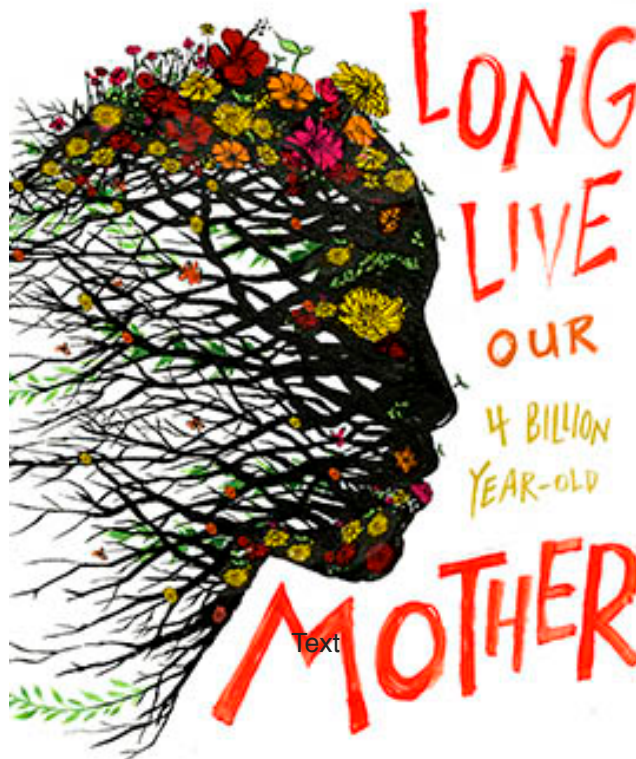


# WOMEN OF WORDS: STORIES OF SURVIVAL

A newsletter created  
by participants in  
Webs of Support,  
a class by and for  
incarcerated survivors  
of violence and severe  
trauma, 3rd ed.



art by Jess X Snow

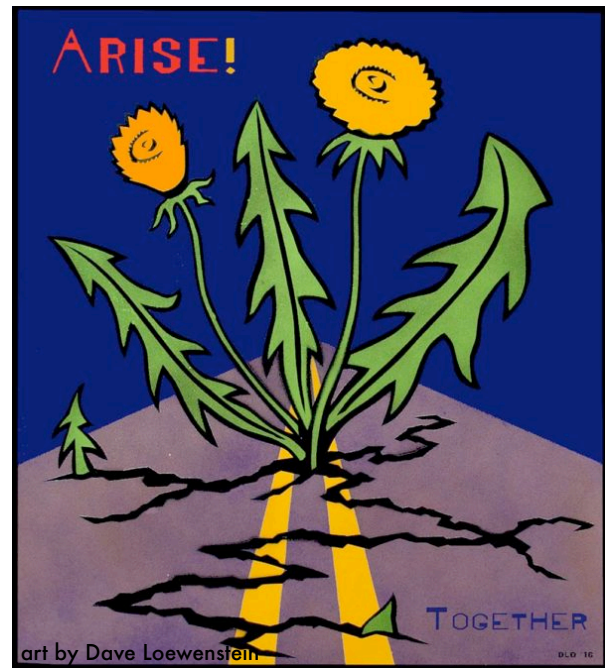
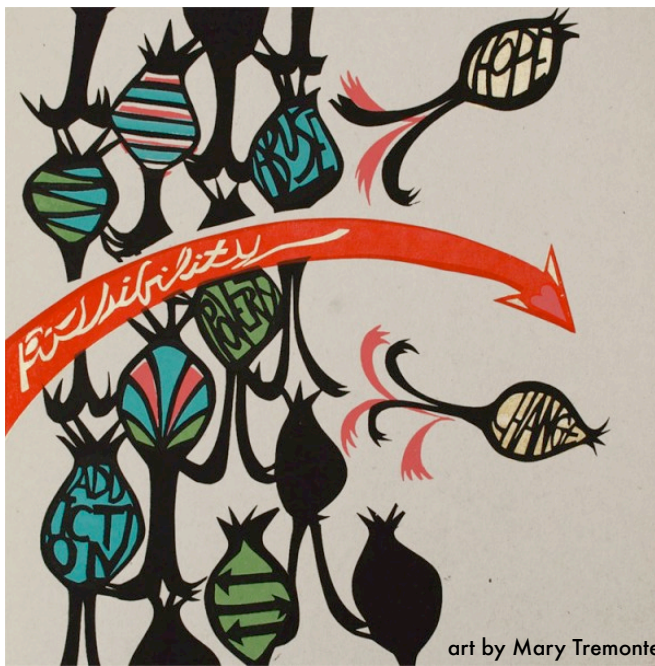


Webs of Support is a 12-week curriculum dealing with issues related to violence and trauma and also develops personal empowerment, a sense of community, growth, and healing.

In the spring of 2017, we developed this newsletter to be a resource guide and source of inspiration to any other person struggling with similar issues.

## Table of Contents

Power Cubed	2 - 3
The Woman of Words	4 - 7
Compassion & Meditation	8 - 12
Poetry and Thoughts	13 - 15
Yoga in Prison	15 - 17
Games and Play	18
Resources	19



### *What is Power Cubed?*

Power is often defined only in negative terms, and as a form of domination, but it can also be a positive force for individual and collective capacity to act for change. Power is most commonly understood as a form of authority, control or domination. Those with authority over others are considered powerful, while those who are dominated are seen as powerless; this type of power is labeled **power over**. Power over others can be exercised in many ways. The most obvious is brute domination, where a person or institution controls or constrains what another is able to do. But power can also be exercised by influencing what others think they can do or even imagine as possible. It extends beyond physical or verbal domination to affecting the ways in which people view themselves, their rights and capabilities. There are also several ways of looking at power as a positive rather than a negative force. They argue that these positive expressions of power – sometimes called agency – can be recognized and supported in development cooperation efforts:

**Power within** describes the sense of confidence, dignity and self-esteem that comes from gaining awareness of one's situation and realizing the possibility of doing something about it. Power within is about being able to act. It can begin with the awareness that it is possible to act, and can grow in the process of taking action, developing skills and capacities, and realizing that one can effect change. **Power with** describes collective action or agency, and includes both the psychological and political power that comes from being united. Power with is often used to describe how those faced with overt or covert domination can act to address their situation: from joining together with others, through building shared understandings, to planning and taking collective action. These expressions of positive power or agency are reminders that power can be used positively as well as negatively, by the disempowered as well as the powerful. They encourage us to think about power as something that can be galvanized to create strategies and pursue opportunities for change. The concepts are often used together: people need 'power within' in order to act, and 'power to' in order to act collectively, while the 'power with' of shared understanding and action can also strengthen self-esteem and agency.

