

*Compassion and love are not mere luxuries...  
They are fundamental to the continued survival of our species.*  
– His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Dear CBCT community,

I am writing on behalf of the Emory CBCT program to offer wishes of health and peace of mind during these challenging times, and to invite you to [join us online to practice compassion and share community](#), every day at 9 am and 7 pm Eastern Time, for 45 minutes, led by a certified CBCT instructor. Click [here](#) for details.

The COVID-19 crisis calls on each of us to do our part, both externally and internally. Externally, the gifts we can give to the world include our regular hand-washing, reducing physical closeness as much as possible, and finding creative and safe ways to share resources with our community, especially with those who need it most.

Internally, the gifts we are able to give are also important. By seeking ways to sustain a calm and focused mind and to touch into our capacity for generosity and compassion, we can foster our best self as we face the difficult weeks ahead. How wonderful when we can be a beacon of thoughtfulness and caring, especially in times those qualities are most needed. With this in mind, we are pleased to host the new online program for daily compassion practice and fellowship.

Given our deep need for connecting with others, it is unfortunate that “social distancing” is being encouraged by the healthcare experts. This phrase is everywhere, it seems, but the words are so misleading! What the experts want to encourage is *physical* distancing, not social distancing. If anything, science tells us that we should *discourage* social distancing as the crisis unfolds. We are humans, and we need social connection to maintain wellbeing, especially in tough times. Here is a practice that helps me: Each time I hear or read the phrase “social distancing,” I replace it in my mind with the more accurate phrase: “physical distancing.” Then I ask myself: “What can I do right now to *decrease the social distancing*? How can I *strengthen* social connections?”

Though contemplative practices can help, the way we carry these practices into our world will be different for each of us. For me, it has been helpful to notice when I am getting worked up by the latest statistics, so I can take a break from the news, get some fresh air, and press the inner reset button. Or I can notice when I am not really hearing the words of a concerned friend or family member, so that I can take a steadying breath and shift my focus back and connect to this person I love. When I feel uneasy about the future, I can check my intention and ask some questions: Am I focused on what I can do to help? Am I taking the needs of the wider society into account? These are all ways to decrease the chance of being overwhelmed by the many factors that are not in our control, and all of these approaches can be supported by inward reflection.

We at Emory awoke Monday morning to another COVID-19 email update, which included this pledge: “We will strive to stay connected, maintaining our essential bond.” This essential bond – the bond of our common humanity – is the wellspring of inclusive compassion. **Staying mindful of this bond, no matter what happens, will be the task for each of us in the weeks and months to come.** It is our connection to others, and capacity for warm-heartedness, that will get us through the crisis with equanimity and kindness.

Feel free to reach out anytime. We always enjoy hearing your reflections and your feedback. And we look forward to seeing you at the online gatherings!

Tim