so they want to look at everybody else. That's because it's really painful to look at ourselves and to realize what we've been doing. I think one of the differences for people of color is that we have our whole lives where we've been dealing with racism. Whereas white folks, because of white privilege, they all got to be unaware of its existence and its impact in a way that's not possible for people of color.

With the conversation happening around Black Lives Matter, for example right now, and Trump, and the Standing Rock, Dakotah access pipeline – it's kind of hard to get away

from the fact that racism is very, very, very much alive. We see it in the people that we know and ourselves to a certain degree. That's a really, really hard thing to wrestle with.

I want to share a story of mine to kind of segue into this. One of the turning points with me in my ability to do this work with white folks – because as you know it'd be very hard for most people of color to hold the space for white people to get in touch with their feelings about race and heal from it. Because they have their own pain that is so great and needs attention; that makes sense. With me, it really hurts us to notice a white person realize they're white and what all of that means and it just affirms the disconnect between our reality and the reality of white folks.

Because that disconnect is painful for us, it's very hard for a lot of people of color to be in the presence of white people who are realizing their own whiteness and the reality of systemic oppression on people of color. And I was like that, too, before. It was very difficult for me to witness that and care. And care about the pain that I was seeing white folks go through.

What shifted for me was my own healing process. I realized earlier, in the beginning of 2016, in January, that the way – from a very, very, very young age, with all of the different things that happened to me was I felt that I was alone in the world and that I wasn't important to the very people that were supposed to care about me. I decided to become unbreakable in order to survive that. I also decided I was going to make sure that nobody else ever felt alone and they knew it wasn't their fault.

You could see that latter half show up in all of the work and the relationships that I had. This was not something conscious, this was just the way I made sense of the world and the way the world reacted to me and what the world threw at me from a very young age.

I decided that I needed to be unbreakable.

I've gone through a long healing journey. A lot of time spent on healing from my different forms of trauma. There was this core fundamental way that I view the world that I hadn't really cracked yet. It was only in January that I really got present to how it was showing up and to the harm that it was causing me in my relationships. When you are unbreakable, it creates this "Well, I'm unbreakable and you are breakable; I'm going to protect you." As if they're not whole, complete people.

This past year has been in all of these moments realizing that I had cut off the possibility of real intimacy, real closeness, with people because there was this assumption that I

was alone and not going to be important to people. And how me being unbreakable also made other folks breakable and needing my protection when they really didn't. You can be in solidarity with them but they didn't need my protection. Because they were whole people already.

This past year has really been that I made the intention to let it go. I let go of something; that took a lot. Because that's how I view the world. That's how I knew to survive in this world. I had to take a grounding in something different.

I could not be grounded in the fact that I was unbreakable, so what was I going to ground myself in to navigate this turbulent world?

For me, that was Buddhism. For other people, it can be different things. Some people have therapy. Some people find religion. Some people find self-help. Some people find art. Whatever resonates with you. Whatever can remind you of your own wholeness.

For me, that was Buddhism.

I made that decision but that doesn't mean that I had suddenly stopped all my old habits; that wasn't true. The year progressed and still to this day, I still keep realizing how it shows up in my life. When I would realize it, I would breathe. When breathing, I would let the feelings arise. I would notice this moment when my friend would do something that was caring, I realized I never really allowed that to happen before – where I invited someone to be caring to me.

I wasn't alone and they would give to me, and what a shock to my system! Because I was so not used to it. I would notice that pain and just let it arise. There was a lot of spontaneous crying.

There was a lot of spontaneous crying over this past year.

I didn't judge myself for it. I didn't make myself wrong for it. I didn't say I was weak for it. I didn't do that. I didn't say that. I didn't beat myself up for having thought that I was unbreakable. I just let it arise. I let it manifest forward and come out. And I grieve. I grieved a lot. I'm still grieving because it's still unveiling to me as to how that framework shaped so much of how I interacted with people.

It was in doing this process that I realized this dynamic is similar to how people with unconscious privilege start to become conscious of systemic oppression. In that moment, I felt a tremendous compassion for white people when they see that whiteness exists. I think when you realize that white supremacy exists and it's so pervasive through

the entire world; we talk about the three disconnections that whiteness has created with you.

That, number one, you're disconnected from the reality of systemic oppression and its impact on people of color. That means that you don't know what's going on in the world or understand why it's happening or why what's happening is happening!

I had one white man ask me what would be different if white supremacy no longer existed and I was like, "Everything would be different! Everything would be different. Everything would be different!"

Because it's everywhere. I don't think people often notice the extent to which it exists. And you don't understand reality then if you don't understand systemic racism along with other forms of systemic oppression. You don't understand what's going on. Because you believe the lies you've been taught growing up.