## Reflections on Power Cubed

### What forms of power over have you experienced?

*My children's father who made me feel powerless and codependent. Keeping silent to avoid confrontation. By not speaking my mind, I allow situations to remain unresolved and if there's a problem and it's gone unaddressed, it never gets fixed. - Nancy F.*

*I would have to say my past relationships: men, prison, cops, judges. The obvious answers... I'm in prison. I feel trapped. Less than, like they are superior. - Jessica W.*

*Forms of power I have experienced... I know all about the power over me before I landed myself in the current situation: drugs, money, cops, laws, medicine, tv, and public education. - Molly W.*

*When I was little, my parents had power over me. In school, principals and teachers had power over me. Even laws have some power over us. When someone that you love takes power over, that that affects not only me, but my kids. It can lead to a loss of control over my life and my mind. - Maria C.*

### How do you build your power within?

*If I focus on power over too much, it lower my self-esteem and keeps me silent; therefore I build resentments. So, I try to use positive affirmations. - Nancy F.*

*Keeping moving forward through life, picking myself back up and dusting myself off, I continually remind myself where I came from and how far from there I've come. - Jessica W.*

*I find that accepting and taking power over my own life and my attitude creates more power and gives me more control. - Molly W.*

*I tell myself that no one ever is going to decide for me but myself. - Maria C.*

### What types of power with do you have and how do you gain more?

*My family is supportive and with my positive friends, we are stronger together through communicating and brainstorming to solve problems and situations. - Nancy F.*

*My kids, my mother, friends, and my dude empowers me. I would like to continue my sobriety and see my mother get and stay sober and all of us build a solid productive, sober life. - Jessica W.*

*I feel like I have power with the community of people who are also consciously aware. I feel like we could have power over if we choose to and if we organized ourselves. But the goal is true, real freedom, so as a group, I don't feel like power over is what the goal is. - Molly W.*

*Now that I'm in prison, I do power with through my peer educator program. We work together to help prisoners when they first arrive at the prison and to help them through the process of being here. Eventually, I'd like to get a team of people and travel the world helping kids and families with no home or food. - Maria C.*





# THE WOMAN OF WORDS

by Dominique Christina

*She got somethin' to say. And she gon say it.*

Some women know what words are for...  
They slide them around their teeth  
Chew through the words  
Til the words believe them  
Lift their tongues from a watery grave  
Put flesh back in the bones...

What would we be without the stories?  
The pulled up parts of who we were  
Stretched out in hallelujahs  
And lord-have-mercy...

There are women who know how to stitch  
Us back together  
How to tell us what happened and  
Who did it...  
How to steal rivers and  
Starve silence.

There are women who remember the world  
When it was new and slick and  
Bubbling over in delicious.  
They tell us how we died  
They tell us we never die

There are villages at the bottom of their soup pots  
They are witch-medicine wonderful...

An untied bundle of mountain and stone

Bring us the stories, woman.  
Let us hold them in our hands.  
Let us keep them under our tongue.  
Let us suck out the venom of an undeclared life...

Bring us the stories, woman.  
Until we know them for ourselves.

**Description of the Woman of Words poem, an excerpt from Dominique Christina's book entitled *This is Woman's Work*:**

The Woman of Words is fat with narrative and lexicon. She is thick with remembered accounts. She is bubbling over in the telling and retelling of things and people and places and the long-ago stories of us. And the right-now stories of us. She is a listening potion. She is a rocking chair on a front porch, shelling peas and bringing the fruit of an old, old tale. She is dependent on getting all that memory to fit in her mouth. She is dependent on an audience. She is a voice that is steeped in superconsciousness. Her discourse is the song at the end of the world. Her discourse is the song that saves the world. It is the first and last big gift.

Storytelling is power. It is a way in to ourselves. A way to map out our experience. A way to find each other in the dark and to know all of our names. Storytelling gives us a way to remember what we did not know. And storytelling is medicine too.

The Woman of Words knows that history and memory are reliant upon the stories that get passed. She submerges her bones in them. She engages them. She interacts with them. She knows that the more you listen to the stories, the more you pay attention to them, the more they start to stare back at you. Stories offer instruction, clarity, guidance. They serve as warnings, celebrations. The organizing principles of any society are in the stories its citizens use to tell themselves who they are. And in the stories they use to illustrate who the "other guy" is. And who the enemy is, and who God is, and who the gods and goddesses and sacred figures are, and what battles were lost but valiantly fought, and what wars were won, and who the heroes were.





The Woman of Words is transmuting history and heritage in the stories she tells. She is showing you what the land looked like before you got here, how your grandfather got that hairline, how your grandmother induced herself into labor by eating collard greens and watermelon, how your family came to the city you were born in, how your sister coveted you when you were an infant. Each strand is a road, and the road is anthropomorphic, giving you whole volumes of yourself you did not know were there.

Language is the carrier of culture. It is voluminous and ever changing. I think about the passing down of stories that stretch across so many continental shifts and cultural evolutions. I think about the bodies of Africans in the bellies of slave ships and how I have never heard the passing down of stories about the Middle Passage. How there are so many stories about plantation life and cotton fields and sugarcane and the way it bites into your palms. So many stories about the lash and the bullwhip, and families and land, and overseers, and the songs slaves sang and the meetings they held, and on and on, but nothing about the Middle Passage. There is a deliberate omission of those stories. And with so many other stories with so much blood on them, that omission tells me that the Middle Passage must have held unspeakable, nameless horror. For it to be so eradicated from the mouths of my ancestors, to be so buried and unoffered. What we know of it comes in the form of statistics and sterile information . But sometimes stories can emerge out of the ones that are so deliberately *untold*. There is that too.

The Woman of Words is a study in oral tradition. Whether the stories are her own or others, she speaks them into existence. She wants them to fit well in your ears. She wants you to keep them with you, to repeat them, to know they are large and important. She is the speaker, the teacher, the orator, the open mouth. She will tell you and tell you and tell you. She is wider than any textbook could be. She is the Woman of Words, and she is put here – put here to speak.

