

## Beginning Anew: Honest Sharing and Deep Listening

*“The essence of love and compassion is understanding, the ability to recognize the suffering of others. We have to be in touch with the physical, material, and psychological suffering of others. To do so, we have to put ourselves ‘inside the skin’ of the other. We must ‘go inside’ their body, feelings, and mental formations, and experience their suffering. A shallow observation as an observer will not help us to see their suffering.*

*“When we are in contact with the suffering of another, a feeling of compassion is born in us immediately. Compassion literally means “to suffer with” the other.*

*“Because understanding is the very foundation of love and compassion, the words and actions engendered by love and compassion will be ones that are helpful... One word, one action, or one thought can reduce another person’s suffering and bring him joy... We must always remember that love is none other than understanding.*

*“It is our suffering that makes us compassionate. It is our suffering that acts as compost to bring about the flowers and fruits of understanding and compassion. Thay tells his disciples, “You have every right to suffer, but you do not have the right not to practice when you suffer.”*

Sister Annabel Laity, *The Mind of Compassion*, Essential Writings, pp99-102.

### How to Begin

Make an appointment to meet with your partner or friend when there is enough time and space to sit together and talk in a peaceful setting.

Both people must realize that mindful communication demands awareness and skillfulness to ensure that the process is productive.

Each person will speak without interruption and go through all 4 parts of the entire process. The other person practices deep listening and following their breath. After both have spoken, there will be time to mindfully process issues that were raised.

Again, after both have completed the 4 parts, as one person clarifies a hurt and/or asks for something from the other, the other breathes, listens and attends with full presence and responds with compassion and empathy.

Be careful of defensiveness and self-justification. You can apologize for the hurt you may have caused the other. This is very helpful as there is always truth in what the other feels. The process demands deep empathy and regard to see the truth for the other.

You may not agree fully but understanding the other’s position can support healing. Remember the intention is resolution, not to be right!

## Here are the four parts:

1. **Flower watering** - This is a chance to share your appreciation for the other person. You may mention specific instances that the other person said or did, something that you admire. This is an opportunity to shine light on the other's strengths and contributions to the relationship or in other areas of their life that you observe. You are encouraging the growth of his or her positive qualities. When we practice "flower watering" we support the development of good qualities in each other and at the same time we help to weaken the difficulties in the other person. As in a garden, when we "water the flowers" of loving kindness and compassion in each other, we also take energy away from the weeds of anger, jealousy and misperception.
2. **Sharing regrets** - You may mention any unskillfulness in your actions, speech or thoughts that you have not yet had an opportunity to apologize for.
3. **Expressing a hurt** - You may share how you felt hurt by an interaction with your partner or friend, due to his or her actions, speech or thoughts. Take your time to express all of your thoughts and feelings. Try to be mindful not to blame or insult but rather state your deepest feelings with regards to the situation or issue. If we can get to our fear and hurt underneath our anger and blame, it is helpful as the other can more easily take that in. Relate the details and context so the other can understand but don't say so much as to overwhelm.
4. **Sharing a long-term difficulty and asking for support** - At times we each have difficulties and pain arising from our past history that surfaces in the present. When we share an issue that we are dealing with personally, we can let the people around us understand us better and offer the support that we really need.

This can be a difficult and emotional process and won't always go well. If you are unable to maintain your equanimity, you may have to stop and reschedule so that the charge will be less and your skillfulness more available.

You can practice **Beginning Anew** everyday by expressing your appreciation in your relationships and apologizing right away when you do or say something that hurts another. You can mindfully let others know when you have been hurt as well.

The process of mindful speech and deep listening takes practice, discipline, self-awareness and openness. Beginning anew cultivates deep listening skills, empathy, compassion, honesty and vulnerability. These qualities will increase your feelings of happiness within your relationships.

## Hugging Meditation

As Thay says, "*Darling, you are precious to me. I am sorry I have not been mindful and considerate. I have made mistakes. Allow me to begin anew. I Promise.*"

When we hug, our hearts connect and we know that we are not separate beings. Hugging with mindfulness and concentration can bring reconciliation, healing, understanding, and much happiness.

- As Thay says, "*We may practice hugging meditation with a friend, our daughter, our father, our partner or even with a tree*".
- To practice, we first bow and recognize the presence of each other. Then we can enjoy three deep conscious breaths to bring ourselves fully there.
- We then may open our arms and begin hugging. Holding each other for three in-and-out breaths.
  - With the first breath, we are aware that we are present in this very moment and we are happy.
  - With the second breath, we are aware that the other is present in this moment and we are happy as well.
  - With the third breath, we are aware that we are here together, right now on this earth, and we feel deep gratitude and happiness for our togetherness. We then may release the other person and bow to each other to show our thanks.
- When we hug in such a way, the other person becomes real and alive. We do not need to wait until one of us is ready to depart for a trip, we may hug right now and receive the warmth and stability of our friend in the present moment.
- Hugging can be a deep practice of reconciliation. During the silent hugging, the message can come out very clear: "*Darling, you are precious to me. I am sorry I have not been mindful and considerate. I have made mistakes. Allow me to begin anew. I Promise.*"