The second disconnection was that you're disconnected from yourself and your emotional system. When faced with the violence of systemic racism you were told "Oh no. It's okay. They deserve it. If they just pulled up their pants. If they just didn't look that way. If they just didn't act that way. We know they're inherently violent."

In the face of the violence of racism, you were taught to be numb to it. To not care. To blame them. Compounding that with other forms of systemic oppression, particularly patriarchy, you learn to be disconnected from that pain of seeing somebody else be in pain.

If you're not even connected to yourself – if you don't know what you're about...right?

The third disconnection is the disconnection from people who are at different places in their analysis. That's really that you can't be with other people.

So you're not in touch with reality, you're not in touch with yourself, you're not in touch with other people. To realize that: that's a lot!

There's a lot in realizing the air that you've been breathing is toxic. You've been spewing out toxicity, too. It's been harming you. It's been harming others and you never meant to do that. It was just the world that you were born into.

We can't do anything about the world we were born into but we can do something about it now that we realize.

We can't jump over, though. We can't jump over realizing the toxicity that is coming out of us. We have to start becoming conscious of that and peeling back that layer and grieve. We grieve when we realize that that's what we've been doing.

Because when we realize that we're no longer just existing as individuals, but actually have these collective identities and we don't move in this world simply having and being our own unique selves. That's not how this works. We have these unique selves *and*: we're a white person, we're a man, we're a woman, we're whatever – going down the different identities.

That means something. That means something. We all carry that in our bodies. And it's in our history in this land. Even though we don't realize. We don't think about it. It lives within us. It lives around us.

There's no way to get around this being painful. There's just no way to get around this being painful. It's going to be painful. You can't rush healing. At the same time, you don't have to prolong it longer than it needs to be. That's what this program is here for, is to help you move through that pain and not have it go for longer than it needs to.

I want to pause here, because as you know, this program is deep. It's not easy. And we try to hold people in this space as much as we can, as you do this hard work.

I want to pause for a second and we are going to do a screen share. I want –

Josette: Sorry. "Acknowledge" is spelled wrong.

Sandra: I know. I always get that wrong!

Josette: I know. I saw that and was like "Oh!"

Sandra: I always get "acknowledging" wrong. I don't know why it's so hard for me. I can't be perfect at everything, you know?

I want to start out with reflecting. When you become conscious of the fact that you not only have this individual identity, but you also have this collective identity – and we're specifically talking about being a white person – what do you notice coming up from you? Where do you get stuck in acknowledging this as being true?

This can be in conversations with people of color, with other white folks, or when watching something in the media and you feel there's something that's preventing you from just being with what is presented to you. There's something that's getting in the way of you acknowledging that this is happening. These people are experiencing these

things and you are experiencing these things. There's some sort of resistance that you have in terms of you want to act like it didn't happen; there's resistance that it didn't happen.

Or you want to make someone wrong as a human being, whether that's yourself or other folks. One of the ways I've seen it come up in this program is that people are very angry at themselves. People are very angry with themselves for having internalized the toxic messages around race. And when they notice it, their reaction is to self-flagellate. So they can't acknowledge and just be with, "Yes, I have internalized this."

That's not where we're going to stop. Obviously, we keep moving through that. But that's the first step. If you can't do that first step, if you can't acknowledge reality, you can't do anything about it.

I want to take some time, and I'm going to give you ten minutes to...sorry, I'm going to give you six minutes. Three minutes each to share what you notice coming up for you as you grapple with the fact that you're both an individual and you're also a white person and that means something. Where do you get stuck in that?

I'm going to put this in the chat. I'm going to put you into breakout rooms.

Josette: I was about to ask that. Just let me do my little breakout spiel.

Sandra: Spiel. Cheers.

Josette: For those of you who are joining us for the first time or just don't remember, breakout rooms are sessions where you go into rooms of two or three people and discuss the question at hand. Now, not everyone is always able to go into a room. For whatever reason, there's sometimes an issue with that. We recommend that if that happens to you today, go and download the latest Zoom. That should fix it.

But also, let us know.

Don't worry. You are totally fine to answer those questions on your own if you like; just reflect on them. You can share in the group that remains in the main room. Sandra, I think it would be nice to have people share there if they don't have a group, if there are folks in the living room.

If you have any questions afterward, let us know. Otherwise, enjoy and we'll talk to you soon.

Sandra: Okay. So we'll come back at the 30 minute mark in six minutes.

...

Josette: Okay, so I'm actually not a cohost anymore so you'll need to add me back.

I don't know if you're here. There you are. Okay. Great. I also forgot to tell folks on the phone that mute and unmute is *6. I feel really bad. I hope that didn't interfere with anyone's connection to their partners. If it did, I'm very sorry. And hopefully next time, I will remember to say that in the beginning.