If you are creating from this energy pattern, then you are right where you need to be. Your art is a story quilt. You are weaving what stories you carry in the work you do. You are creating to tell these stories – your story. You know how important it is to speak and speak again. Your creative process is an extension of the stories and the inclination to share them. The storyteller's heart is an old, old tale. Let your art make us know it well.

### Exercise for The Woman of Words

Tell an untold story. Think about your family's history and what you know of it. Think of the details provided to you and by whom. What questions did their story leave you with? What sounded unsaid to you? Perhaps it's a detail you wanted to know that they didn't have. Tell *that* story. Tell the story you don't know.



art by Jordan Alam and Jess X Snow

Let your imagination gallop here. Use what you do know to write what you don't know. For example, I don't know a whole lot about my grandmother's family history. I know her daddy was a traveling musician. I know her mama lost a child. I know her roots are indigenous. I have seen pictures of her parents and her siblings, including the boy who died. I imagine her daddy with a banjo, beating up the dirt roads in Danville, Arkansas. I can write the story of his unlit life. I can tell you what I think he kept in his pockets, what he smelled like, what affections he showed his wife. No one has given me these stories. But what stories I *do* have can generate the ones I do not.

Bring the unlit parts of a story you value into the full light of your imagination. Your ancestors will be pleased.

### **Webs of Support entries – The Woman of Words**

#### I Wish

There are many things in life that hurt us. There's many things in life that make us happy. When we are happy we wish for that happiness to never end. When we are sad we wish for the sadness to go away. Today my sadness hasn't ended. I go to sleep alone and wake up alone. I'm forced to do things for my mistakes. I wish that this sadness would end already. I wish that I could go to sleep with my kids and wake up next to them. I wish that prison didn't exist. But, that's just a wish. Please let me out, that's all I wish. Please, hear my pain and let me free. Please don't judge me anymore for my mistakes.  
by Maria R. Carrillo

\*\*\*\*\*

Overlooked.  
Being ran by a scam  
A scam on lives  
A scam for a dollar  
They protect society  
They make money  
I disagree  
They punish me?  
They put my name in the bank

Try to wash my spirit away  
The fire's been lit  
What doesn't kill you makes you...  
Has made me  
Given me time to decide, to choose  
Unclench my fist  
Fight with my hands open,  
Wiser than the enemy will ever be  
by Molly Weaver

\*\*\*\*\*

Speaking up and still not being heard. Like nobody hears a fucking word.  
Sick of hiding my feelings and downplaying my emotions,  
Hiding behind daily devotions.  
Hiding the real me – afraid to come out, so nobody knows what I'm really about.  
I'm a mother, a daughter, a sister, a friend, but behind this mask I have to pretend.  
So scared to show anyone the real me, will anyone like the real Tiffany?  
Abandonment, addiction, abuse, and pain.  
Don't call me a junkie, I still have a name.  
To love and be loved is what I desire but inside I have rage, a heart full of fire.  
Angry, hurt, and sad, in fear of rejection so the wall I put up is my only perfection.  
by Tiffany Weaver

\*\*\*\*\*

Today I live in a box,  
A box with a lock  
Thoughts of tomorrow  
Only bring pain  
Knowing it will only be the same  
Silent, alone, no bird chirps  
Watching the clock  
Hour by hour  
Calendar years, pages turned  
How old am I  
Older than last year  
Lessons learned  
Past forgotten  
Anger heals, I feel.  
by Sarah Johnson

\*\*\*\*\*

## WOMEN: BRING IT!

Women thrive and strive; we survive

Don't do it, don't speak it,  
Don't remember it, don't think it

We're fragile, she's weak  
We're soft, look sweet

NO! NO! NO!

She's strong, I'm courageous  
We're tough, she's contagious

We build, we create, we love  
She brings faith from above

Live laugh, dream, dance, cry  
Then scream!

Say what you mean and  
Mean what you say

When you shout it, scream it!

But... However you do it...  
BRING IT!

by Nancy Faust

\*\*\*\*\*

My environment's disgusting  
On every single level  
The smell is atrocious  
The bathroom filthy  
The water comes out looking milky  
The noise is constant  
The drama as well  
The cops disrespectful, degrading as hell  
Nothing in this place ever goes well  
The water is poison  
Oppression is real  
The only thing that keeps me sane  
Is playing along with all these games  
My pain is toxic  
My tears burn my face  
I hate being confined in this god awful place  
Sentenced, sad, suffering, sitting all alone

Longing so bad just to go home  
It's a daily battle to make it through  
Between the chemicals ingested,  
Crooked cops and plastic people too  
But what's worse is it's years 'til I can even get out  
But I'll wage my war to fight  
For my life 'til the gates open  
Up so I can take flight  
And cleanse myself  
And begin my new life.

by Arian Campbell

\*\*\*\*\*

We are not disposable,  
You can not just throw us away  
Even though society has tried  
We are still here standing tall  
The voice no one wants to hear.  
Like who we are and what we believe and think is no  
longer valid  
That was all stripped from us the moment that door  
slammed  
Shut behind us  
Have you ever had one of those dreams  
When you're screaming at the top of your lungs  
But no sound comes out?  
That's what it's like,  
Surrounded by people who can hear you but won't.

by Jessica Wyant

\*\*\*\*\*

I am relevant. You will hear me and see me. I do  
matter. I do exist.  
You can hear me loud and clear, and even if you  
couldn't I'd haunt you like a ghost.  
You know I am a strong woman with dedication,  
integrity, reliability, honesty, respect, and  
Can bear more pain than any man on earth.  
So I'll tell you like this:  
I wasn't heard when things went wrong so I have to  
pay the price.  
Here I sit out my life for a 40 piece,  
But not to complain because soon I'll be back on top  
once again  
In a WOman's world.

