

WIDENING OUR CIRCLE OF COMPASSION/MERCY RITUAL



CENTRE-PIECE

For the centre-piece you will need:

A variety of plants: each participant could be asked to bring a plant

A bowl of water and sprinkler

LEADER:

In this year of Mercy Pope Francis' words in Laudato 'Si are an apt reminder that we should include the whole of creation in our circle of Mercy.

Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and in constant interaction with it. (LS 139)

He calls us to a 'serene attentiveness' to nature.

OPENING SONG

Our opening song calls us to pay attention to different aspects of nature.

PAY ATTENTION by Joyce Johnson Rouse (www.earthmama.org)

Pay attention to the trees, pay attention to the river

Pay attention to the bees.....

Pay attention to the clouds, pay attention to the weather

Pay attention to everything you do to the Mother

We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestor

We are just borrowing it from our children,

Pay attention to the hills, pay attention to the water

Pay attention to the breeze...

Pay attention to the dreams, pay attention to the Wisdom

To the sisters and brother living close to the Earth

Whatever befalls the Earth befalls our sons and daughters

Whatever we do to the Earth, we do to ourselves.
Pay Attention to the birds, pay attention to the forests
Pay attention to the streams...
Pay attention to the snow, Pay attention to the glaciers
To the frostline and coastline, and coral beneath the sea
This we know: The Earth does not belong to us
We belongto the Earth.

Pay attention to the waves, pay attention to the ocean
Pay attention to the reefs.....
Pay attention to the heart, beating steady in the Mother
Or generations will pay for our ways.
We did not weave the Web of Life, we are merely a strand in it
Whatever we do to the Web, we do to ourselves.
Wisdom attributed to Chief Seattle

PAYING ATTENTION TO SELF

LEADER : The quality of our attention to nature is reflected in the quality of our attention to self. Focusing on our breath is a wonderful way of paying attention to self.

Breathing Meditation:

I invite you to settle on your chair, close your eyes and allow your body to relax.
Acknowledge that it is a great act of loving kindness to pay attention to yourself.

Feel the sensation of the flowing breath in the body.. as it flows in and out ...in and out, let your body breathe itself.

Sense your body being open to and welcoming of the universal breath.

Notice where in your body you feel the breath. Let your attention rest gently there...nostril, stomach, chest/heart region.

Rest in the awareness on your in-breath and out- breath...this moment ... this breath
.....this pause after the in-breath and the pause after the out-breath

Rest in the serenity of this awareness
....stillness...silence...softness...reassurance...presence

Note your level of comfort with this stillness, this silence this presence

Just breathe... this breath, this moment, this breath, this moment

Sense your oneness with all life. (Pause)

Now gently, whenever it feels right for you, open your eyes

LEADER:

Our attention to nature needs to flow from a place of compassion, from an awareness of our place among countless other beings in the web of life. Einstein reminds us that:

Our task must be to widen our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

This sentiment is echoed in the words of Brian Swimme:

We need to embrace a more comprehensive compassion to include the total community of life of the natural world on the planet.

The following poem and story offers a glimpse of what it is to widen our circle of compassion.

BIRDFOOT'S GRANDPA. By Joseph Bruchac

The old man
must have stopped our car
two dozen times to climb out
and gather into his hands
the small toads blinded
by our lights and leaping
live drops of rain.

The rain was falling,
a mist about his white hair
and I kept saying
you can't save them all,
accept it, get back in
we've got places to go.

But leathery hands full
of wet brown life
knee deep in the summer
roadside grass
he just smiled and said
they have places to go
too.

A STORY TOLD BY A SISTER OF MERCY

Recently I visited an old couple I take care of. When they had eaten I washed the dishes and swept the flour. I noticed that there was a snail in the dust I gathered. Not liking snails too much I opened the door of the stove and threw the snail with the dust into the flames. Immediately I was overcome with remorse. I did not sleep well that night knowing that I had burned one of God's creatures that had been brimming with divinity.

Questions for Personal Reflection time:

What did the poem and story evoke in you?

Have you similar experiences of showing compassion or lack of compassion to other beings which inhabit our world?

Sharing of reflections

After each sharing participants say :

May we widen our circle of compassion and mercy!

REFLECTION ON A PLANT

LEADER

In order to show mercy and compassion to others we need to recognise their beauty, be aware of their uniqueness, and know that they are alive with God's presence. As the poet says we need to take time 'to stand and stare'!

I now invite you to take one of the plants from the centre-piece. Pay attention to its form and shape; take time to recognise its characteristics; see its beauty.

Time for reflection

LEADER

I invite you to return the plants to the centre-piece.

Let us say the following prayer together as we bow to the plants.

I bow to you!

The God within me greets the God within you!

The light within me salutes the light within you!

LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION

Leader: Sometimes our compassion can manifest in practical activities. Sometimes our compassion can be the subtle flow of energy as we meditate. The following loving kindness meditation directs the energy of compassion to ourselves first and then outwards to earth and all beings

Loving kindness meditation

Sit comfortably. Let your eyes close gently. Let your body be soft and your breath be soft. I invite you to bring your attention to your heart. See if you can feel your heart and your breath together as if you could breathe into your heart and out of it. The loving kindness meditation is first of all directed to yourself.

Feel compassion for yourself as you say the following words quietly

May I be healed!
May my heart open with kindness and peace!
May I be filled with the spirit of loving kindness!
May I be whole!

Now think of someone you love a lot. Hear yourself saying to them:

May you be healed!
May your heart open with kindness and peace!
May you be filled with the spirit of loving kindness!
May you be whole!

Let another person or two that you love into your heart. Let your heart grow bigger. Direct these words and a flow of compassion to them:

May you be healed!
May your heart open with kindness and peace!
May you be filled with the spirit of loving kindness!
May you be whole!

Let your heart open further. Let in all your friends, people you love. Again let compassion flow to them as you say these words.

May you be healed!
May your heart open with kindness and peace!
May you be filled with the spirit of loving kindness!
May you be whole!

Sense or feel or imagine that your heart gets bigger than this room, in all directions, in front, behind, to left, to right, above and below, to fill the whole of the earth as if you could cover the whole of the earth with feelings of loving kindness.

Picture the earth now as a ball you could hold in your arms. See yourself take it into your arms and heart and hold it, with its billions of beings, humans, insects, reptiles. Hold the earth with the heart of loving kindness and compassion as you say quietly to yourself.

May all beings be healed!

May all beings be happy!

May all beings be touched and opened and healed by the force of loving kindness!

May the power of our heart, our goodness, our love bring that light to the world and bring a freedom to our lives and those of all beings!

FINAL BLESSING

LEADER

Points to the water in the bowl

We have the power to heal nature and nature has the power to heal us. Internationally renowned Japanese scientist Masaru Emoto shows how the influence of our thoughts, words and feelings on molecules of water can positively impact the earth and our personal health. Using high-speed photography, Dr. Masaru Emoto discovered that crystals formed in frozen water reveal changes when specific, concentrated thoughts are directed toward them. He found that water from clear springs and water that has been exposed to loving words shows brilliant, complex, and colourful snowflake patterns. In contrast, polluted water, or water exposed to negative thoughts, forms incomplete, asymmetrical patterns with dull colours.

I invite you now to bless this water with words of love and compassion.

Participants say words of blessing to the water.

We now ask the water to bless us with tender, loving hearts so that compassion and mercy to all of God's creatures will become a way of life.

Leader sprinkles the participants and the plants.

May this water bring us health and healing!

May it open our hearts to love and compassion for all!

May it help us to embrace the whole community of life with tender loving kindness!

Amen