So *6 is how you mute and unmute yourself on the phone.

Sandra, are you talking? I think you're on mute.

Sandra: Okay.

I noticed, also, there was quite a number of people who didn't go into the breakout rooms, so we want to make sure that the people who wanted to, did. And if you didn't want to, that's fine. But if you wanted to and for some reason you couldn't, as Josette said, if you didn't get the invitation – the pop-up – then just download Zoom.

Josette, can you get that link and put that in Dropbox?

Josette: Yeah.

Sandra: Okay.

I want to share a bit what came up for folks in the whiteboard as well as in the chat box. As you were sharing what was coming up for you in realizing that you have both an individual identity and you have a collective identity as a white person and what all that means for you, potentially: what did you notice when talking about this? And, Josette, if you want to explain how to use the whiteboard as people are talking?

Josette: Yes. For those of you who'd like to write on the whiteboard, first of all, very short sentences. Two to three or four words. Anything longer should be in the chat. To use the whiteboard, you go into fullscreen mode. At the top, there will be a green box that says, "you are viewing Sandra Kim's screen". To the right of that is a button called "options". And if you click on that, there is an option called "annotate". Once you click on that, you should have a list of tools: draw, text, arrow, eraser.

Heads up, folks who are either on their phones or iPads or any kind of mobile device, this does not actually work for that. That's something that we came up with or ran into in other sessions; it's because they were using a mobile device of some kind.

Great. Awesome. Thanks so much. And if you have any questions about technical issues, please feel free to email me at josette@everydayfeminism.com and we will work it out.

Sandra: Great. Thank you for all that technical help. I tried to do this without Josette another time and I didn't know what the answer was for how to do the whiteboard. Always glad to have you here and explain that.

Josette, if you also want to share what came up for folks as they were having this conversation with each other.

Josette: Sure thing. First of all, lots of: six minutes wasn't enough time!

There's that.

Simultaneous fear and release.

Fear that I'm like other whites and relief that it's not just me when I do something racist.

Stuck feeling like the problems are so big you aren't able to make a difference.

Wanting to speak up and use my privilege and also wondering if I'm unconsciously oppressing people at the same time.

Isolation.

Sad face.

Pain.

Anxiety.

Exhaustion from trying to do all this work in the context of personal trauma.

Uncomfortable.

Resistance to being labeled.

Complex intersection of identities across systems of privilege and oppression.

Loneliness.

Split heart to integrate.

Fog.

Doubt.

Collective, I think.

Sadness.

Oh, heartbreak at collective.

They're still writing so we'll come back to that.

Overwhelming.

Split and disconnection.

I don't give credit.

Rabbit hole.

Anger.

Holding onto my oppressed identities and ignoring my whiteness.

Scared of all the harm I've caused in the past and probably am still causing.

Disconnected.

The vast majority of white men I've dated have blatantly told racist or sexist jokes. I've often ignored these things or pretended that they didn't say that.

This is when I have difficulty acknowledging that these things happen.

I could relate to the fact that my partner was not able to get people to attend this workshop and happy that there are so many people online doing this together.

Frustrated that so many other white folks don't realize that we have a collective white and problematic identity.

Wanting to hide in the places where I am oppressed – example: trans, queer, Jew – so that I don't have to take responsibility for my whiteness.

Oscillating between the poles of "I'm the worst: just another racist, privileged white male" to "I am the best. I can do better and I can fix things".

Sandra: Great. So, a lot!

We're going to stop now on the whiteboard, for folks.

Josette: Did you save it?

Sandra: Oh, it saves automatically.

Josette: Okay. Great.

Sandra: So yeah, a lot was coming up for folks. And as you can tell, the nature – if you listen closely for patterns into the nature of where people are getting stuck – it was a resistance to what was happening. Not wanting it to happen to the point where you wanted to act like it didn't happen. And then also blaming and judging and shaming. And globalizing. Doing an act or letting a racist act happen in front of them and not doing anything about it and creating a global label for themselves or another person.

That's not really terribly useful. That's really not terribly useful, to do this. I would say that actually most of the emotional charge of the situation is because we're in this toxic swirl of make-believe, as I keep calling it, where we resist. I say this because it's not actually helping us get to the heart of the issue. It may feel like this is what's expected of you, because I do think that's how we talk about white allyship and generally people with privilege. Just generally, we like to shame people in our societies.

It's called systemic oppression. It's what it thrives on. And it's not helpful. One thing to understand – let me get existential on you for a second now – there's no global you. Okay? There is no global you. You are this moment. This moment you're existing, that's you. Next moment, it's still you but it's different from a moment ago. Which is different from the you an hour ago, which is different from the you a year ago. Which is different from the you five, ten...