by Dawn Richburg

\*\*\*\*\*



# COMPASSION

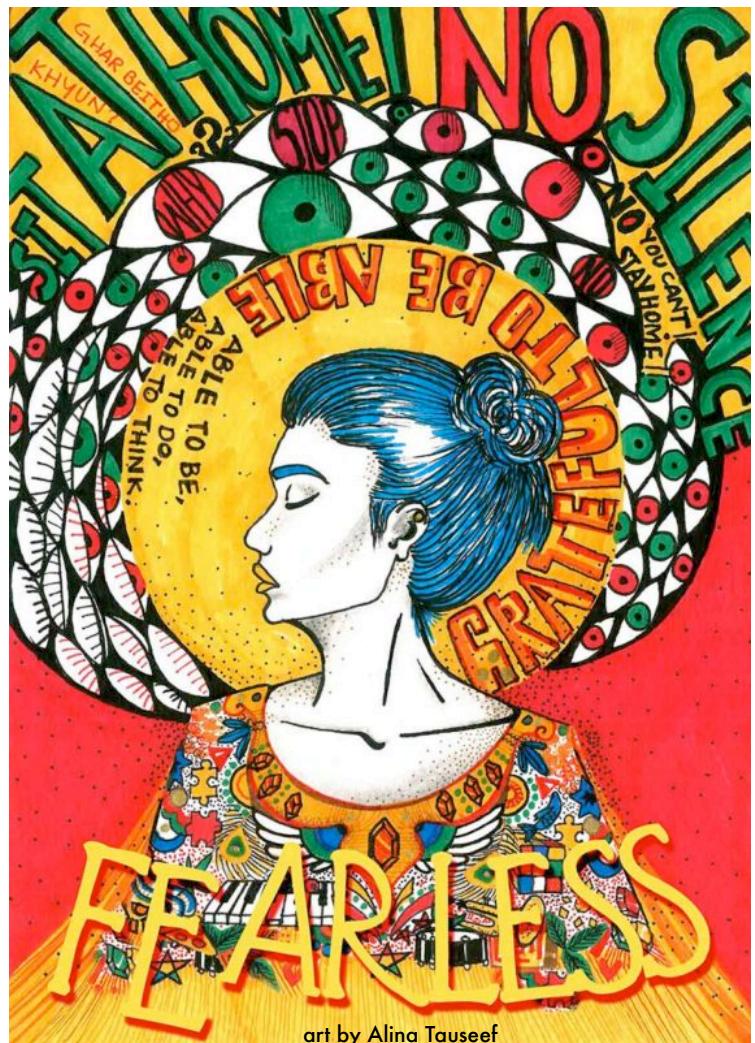
*(The following is an excerpt from “The Kindness Cure,” an article in The Atlantic, by David Desteno, 2015)*

How do you cultivate compassion? How do you ensure that at the end of the day, it’s your kindness and generosity for which you’ll be remembered? It’s a good question, for as much as we all agree that compassion is a virtue to be admired, as a society, we don’t seem to be very effective at instilling it. In fact, research by Sarah Konrath at the University of Michigan suggests we’re actually getting worse on this score. In reviewing the results of a standard assessment of empathy and compassion taken by 13,000 college students between 1979 and 2009, Konrath discovered that self-reported concern for the welfare of others has been steadily dropping since the early 1990s. According to this analysis, levels of compassion and empathy are lower now than at any time in the past 30 years, and perhaps most alarming, they are declining at an increasing rate.

Since acting compassionately usually means putting others’ needs ahead of your own, prompting yourself to act with kindness often requires not only vigilance but a bit of willpower. That’s not to say that relying on religious or philosophical guidance to prompt kindness won’t work at times. It will. But any method that depends on constant redirection of selfish urges and top-down monitoring of one’s moral code is apt to fail. Perhaps cultivating compassion situationally—so that it automatically emerges at the sight of others in need—would be more foolproof.

As a psychologist interested in moral behavior, I have long wondered if there might be a way to develop precisely this sort of reflexive compassion. As it turns out, I didn’t have to look too far; a means was hiding in plain sight.

Mindfulness meditation involves guided contemplation as a way to focus the mind. It commonly entails sitting in a quiet space for periods ranging from 20 minutes to an hour (depending on your level of advancement) and learning to guide awareness to the current moment rather than dwell upon what has been or is yet to come. The practice has lately been promoted for its abilities to enhance the brain and heal the body, but many of its most experienced teachers argue that its fundamental purpose involves the soul. As Trungram Gyaltrul Rinpoche, one the highest lamas in the Tibetan tradition, recently pointed out to me, meditation’s effects on memory, health, and cognitive skills, though positive, were traditionally considered secondary benefits by Buddhist sages. The primary objective of calming the mind and heightening attention was to attain a form of enlightenment that would lead to a deep, abiding compassion and resulting beneficence.



Yet for all the emphasis meditation instructors place on kindness, solid evidence linking mindfulness to compassion has been lacking. By historical accident, the first psychologists to study meditation were experts in neuroanatomy, information processing, and physiology, which, as you might guess, meant that these topics were where they focused their research. The result was a decade's worth of findings confirming that meditation enhances the functioning of brain and body—findings that continue to appear regularly, and serve as the basis for much of the publicity surrounding meditation. Unfortunately, the question of how meditation might influence social behavior wasn't, until very recently, on anyone's radar.

A few years ago, my research group at Northeastern University set out to change that. **If meditation was indeed capable of fostering compassion—a quality this world seems at times to have in short supply—we wanted to find proof.** To do that, we conducted a simple experiment, led by Paul Condon, a graduate student in my lab at the time, and subsequently published in *Psychological Science*. We recruited 39 people from the Boston area who had never meditated before and assigned them to one of two experimental groups. Those in the first completed an eight-week meditation course led by Willa Miller, a Buddhist lama. Those in the second were placed on a waitlist for the course.

After eight weeks had passed, participants returned to our lab one by one, supposedly to complete measures of attention and memory. In reality, the true experiment occurred in the waiting room, which had three chairs, two of which were already occupied by actors. A few minutes after each participant arrived and took the remaining seat, a third actor appeared, this one on crutches, wearing a boot typically used for a broken foot, and wincing in pain. Upon entering, she leaned against a wall, sighing audibly, as there was nowhere for her to sit. By design, the other actors ignored her. They thumbed through books or scanned their smartphones, paying no mind to her discomfort.