And you get the point, right? There's no permanent, fixed you. It's just this moment. It's just this moment that you have. And who are you being in this moment? What actions are you taking? Are your actions in line with your values in this current moment?

That's actually all that exists for you. Literally. Literally. You can think about things happening way out there, but you're just experiencing something you're creating in your own mind. You're not actually there. You're here. You get that?

We often get overwhelmed as activists; we think we need to change all of society 24/7, 365. Things need to be perfect; if it's not, it's all shit. Well, maybe not. But, point being, you don't have access to all of that, anyway! All you do have is access to this current moment.

So what's coming up in the current moment for you, that's what I want you to focus in on. I say that because, until we can focus on this current moment, we can't do anything about it. We can't change the future. We can't change what our next step is going to be

so it's actually different from the past. Instead, we're just going to keep playing out the stuckness.

What that calls for is getting in touch with grief and to grieve that pain. As I said, grieving is not something that society, or really most societies, create space for. Even when somebody we love passes away, how much time for grief do we get from work? As if it can be fixed in a few seconds!

There are layers to this grieving work as well, and that happens.

We have many myths and lies about what grieving means and if we're allowed to do it or not and what that means about us. I wanted to spend some time helping people get present, get in touch with what our relationship is to the act of grieving. To taking care of yourself as pain is arising. To remind folks that by grieving, what I mean is that we're not trying to do anything with it. We're just letting it arise and come forward.

We don't have to make it mean anything else, make it be for some overarching good. We don't have to justify it. We don't have to make ourselves right or wrong for feeling it. We can just let it arise. And it'll be hard and it'll be painful. But it'll be released if we actually did grieve. Though it may take some time before it shifts when this gets released.

But if we keep repressing it, it's definitely not going to go away. This is a different way of thinking about it for many folks. I want to take a break, do a breakout room to help folks get in touch with it. Let me go to our second question. What do you notice coming up for you as you consider that grieving is a critical part of the healing process?

A lot of people want to skip over the grieving process. A lot of people don't want to be in touch with the pain. You just want to be good. You want to be free of the racism without actually realizing how you've been racist. That doesn't work. You've got to get through it and grieving is important.

Where do you get stuck when trying to acknowledge that? We can't be released from something unless we know what we're being released from. There's no liberation unless there's being trapped. You need to know where you are before you shift somewhere different.

So that's what this is.

Josette: As we go into the breakout rooms, just a reminder that the prompt will be in the chat as well. So if you are in your breakout rooms you can always go to the chat and refer to that. And don't forget *6 is mute and unmute for the phones.

How much time do they have?

Sandra: I'll give you ten minutes. So come back at :53. Remember to unmute yourself with *6 for the video if you start talking.

You're all now being dispersed into your breakout rooms.

...

Same thing. As you were having this conversation: what do you notice as you realize that grief is a quite private healing process? When you're creating space to grieve, where are you getting stuck there? What was coming up for you as you were having these conversations? What are you noticing as you're noticing your relationship to grieving?

Let's start with that.

Josette: Someone said: It's hard to be more open to changes in healing.

Comparing it to losing people close to you, hopefully temporarily.

Not enough support or accommodation for exhaustion or grief.

Vastness.

Resisting the grief because I worry that it's egocentric and a reinforcement of my white privilege, ie. white tears.

I'm a little scared that I won't ever stop if I start grieving.

That's really powerful.

If I touch it, it might break me. Maybe I need to let it happen. Maybe I need to be broken to be healed. The only way out is through, right?

Isolation.

We have: the hardest part about any type of grieving is dealing with those who are not. Except in this case, because it's not enough to care about grieving. Those who aren't going through the same process aren't offering you sympathy because your grief isn't visible to them.

I notice how frustrated I get when I'm feeling sad or upset, when I really don't want to feel that way. It doesn't feel "productive".

I'm actually excited/relieved because I've been trying to think about the ways I've perpetuated oppression and getting stuck.

Noticed I try to avoid it because it hurts.

Grief isn't an emotion that's comfortable to experience, which results in avoidance.

After grieving, then what?

Grief is treated like a luxury, not something essential and healing.

Feeling like I don't deserve to grieve.

If I feel joy, then something must be wrong.

I haven't started grieving, but a part of my identity has been lost/challenged a bit. Still struggling with it.

I know that it takes time, that it moves slowly, and that it's primarily a passive process. Taking the time to feel it when it comes up, so I've got to give up on the turbo track.

Oh man, I wish there was a turbo track!

Figuring out the boundaries/container for the grief.

White supremacy is so vast that it's sometimes hard to contain grief in a healing way.

I worry that if I really *be* with how I am feeling, I'll just curl up in a ball and never do anything.

I notice that it's hard for me to get in touch with my grief. My outrage and pain feels intellectual and I see people around me having a deep emotional experience when they see injustice. I compare my experience to their experience.

Concern that letting out the grief whenever it arises will stop me from being functional for the rest of my life.

There are millions of other ones; I don't know if I should pause there.

Sandra: Yeah.

There are lots of feelings around grieving.

I want to stop the share now and I want to just note something. I knew this program would be different. The other program we have around Compassionate Activism was

healing from marginalization. I felt there were going to be some differences in working with folks around their privilege and one of the major things that have been different is how much you all beat yourself up for your pain, for having this pain.

I think, what came up for me, is that people who've experienced and who've been targeted, by the time they come into a program like this, they know that at some level, it's not their fault. They may feel viscerally like it's their fault but there's some degree of acknowledgment that it's not their fault, that it was something that was done to them.

White folks and people with privilege, that acknowledgment is something that white supremacy, that systemic oppression was something that was also done to you hasn't sunk in. And even though we keep talking about it, I don't think it's sunk in for a lot of folks. We have to be taught.

Watch the videos. FYI. It's going to unpack something more each time you watch it.

It's incredibly important to understand that white supremacy is something that was done to you. Toxic whiteness is not inherent to you as a person, as a white person. That's really important because you are not white supremacy.

It is something that you heard over and over and over again through many different ways. And because you've heard it so often that you've begun saying it, too. But that's not your true inner voice. I find, to distinguish the two is a huge part of this process. That's why we have so much time of listening to yourself. So you can stop listening to the voice of white supremacy.

Listen to yourself. Your true, inner self.

Because what I get out of being unbreakable, there was a fear I had that, if I give that up, what will become of me? What will become of my people, who, I, in my unbreakability, was protecting and providing for? I had survived. I've gotten to my place in my career, for example, because I was unbreakable, by pushing myself so damn hard. What would happen?

When I gave it up, though, I realized: there's nothing to break! It's not that I'm breakable/unbreakable. There's nothing to break. There never was. But they taught me that there's something to break, so I had to be strong.

And it's the same thing for people with privilege. You are naturally whole people. You are not white supremacy embodied into a person. It's just that part of you that was taught

all of that. In some ways, when all that toxicity has been thrown at you and you start becoming aware of it.

That's why white tears, white fragility, all those terms have been used to name that flailing. That flailing that white people go through when they start realizing that they're white. That's useful in naming it as a thing, it's a huge, pervasive pattern. But what I don't like about it is that there was a moral judgment to it, oftentimes.

Not inherently, but oftentimes it's said with a moral judgment because it is inappropriate to engage in white tears and white fragility in front of people of color. Because like I said, if you set someone on fire, you don't spend time putting the focus on you having a moment, being like, "Oh, I didn't mean to set you on fire. How could I have done that?" You focus on the person who's on fire and try to put that fire out.

But that doesn't mean that you shouldn't take the time to unpack what happened that you thought it was okay to set somebody on fire. Or that you didn't realize that that's what was going on when you saw the fire, or if somebody else did.

The point is, there's no right or wrong to feelings, they just arise. There are appropriate times and ways to go into it and you haven't been taught it. We're going to go into it in the last 30 minutes of this session. I've been spending a lot of time focusing on where you're getting stuck, because you have to use it as a red flag.

A big part of Compassionate Activism is noticing the toxicity. Just noticing the toxicity. If you don't notice it, you can't do anything about it. that's why I've been spending the first hour just getting present to why you don't want to be with it. And now we're going to move into talking about how to care for the fact that you don't even if you don't want to be with it.

I'll share another personal story of mine – and, like I said, emotionally-charged situations happen all over the world – romantic relationships are definitely one of them. I had something that happened not too recently and it was somebody I care about, they didn't do something that I wanted to see done. In that moment I didn't care about that person.

In that moment, because I cared about that person so much, it actually hurt so much, the fact that they didn't do this thing that I didn't care about them because I cared about them. Does that make sense? So when they did this thing, my question wasn't for anybody else. "Oh, what was going on that you didn't do this thing?"

As Josette will attest to, whenever someone doesn't do something that they said they were going to do, I'm like, "What happened?" There's no, "Don't care. How dare you?" but there in this situation because I cared about this person so much. That's what you'll often notice.

The people you're closest to, it's harder to have these conversations with, because you care about them so much.

So, in that moment that I realized that I didn't care about them because I cared about them so much, I was like, "Well, damn, that's because I'm in pain right now, huh?" Because if I stayed fixated on that other person and blaming them and being mad at them for having all these feelings, I wouldn't have gotten in touch with that pain. So instead I'm like, "Okay, I don't really care that I don't care because I care so much". It's a circular world that we live in.

There are many levels to this.