Situations like this—in which other people seem to be ignoring a person in distress—are known to inhibit

helping behavior, a phenomenon termed the “bystander effect.” If no one else is helping, why should you? In our study, among participants who didn't meditate, the bystander effect was on clear display. Only 16 percent of our subjects (or three people out of 19) offered their chair to the actor on crutches. But of those who meditated, half (10 of 20) immediately and spontaneously offered their seat to the woman. It's important to note that none of the participants had meditated before, and were all equally interested in signing up for the course (even though they knew some might be assigned to a waitlist). The resulting differences, then, didn't stem from any factors related to a pre-existing interest in or experience with mindfulness. The only difference between the groups was that one meditated for eight weeks and the other didn't. Nonetheless, eight weeks of meditation proved enough to triple the likelihood of this benevolent behavior, even under conditions known to discourage acts of kindness. And as any research psychologist will tell you, an intervention that can shift human behavior by three-fold holds a lot of promise.

To be certain about this level of promise, however, we wanted to replicate the finding while also examining whether it might be scalable. After all, how realistic is it to imagine that substantial populations of people will seek out a meditation master and sit at her feet to learn the practice of mindfulness? With these questions in mind, we set out to see whether mindfulness training using mobile devices might do the trick when it came to enhancing compassion. To this end, we repeated our previous experiment using a smartphone mindfulness app designed by an individual with Buddhist monastic training. In this version of the experiment, led by my graduate student Daniel Lim and recently published in *Plos One*, we randomly assigned 56 people to complete three weeks of either mindfulness training using the app, or cognitive skills training using a web-based, brain-training program. When we later exposed our participants to the waiting-room scenario, the results were similar to those from the original experiment: While only 14 percent of non-meditators (four people out of 29) offered their chair to the woman on crutches, 37 percent of the

meditators (10 people out of 27) acted to relieve her pain.

Outside of the waiting room, however, there are people everywhere who need compassion. But there's only so much to go around. As the Yale psychologist Paul Bloom regularly points out, it's well established that we feel more empathy for single individuals in pain than for larger numbers of suffering masses. Based on this fact, techniques for building compassion might seem futile. And yet, it's this very contradiction that helps to explain why meditation may be uniquely suited to fostering compassion.

Concern for others tends to nosedive as suffering grows because, thanks to our natural empathic response, distress is a bit contagious. When we encounter people in pain, we not only recognize their discomfort, we feel it—an experience that can quickly become overwhelming. As a result, people can shut down emotionally and turn away, a result known as “compassion fatigue.” Attesting to this fact, research confirms that compassion fatigue is quite prevalent among physicians and nurses whose work centers on oncology and palliative care—specialties that require daily confrontation of suffering, pain, and emotional loss.

But recent research by the neuroscientist Tania Singer and the Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard has shown that meditation-based training reduces activation of the brain networks associated with simulating the feelings of people in distress, in favor of networks associated with feelings of social affiliation. In other words, shared pain rapidly dissipates, but compassion remains.

This finding appears to offer a neuroanatomical basis for something many long-time practitioners of meditation have observed: a lack of compassion fatigue among meditators. As Thupten Jinpa, a Buddhist scholar and long-time translator for the Dalai Lama, told me “meditation-based training enables practitioners to move quickly from feeling the distress of others to acting with compassion to alleviate it.” Put simply, contemplative training appears to teach the mind to move directly from an observation of suffering to benevolent action, without becoming paralyzed by others' pain.

In short, then, our research suggests that mindfulness's most profound benefit may not be the one that's most often touted—adapting to a stressful, competitive, even unkind 24/7 world. Instead, meditation might fundamentally alter how we treat those around us. Corporations, physicians, and policy-makers who now push mindfulness as a technique for self-enhancement and physical wellbeing would do well to focus more on its potential for preventing everything from bullying to domestic violence to callousness and indifference. To see why, one only need look at the impressive results stemming from a meditation program that the Center for Wellness and Achievement Education recently offered in Visitation Valley School—a junior-high school in one of San Francisco's poorest neighborhoods where violence was a frequent occurrence. After providing instruction and instituting twice-daily meditation periods known as Quiet Time, a noticeable difference began to emerge. Over a four-year period, school records show that suspensions decreased by 79 percent. It's important to note that unlike the work from my lab, this was not a scientific study designed to control extraneous factors. Accordingly, it's possible that the decline may have as much to do with the benefits of meditation as it does with a school culture that decided to adopt Quiet Time in the first place. Either way, though, the result is striking and calls for additional study.

Perhaps most interesting, though, is that **when it comes to enhancing compassion, it may not matter much whether you begin the practice for self-advancement, health, or character building.** Arianna Huffington, the *Huffington Post* co-founder and one of today's most prominent evangelists for mindfulness, emphasizes this point. “It doesn't matter why you start meditating,” she told me, “as you'll get all the benefits—those you intended and those you didn't—if you stick with it.” Both she and Chade-Meng Tan, the creator of Google's immensely popular Search Inside Yourself course, which teaches mindfulness skills to the company's employees, compared it to exercise. “Even if you start going to the gym with the purpose of buddying up to the boss,” Meng recently told me, “You'll gain the benefit of better health if you keep on going. “Mindfulness, practiced correctly, works much the same way.”



## Submissions on Compassion

Compassion doesn't simply mean feeling sorry for people. Rather, compassion is a spontaneous feeling of connection with all living things. We are all the same. What you feel, I feel. There's no difference between us. The more we allow ourselves to be guided by compassion – to pause for a moment and try to see where another person is coming from – the less likely we are to engage in conflict. To awaken this inborn capacity to identify with and understand the experience of others, to awaken this within ourselves is one of the greatest gifts we can give to ourselves and to acknowledge the vulnerability of the human condition. Compassion ultimately is the same as love and implies a direct expansion of the heart, but it is a type of "love" without attachment or any expectation of getting anything in return. Recognizing the basic similarities in all of us, that we all have pain, feelings, stories, a past, a dream, fears, and desires, recognizing the human condition in each sentient being creates compassion in and of itself.

by Alexandra Veron

\*\*\*\*\*

I have friends and family who show me compassion when I got sentenced to four years. I feel that they love me and they were feeling my pain and fear. I have a lot of compassion for others... and I show compassion to myself by eating well, working out, meditating, and loving myself.