Now that we've been talking about this, before we move into practicing getting in touch with the pain and being with it in a different way, I want to stop and take any questions.

Josette: Yeah, so anyone who is able to use the chat, you can put your question there. Anyone on the phone, unmute yourself and kind of type in and whoever comes in first will be the person.

Sandra: If you have questions about how to do this, don't ask those questions because I'm going to do it with you. We give you a lot of content in point questions, then you can ask that. And while we're waiting for people to ask questions, I also want to talk about this whole "not deserving to grieve". It may feel like you don't deserve to because you're a person with privilege or you don't deserve it for many other reasons: you don't think you're good enough, your feelings don't matter, and it may be about the ways you are marginalized.

Or that men don't cry, women are hysterical if they show grief, if they cry, all these things. Lots of messages about how we should be strong and stoic, which just helps systemic oppression keep oppressing us. Because if we're not expressing the pain then usually we're just soldiering on.

Understanding that, yes, if you think that you don't deserve to take up space, to exist, and to be human, that makes sense – given the ways that we've unconsciously been conditioned by systemic oppression. So maybe caring for the fact that that's what you've

been taught to show it and acknowledging that you've been taught not to feel your own pain; that's wrong.

Josette: I'm not seeing questions come in. We have one that might be relevant. I'm not sure. The question is: Where do white tears go to dry?

That, I thought, could be kind of a metaphorical question. But it also, in terms of making space for this and all of that, I thought it was relevant.

Sandra: I'm not promising you that by the end of this course you're never, ever, ever going to do anything racist again and you're going to be the perfect person to come to about racism. I'm not promising that. The world is very messy. There's no getting around that. What I am showing you is how you can be with what is happening so that you can engage with it.

Understand what's coming up for you, what's coming up for the other person. By identifying the disconnect between the two you can actually restore that. And being connected means you can do something different together. It's really a process, a practice, that I'm teaching you. Not that you'll never have tears. You'll just know what to do with them that is affirming to your reality and affirming to other people's realities.

What happens is that when you do this healing work about your past that keeps coming up in your present, it will lessen over time. More and more keeps getting released. Then you start to only have to deal with what's happening right here. That's a lot easier. Because you don't have to deal with the past and the present; you just deal with the present.

Josette: We had a couple other questions come in. One says: What are the ways that this grief shows up that is different from other types of grief, such as when someone we love passes away?

Sandra: I think, fundamentally, it's not different. The resistance to grieving is different, I think. For someone who's had a loved one pass away, there's a feeling of, "Oh, okay" that's valid grief. That's valid that you have some pain around it and there's going to be some space to grieve. Not a whole lot, unfortunately, but there's going to be some space given to it.

To grieve the resistance to the way white supremacy lives within you and the ways you take it in, there's almost no space. There's almost no space, outside of here. There are some people who have this approach. Some people are doing it. But it's not a widely accepted thing to take time for yourself. It's different to take time in cross-racial spaces

versus take time for yourself, particularly with a community of white folks or just on your own.

That's the difference. It's the ways that we self-flagellate, so we don't grieve.

Josette: How much time do we have for questions?

Sandra: I'd like to move on unless you think it's something that was –

Josette: There was one other question that spoke directly to what you were just saying: How do I know if I'm grieving in a way that's healing? How do I know the difference between grieving systemic racism in itself and the harmful things I do to perpetuate it?

Sandra: The ways that you know, when talk about the toxic swirl of make-believe – you notice when people are talking about where they got stuck, it was some manifestation of resisting what had happened. Even though it happened, trying to make it not have happened. Kind of a coercive demand upon the past to be different than what it was. Or making themselves or somebody else wrong.

Blaming. Judging. Shaming. Punishing. Policing.

Those are unhealthy ways because they're not true; it's make-believe. It's make believe. When you try to access pain from that swirl of make-believe, it's going to explode in your face and that's why most people don't like getting in touch with their pain. Is because they go in from there.

Me, I've been doing this work for a while where I just let it arise. I'm really cool with pain. I don't prefer it, obviously, but I can deal with it. I don't have fear of pain. What I do have, I have fear of pain in other people but I'm working on it. But I don't have fear of pain within me because I have this practice of embracing pain and because I have learned over time.

And I really believe it and I've seen in other folks that if you embrace the pain, care for it, things shift. Sometimes it may take a while, but you can do it in this moment, too. It'll pop up again later but you can do it in that moment, too. You just keep making the moments that you're being with yourself more, more frequently and for a longer duration.

In terms of the second part of that question, about grieving systemic oppression, outside or internal; there is no outside! There is an outside, but you don't have access to it. You will always interpret it through yourself. Whenever you see something happening or

something's actively arising with something that you think or passively believe, it's still all through your own filters. There's still a you; you're still experiencing it.

You don't have access to anything out there; it's all filtered through your own self. It's all the same thing. Well, it's not but you know what I'm talking about.

Still only your experience. That's the only thing we're talking about. We're talking about your experience. That's all you've got.

Josette: Cool. We had a couple other situations expressed but I think we only have about 15 minutes so.

Sandra: Yeah. For folks who had situations – and, you know, everyone has had something come up for them where they got stuck – I want to you re-remember that. And I want people to get comfortable wherever you are. Just take a moment, close your eyes. I want you to take a couple of deep breaths.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.

And I want you to pay attention to your feet. Notice if you have any sensations. You're not trying to change it; just noticing.

Move up to your legs. Notice if it's tight somewhere. If it's relaxed, if it's sore. Not trying to change it or make it go away. Just noticing.

I want you to go to your torso. Is something tight, hurting, relief? There's no right or wrong to how your body's doing.

Go to your neck and arms. Just notice. And then go to your head and face. Just notice. No more, no less.

Continuing on with just noticing, I want you to remember the situation where you got stuck, emotionally stuck.

As you're remembering the situation, notice what's coming up for you right now. Is it getting hot somewhere? Is it getting tight somewhere? Focus your attention on wherever the sensation is in your body.

I want you to put your hand on where it is, where the sensation is strongest in you. Just notice. Keep breathing into it. Just notice what's going on there. How big is it? How big is the sensation? Does it have a size? Is it moving? Is it dense or is it loose?

Does it have a color? If it is showing up for you, that happens. If it doesn't, that happens, too. I want you to notice how you're relating to it. Do you want it to not be there? Do you feel bad about having it there? Are you holding it gently?

There's no right or wrong to how you're relating to it. Just notice.

Breathing in, say, "I see you."

Breathing out, say, "You exist."

Breathe in, "I see you."

Breathe out, "You exist."

Breathe in, "I see you."

Breathe out, "You exist."

Just notice what's coming up for you. Do you want it to exist? Maybe yes, maybe no.

Just noticing. Not trying to change. Now I want you to go inside of that feeling. However it's living inside of you right now. Go inside of it, visualize yourself entering and being the center. What is it like as you look around? What are you noticing? What are you seeing?

Just move around the space and take in what's coming up for you. If nothing is, that's fine, too. If something is, that's fine, too. Just keep noticing.

As you're in there, I want you to go to whatever is drawing your attention the most. And I want you to put your hand on that spot. Or you can just look at it if you want to.

Breathe in. Breathe in, "You exist."

Breathe out, "And that's hard for me."

Breathe in, "You exist."

Breathe out, "And that's hard for me."

Breathe in, "You exist."

Breathe out, "And that's hard for me."

Just notice what's coming up for you.

Just stay there.

Breathe in, "It's hard to be here."

Breathe out, "It's hard to be here."

Breathe in, "It's hard to be here."

Breathe out, "It's hard to be here."

If that phrase doesn't work for you, you can try something else, too. It's wherever you are.

Just keep noticing. Noticing what's coming up for you. Are things shifting? If things are the same.

Then breathing in, "It's hard to be here."

Breathe out, "And that's okay."

Breathe in, "It's hard to be here."

Breathe out, "And that's okay."

Breathe in, "It's hard to be here."

Breathe out, "And that's okay."

Breathe in, "It's hard to be here."

Breathe out, "And that's okay."

Just keep noticing what's coming up for you. There's no right or wrong to it.

I want you to ask it, "Is there something you want to tell me?"

"Is there something you need from me?"

Maybe it tells you something, maybe it doesn't.

If it tells you something, say, "Thank you for sharing. I'll consider it."

If it didn't tell you something then say, "Thank you for letting me be here. I hope you will share with me later. And I want you to breathe in, "I see you."

Breathe out, "And I'm here."

Breathe in, "I see you."

Breathe out, "I'm here."

Breathe in, "I see you."

Breathe out, "I'm here for you."

Breathe in, "I see you."

Breathe out, "I'm here for you."

Just thank it and take a couple of deep breaths.

Start opening your eyes, wiggling your toes, moving, coming back to here. If you're slow moving out of it, that's okay. That just means you're in your body.

As always, we're going to do whiteboard. I want folks to share what that was like for you.

Josette: Don't forget, longer ones go in the chat. Or just if you don't want to use the whiteboard, that's totally fine. What did you notice as you were doing that exercise?

We have a few answers coming in. Someone said, "I sobbed."

Overwhelming intensity of feeling.

Relief.

Laying down perfection.

Dissociation and numbness.

Softening.

Discomfort dissipated.

I appreciate the practice and meditation as a way to get in touch with sadness and grieving.

It told me, "If it happened, it's dead. We need you to be with the living. It's not your fault. There are plenty of tears to wash it away."