by Maria Carrillo

\*\*\*\*\*

Why, in certain situations, is my initial reaction not compassion? Even if logically, the given situation does not "deserve" compassion. Does the person not "deserve" compassion for the life events and conditioning that has enabled the poor reaction? Today I experienced this... Someone cried over something totally silly. Acted like an ass over a test they could pass right now. And I laughed at her. I can sugarcoat that shit all I want. And her reaction was totally irrational and ridiculous. But why did it take me more than an instant to feel compassion and to question what things in life she may have gone through that have conditioned her to behave in such a way? And how much fear she must have had to react that way? And my instant reaction is to laugh? Why? Because of my ego and that it makes me feel superior? Because I have been in a place in my life where I have the same fear in my life. Because I'm also scared to fail. And I'm not comfortable enough to admit that even to myself. So I put as much distance between myself and those feelings. Thus, the laughter. At the end of the day, she'll be okay and I didn't laugh in her face... But how could I have shown her compassion? How do I help her not to live in fear? And if I feel I can't approach her? Compassion is not about feeling bad for another, it's about helping them. As far as myself... I could easily be hard on myself for my reaction. But by examining my own feelings, I'm able to grow and find compassion for myself.

by Molly Weaver



# Compassion Meditation

Compassion meditation involves silently repeating certain phrases that express the intention to move from judgment to caring, from isolation to connection, from indifference or dislike to understanding. You don't have to force a particular feeling or get rid of unpleasant or undesirable reactions; the power of the practice is in the wholehearted gathering of attention and energy, and concentrating on each phrase. You can begin with a 20-minute session and increase the time gradually until you are meditating for half an hour at a time. If your mind wanders, don't be concerned. Notice whatever has captured your attention, let go of the thought or feeling, and simply return to the phrases. If you have to do that over and over again, it is fine.

- 1 To begin, take a comfortable position. You may want to sit in a chair or on cushions on the floor (just make sure your back is erect without being strained or overarched). You can also lie down. Take a few deep, soft breaths to let your body settle.
- 2 Closing your eyes or leaving them slightly open, start by thinking of someone you care about already—perhaps she's been good or inspiring to you. You can visualize this person or say her name to yourself, get a feeling for her presence, and silently offer phrases of compassion to her. The typical phrases are: "May you be free of pain and sorrow. May you be well and happy." But you can alter these, or use others that have personal significance.
- 3 After a few minutes, shift your attention inward and offer the phrases of compassion to yourself: "May I be free of pain and sorrow. May I be well and happy."
- 4 Then, after some time, move on to someone you find difficult. Get a feeling for the person's presence, and offer the phrases of compassion to her.
- 5 Then turn to someone you've barely met—the supermarket checkout woman or UPS man. Even without knowing his or her name, you can get a sense of the person, perhaps an image, and offer the phrases of compassion.
- 6 We close with the offering of compassion to people everywhere, to all forms of life, without limit, without exception: "May all beings be free of pain and sorrow. May all be well and happy."



art by Josh MacPhee

# Poetry and Thoughts

Good in, Bad out.

Boundaries help us to distinguish our property so that we can take care of it. They help us to “guard our heart with all due diligence.” We need to keep things that will nurture us inside our fences and keep things that will harm us outside. In short, boundaries help us keep the good in and bad out. Sometimes, we have bad on the inside and good on the outside. In these instances, we need to be able to open up our boundaries to let the good in and the bad out. Life is full of boundaries with different kinds of people. Examples include, boundaries in dating, in marriage, with kids, and with your family, friends, work, and God.

The most basic boundary that defines you is your physical skin. People often use this boundary as a metaphor for saying that their personal boundaries have been violated; “He really gets under my skin.” Your physical self is the first way that you learn that you are separate from others. As an infant, you slowly learn that you are different from the mother or father who cuddles you. The skin boundary keeps the good in and the bad out. It protects your blood and bones, holding them on the inside and all together. It also keeps germs outside, protecting you from infection. At the same time, skin has openings that let the “good” in, like food, and the “bad” out, like waste products.

In the physical world, a fence or some other kind of structure usually delineates a boundary. In the spiritual world, fences are invisible. Nevertheless, you can create good protective fences with your words. The most basic boundary-setting word is NO. It lets others know that you exist apart from them and that you are in control of you. Being clear about your nos and your yeses can help establish boundaries with others.

by Maria Carrillo

\*\*\*\*\*

## The Fight

Am I wrong and she’s right? I can’t tell who won this fight. It don’t matter, that’s alright, in all reality we both ain’t right. Is it this place? Is it the lights? I can’t tell who lost their mind. Is it the space? Is it the time? It’s okay cause I’ll be just fine. In a few days, maybe nine we’ll make up then start to cry. That’s alright, it happens sometimes, here in a little bit we will both be done with our time. Then it won’t matter who’s wrong and who’s right cause by then we’ll be free living our own separate lives.

by Darci Bower

\*\*\*\*\*

Meditation, affirmation, for all of creation  
War songs, love songs  
Different sides of the same coin  
Same side of the same coin  
Perspective is everything  
My perspective is my own  
My role is my own  
These are things I own  
Take some responsibility  
I’ve seen some crazy dreams manifested

by Molly Weaver

\*\*\*\*\*

When I think of you, you disgust me. I despise you.  
It’s amazing how you can take mlove and flip it into hate. I see you and I hate you. I hate how you feel, touch, think, smell, yet you...