The emotions I thought feel because I've numbed them for so long came welling up. I was relieved to feel them.

I often feel like I cannot share what's going on with me because I'm so lucky and I have so much, I have no right to grieve.

Finally feeling.

I feel less threatened by the feelings and fears.

Difficulty letting go of expecting myself to feel a certain way.

Loneliness.

Frustration.

Dark metal armor around my torso, let some light through eventually.

I don't have to take on everyone's pain, just my own.

Tension in my throat like I have been silenced my whole life, and to grieve is learning how to speak.

I can.

Lots of tears, guilt.

This is hard for me.

Relief to feel.

It's hard to feel and that's okay.

Becoming human.

I think I just felt compassion for myself for the first time in a long, long time.

That's all the answers that I believe have come in.

Honors others' ability.

How can I be a good ally when I'm still self-centered?

The structure of this feeling was a cross between an Elizabethan parlor and amusement park ride.

It was difficult to wear, but also really intriguing.

The challenge of addressing Black colleagues, whom I admire, even though I know I will/ do screw up.

Sandra: I just want to point out the difference. When you were stuck in thinking about these things and what was really underneath it? Where people were stuck, and where their focus was, was in the toxic swirl of make-believe. Of resisting and making wrong.

Where we are now, we got really grounded in our own reality. Being really grounded in our own reality and being in touch with what was coming up for us and having this space to let it arise without judgment, without policing, without trying to make it go away. We were just with it. We were just acknowledging it.

That was really a short thing. That was ten minutes? 15 minutes, maybe, maximum. And as someone shared, it was maybe the first time they've felt compassion for themselves in a very long time.

Some people heard messages of what they needed. Some people felt some release. Some people got in touch with how constrained they were feeling and then they started to weaken that constraint, it started to loosen up a bit.

There's no right or wrong to any of this. It's just, how are we going to relate to what is happening, is the question. What arises, arises. It's like the weather. We can't help it when it rains. But we can help if we're going to get a jacket or umbrella or if we stay inside – how we respond to the rain.

You have control over. The only way out is through. And healing takes it's time. It's own time. You can't rush it. But you don't need to prolong it. You don't need to make it longer than it has to be. The way we make it longer is by resisting and by making wrong.

So shift away from that and get recentered in your own body, in your own experience. Remember, this is all you have. You don't have access to other people's experiences; you can only invite them to share their experiences. But you will never be them. You're not a mind-reader. Just, each time you notice you're trying to stay over there with them, because if you're trying to go over there to them, you're going away from yourself.

Remember, all roads, lead back to you. Let them lead back to you. That is where the healing will happen.

I want to wrap up in this last couple of minutes that we have and I want to do a main takeaway.

Once again, you have the whiteboard and you can write in the chat box: if there's one thing you want to make sure you remember from this, from today's session, what is it?

Josette: As we wait for folks to answer, there was a question.

Actually, now the answers are coming in. Maybe we can bring them up next session or bring them up in the Facebook group when we can discuss that?

People who have takeaways are saying: White supremacy is something that happened to you; it's not who you are.

There's no global me; only me in this place and moment.

Self.

It's not our fault.

It's alright to grieve, truly.

Let go. Let arise. Be real.

So thankful for the tears.

Asking for help will always be hard for me and keep me stuck.

Heart.

Someone seconded the white supremacy happened to you; it's not who you are.

Look within for the reality we can truly deal with.

It's okay to be vulnerable and imperfect. And we only exist in the present.

To let go of that resistance, pain, suffering, does not mean that I don't care. It's there because I care and I feel it and let go because I care.

There's no way out but through.

Really seeing reality is painful but also healing.

Self-love.

Sandra: I want to wrap up with this one idea, with this one notion. I keep saying: what undergirds all this work for me and why I created what I created with Compassionate Activism is I believe that we are created naturally whole. And we're originally one with each other.

What has torn us away from that truth is systemic oppression. It has taught us that there is something wrong with us. It has taught us that we are inferior and superior to each other. So we're no longer connected to ourselves or to other people. So when we do this work to heal, we get back in touch with something that we've been told doesn't exist.

That we are naturally whole. Like I said, when I gave up being unbreakable I realized that there was nothing to break here. So trusting in yourself; really trusting yourself to work through, to move through this, as long as you keep grounding yourself in yourself, that ultimately is the purpose of this work.

When you move in the world being grounded in the truth, your natural wholeness, and our original wholeness with each other, there is nothing we can't do.

I just want to leave you with that and leave you with that one thought.

Thank you, everybody, for showing up and doing this hard work. I will see you next week.

Josette: Don't forget the Facebook group. We're all there waiting for you! We've got lots of conversations going on and things.

Thank you all so much!