by Dawn Richburg

\*\*\*\*\*



## Who is She?

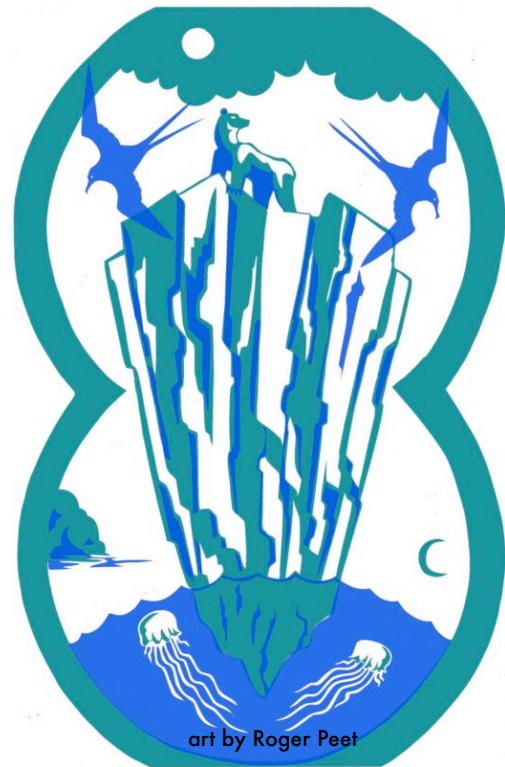
Who is she? Pretty, fit, smart. She wants to be  
That's all she sees, trying to be.  
Who is she? Impressionable, witty, and funny.  
Absolutely.  
Who is she? Deep down?  
She is alone, scared, frightened. How could this be?  
Deep down she's frustrated, angry, ashamed. That's  
crazy.  
Deep down she's broken, damaged, and quiet.  
I don't believe, what I see, she don't know.  
Who is she? Can she know?  
Who is she? She is strength, fire, strong.  
Who is she, she don't know.  
Who is she... will she... see... that she can be  
Incredible, charming, calm.  
No she don't know.  
Who is she? She is motivated, loyal, driven  
Absolutely! Who is she within me trying  
To be telling me I can be.  
Who is she? Love, honesty, and compassionate  
That would be easy to see.  
Who is she? What she feels they won't believe how  
could this be...  
Who is she? Disrespect, hurt crazed. No, No, No.  
Sick, heartless, pained (hardly). No, not me.  
No way. Who is she? Tired, scared, depressed  
Only for a moment. But then she sees, knows, feels.  
Who is she coming back to me  
I think she thrives to be alive.  
Who is she? Oh yeah, that's me: Unbreakable,  
beautiful,  
Strong. I can't imagine why.  
Who is she just one more time.  
Who is she? Unbreakable, hopeful, driven. Always.  
Yep, that's ME. Never, ever will she ever just be.  
Who is she?

by Darci Bower

\*\*\*\*\*

## # Numbers #

In here, people don't have names, just #s. Get them  
in, but hardly out, it's so true but hard to see. Some  
how I became just another #. This can't be, just



art by Roger Peet

another # lost among society. Lately it's been a  
travesty, too many people there at full capacity.  
It don't matter they don't see, all they see is # # #  
which means \$ \$ \$. One of these days I'll be freed,  
and I'll never have to worry about offending  
anybody. Old #, new #, in the end it's all the same, as  
long as you have a 6-digit # to repeat constantly! It's  
so sad to me, all these new and strange, very different  
people all among me. I try to be the # that blends in  
with everybody. The same routine that's what I need,  
so I don't find trouble with anybody. So many people  
in such a small facility, I can't imagine what it's like  
to be around nobody. Hopefully soon they will know,  
and start letting more people go, because they can't  
afford them so. Meds, food, tissue, clothes, and  
everything in between, they didn't think all this  
through more properly. Now it has become way too  
overwhelming. All these new people, even the  
biggies, all these stupid people who are in charge of  
me. They just don't take the time to think rationally.  
But as for now, I just have to be, I know that at least  
I'm the one seeing and thinking very clearly. As for  
now I'm just another #, another # lost among society,  
one of these days I'll be free, and I'll be able to live a  
life with clarity.

by Darci Bower

## All I feel

All I feel, here I set all alone  
So much pain in my heart  
I can't believe things have gone so wrong  
It's too late for a brand new start.

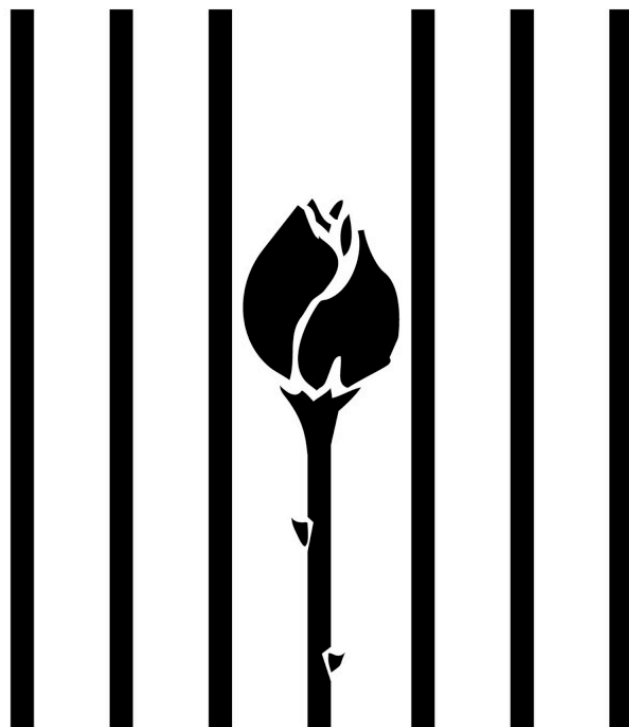
I cry and I pray when I'm all alone  
Don't know if "He" can hear  
At night, I cry myself to sleep  
Counting down the tears.

I think I'm at a million now,  
So many more to come  
All my fears are pushing me  
With nowhere left to run.

So I'll face my fears head on  
It's the only option I can see,  
Believe me when I say "that it's not easy being me."  
Through it all I can say at least I've kept it real

Pain is all I know these days  
Pain is all I can feel.

by Arian Campbell



art by Un Mundo Feliz

# YOGA IN PRISON

Most prisoners suffer from Complex Trauma, chronic interpersonal trauma experienced early in life such as abandonment, hunger, homelessness, domestic violence, sexual abuse, bullying, discrimination, drug and alcohol abuse, and witnessing crime. We call this "original pain." These experiences, imprinted by the terrifying emotions that accompany them, are held deeply in the mind, and perhaps more importantly, in the body, with the dissociative effects of impulsive/reactive behavior, and tendencies toward drug and alcohol addiction as well as violence. Carrying unresolved trauma into their lives impacts everything they do, often landing them in prison, where they experience even more trauma.

Traditionally, cognitive behavioral therapists have helped people process unresolved trauma, but more recently psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers -- many working with US military veterans -- acknowledge that *embodiment practices* such as yoga enriched with mindfulness practices can have *more impact* in alleviating the symptoms that lead to both reactive behaviors and stress related disease. Yoga as a mindfulness practice is our tool for reengaging prisoners with their bodies to restore the connection between mind, heart and body.

# morning yoga routine

Length: 10-15 minutes

Calories Burned: 88

Instructions: Hold each pose for 10 seconds and repeat 6 times.



Mountain Pose



Forward Bend



Left Facing Warrior



Right Facing Warrior



Plank



Downward Dog



Upward Dog



Downward Dog



Forward Bend



Upward Salute



Mountain Pose



Corpse

# nighttime yoga routine

Length: 15 minutes

Calories Burned: 60

Instructions: Hold each pose for 30 seconds and repeat 3 times.



Child's Pose



Boat



Seated Forward Fold



Butterfly



Downward Dog



Corpse



Half Pigeon



Happy Baby



Camel



# GAMES AND PLAY

In the spring of 2017, Webs of Support welcomed a guest by the name of Julie. She introduced the radical notion that people should “play” more. We deserve to not take ourselves so seriously and to have more fun in our everyday lives. Julie believes that we can use our bodies and senses to learn more about ourselves, others, and the world around us.

The following games are directly from her notes and similar to how we practiced them in our class. If possible, try to get a few people together and try playing these same games and seeing what they do for your group:

## **Thumb Game:**

First, stand in a circle. Extend both of your arms to your sides (left and right arms parallel with the floor). Open your right palm, making sure it is flat and facing the ceiling. With your left hand, make a “thumbs down” sign. When your group is doing this, everyone’s right palm should be underneath the thumb of the person to the right. Everyone’s left thumb should be pointed down and touching the palm of the person to the left.

When the facilitator says “go,” grab the thumb of your neighbor without having your thumb grabbed!

1-2-3-Go!

Try having another person count. Do this a few times, with people taking turns counting. Also try to have someone count in another language.

## **Heads Up - Heads Down**

Everyone in the group should stand in a circle, with their heads down. When the facilitator says “Heads Up,” everyone should lift their head and stare at **one** person in the circle, **not breaking eye contact**. If you make eye contact with someone, you two are out! The remaining people should tighten up the circle and put their heads down until the facilitator again says “Heads Up.” Keep going until there are two winners!

## **Discussion for the Thumb Game and Heads Up - Heads Down**

Within the context of these games, what dynamics are worth mentioning as we are building and developing relationships with each other (e.g. tension and release, rhythm, group agreements, agreed focus, leadership, rules)? Does this help emphasize the importance of fun?

## **POETRY AND THE FIVE SENSES**

Julie also shared a poetry writing exercise:

Do not write in complete sentences, but respond in three, four, or five- word phrases. If a particular question doesn’t interest you, or if nothing occurs to you, skip it. You are an expert in the world of the sensory/five senses.

- What do you hear if you are in a car and it is raining outside? What do you feel if you are standing outside?
- Describe the odor of gasoline.
- What sounds do you hear if you are walking with heavy boots in deep snow? (Don't use the word 'crunch'.)
- What does hair feel like? Anybody's hair.
- Describe the texture of skin. Feel it.
- How would you describe fear? If you've never been afraid, don't answer. If you have, you don't have to answer either, unless you want to.
- Describe the odor of freshly cut grass.
- Describe the sensation of placing an ice cube against your lips.
- Is there a particular odor in the air before a rainfall? Describe it.
- If your hand slides across a piece of silk, what sensation do you feel?
- If you were to walk barefoot along a beach of pebbles, what would you feel?
- What does your hand feel like?
- What does someone else's hand feel like?
- Describe the taste of salt.
- Describe the flight of a seagull.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Prison Activist Resource Center**

will mail you a free booklet of resources in Colorado and around the country, like legal advice, books behind bars organizations (free textbooks and other books), college resources, prison newsletters, and pen pal services. Write them a letter and request a free resource guide:

Prison Activist Resource Center  
PO Box 70447  
Oakland, CA 94612

**Prison Yoga Project** seeks to make yoga available to prisoners, including to women behind bars. Please write them to request information and/or a yoga booklet:

Prison Yoga Project  
PO Box 415  
Bollinas, CA 94924

### **Also try:**

The Give Back Yoga Foundation  
900 Baseline Road 13B  
Boulder, CO 80302

**Prison Health News** is a quarterly newsletter by and for prisoners about health care. Write them for a free subscription to their newsletter:

Prison Health News  
c/o Philadelphia FIGHT  
1233 Locust Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

**Prison Legal News** is a monthly 72-page magazine on the rights of people in prison and recent court rulings. A sample issue costs \$3.50 and a yearly subscription costs \$30/year.

Write them at:  
PLN

PO Box 1151  
Lake Worth, FL 33460

**Prisoner Diabetes Handbook** is a 37-page handbook written by and for prisoners dealing with diabetes. Free for one copy. Also write them at:

PLN  
PO Box 1151  
Lake Worth, FL 33460

**Inside Books Project** provides a free national resource guide for people in prison, with listings of organizations that can send free books or info on finding legal help, pen pals, release planning, publications, and more. Write them for the free resource guide at:

Inside Books Project  
c/o 12<sup>th</sup> Street Books  
827 West 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

**AIDS Library** answers questions that people have about any health condition, not just HIV/AIDS.

Write them at:  
Philadelphia FIGHT  
1233 Locust Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

**POZ Magazine** is a lifestyle, treatment and advocacy magazine for people living with HIV/AIDS. Free subscriptions to HIV-positive people in prison. Write them at:

POZ Magazine  
462 Seventh Ave, 19<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10018-7424

**Black and Pink** is an open family of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer) prisoners and “free world” allies

who support each other. Free monthly newsletter and pen pal program for incarcerated LGBTQ people. Write them for the newsletter:

Black and Pink  
614 Columbia Road  
Dorchester, MA 02125

**Earth First! Journal** sends a free monthly newsletter to prisoners interested in environmental issues. Write them for a free newsletter:

EF! Journal  
PO Box 964  
Lake Worth, FL 33460

**PEN Writing Program for Prisoners** provides incarcerated people with skilled mentors and audiences for their work. Write for a free *Handbook for Writers in Prison* at:

PEN American Center  
588 Broadway, Suite 303  
New York, NY 10012

**Reproductive Health, Living, and Wellness Project** provides a free 50+ page manual about incarcerated women’s reproductive health. Write them for the free manual:

Justice Now  
1322 Webster St. #210  
Oakland, CA 94612

**Tenacious Publication** is a newsletter written by women prisoners and offers free subscriptions to women in prison. Write them at:

Tenacious c/o Victoria Law  
PO Box 20388  
Tompkins Square Station  
New York, NY 10009

