



the.  
Compassionate  
Activist

Transforming the World from Within

Lucy Draper-Clarke PhD

*Lucy offers a unique perspective on compassionate activism drawn from her decades of living in Africa and working to help uphold and highlight the indigenous mindfulness traditions of the continent. Her work is authentic, heartfelt, and deeply beneficial.*

Charlie Morley,  
Bestselling Author of 'Dreaming through Darkness'

*Lucy has the incredible gift of encouraging everyone around her to take the next daring step on their journey, both on and off the yoga mat or meditation cushion. She generously shares the wisdom and joy from her own practice and life experiences, and in this way, inspires others to follow their own path to growth.*

*May this work bring possibility to many more aspiring movers and shakers in the world!*

Steven Heyman  
Yoga Works, South Africa

*Lucy's bubbling enthusiasm for life in both its delightful and challenging aspects, infuses readers of her book with well-being and the resolve to live with gratitude. The *Compassionate Activist* is filled with simple, practical wisdom that makes for crystal-clear guidance and the development of personal insights. It is an easy-to-read workbook, with accessible stories illustrating the concepts described. May this lovely offering open hearts along the way.*

Robyn Sheldon  
Author of 'The Mama Bamba Way'  
and 'The Liminal Lands'

*During the writing of this book, two spiritual leaders, whom I have long admired, passed away: Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.*

*They were both compassionate activists in the profoundest sense. Thich Nhat Hanh was a peace activist, who inspired the practice of Engaged Buddhism throughout the world. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, known as the Rabble-Rouser for Peace, played a vital role in South Africa's transition to democracy.*

*This book is dedicated to them, and to those who come after them: the leaders of the past, and the compassionate and engaged community who will lead us into the future.*

# Foreword by Rutendo Ngara

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## **Wholeness at a Time of Holeness**

The year was 2020. Despite humanity's quests for 2020 vision through the age of modernity, clarity of seeing instead found the world wading through murky waters in a raging storm - blindfolded. 2020 was a time of unraveling.

At the hands of a microscopic sentient being, the COVID-19 virus, the world stopped in its tracks. Borders were closed, systems were shut down, economies catapulted into recession, health systems were strained, millions of sources of livelihood were lost and many of the prevailing ills of society were accentuated. The repetitive pleas of George Floyd, "I can't breathe!", as he was suffocated to death by a white policeman on 25 May 2020 reflected not only the modus operandi of the virus in restricting the body's respiratory system's ability to sustain life, but the constrictive nature of oppressive systems worldwide. "I can't breathe!" similarly spoke to the shifts in environmental factors as climate change becomes a startling reality.

The pandemic catapulted the world into pandemonium, unearthing the collective pathologies of humanity – seen only in the dilated pupils of society. Yet even as the virus mutates into normality, wars of differing shades and timbres rage on. In its intelligence, the virus has been a catalyzing force. In its belligerence, the virus has been an illuminator. In its resilience, the virus has been an activator. To Nigerian philosopher, Bayo Akomolafe, Coronavirus is at once a Mother, a Monster and an Activist. He tells us, "The times are urgent, so let us slow down."

During the throes of the chaos, a group of seasoned activists, scholars, artists, healers, visionaries and wisdom keepers began to gather in circle

around the proverbial baobab tree, seeking to create new systems, foster new ways of working and build new paradigms for the future. In this, the Earthrise Collective braids the threads of Activism, Ancient Wisdom and Alternatives into a tapestry. As founding member of this Collective, Kabir Bavikatte, reflects, “The vision of Earthrise is one of Wholeness”. This is a Wholeness that reminds us that we are ‘a part’ and not ‘apart’ from life. This Wholeness is relational, while allowing each individual to embody their own ‘isnesses.’ This Wholeness affords each node or knot a place in the cosmic web. This Wholeness is at once a crease in the fabric of Life... and the very fabric itself.

Yet this fabric is frayed at the edges. This crease has threads running bare. This vision is marred by the reality of “holeness”. Holes in our thinking. Holes in our doing. Holes in our being. Isness has long given way to an ‘othering’ proclivity. Innovativeness has long stepped aside for dwindling creativity. An apartheid of ideas - a segregative propensity - has bound us in captivity. The dimming spark of life creates shadows seen only at the dusk of an epoch.

At this time of turning we seek a common passion; we seek engaged activity; we seek an alternative activism in our present, rooted in ancient wisdom, as a feedback loop to shepherd us into the arms of a benevolent future. This is a moment that calls out to the spirit of Sankofa. It is a moment screaming for Ntu – the original real reality, the source-force and the unified field that animates Ubuntu. It is a moment calling for both outer and inner revolution.

Lucy Draper-Clarke’s work provides us such a bridge. The Compassionate Activist draws many tributaries from universal wisdoms, rooting us into the mutual duality of reality. Activism can foster meaningful engagement only if it takes time out to contemplate. It is in the stillness that action is born. It can only illuminate and shift the status quo when it delves into the shadows that merge into the night, eventually making way for the clarity of the day. In a time when inequality and lack of equity abounds, activism calls us into the realms of equanimity. We slow down into the urgency. Trans-formation, re-restoration and re-generation, can only begin from within.

This work- and play-book gives us new tools to create alternative fabrics of reality. It gives us new threads to weave fresh tapestries of creativity. It gives us new imaginaries to manifest emergent fractals of activity. It brings a 2020 vision of wholeness into a time of holeness.

*Rutendo L Ngara - healer, philosopher and engineer*

# Foreword by Warren Nebe

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In a time of profound hurt. In a time when people are walking wounded. In a time of local, national, and global catastrophe, Lucy Draper-Clarke's *The Compassionate Activist* opens a door for us to bridge an old world order; one that will surely see our demise as a human species if we do not evolve into a conscious, compassionate, and responsive world to address the urgent crises we face.

*The Compassionate Activist* is born in a country that is the most unequal in the world. South Africa is plagued by a legacy of Colonialism, Apartheid, and corruption, in a context of crippling global inequality, as witnessed by the COVID-19 pandemic, where unemployment, substance use, and violence are epidemics. The country's public discourse has been hijacked by international and local economic and reactionary forces that propel dialogue into binaries, minimising complexity and nuance, creating alternate narratives devoid of reality, and rendering it difficult to usher in critical change through informed, meaningful conversation and action. These challenges are by no means unique to South Africa.

My work with young people studying to become facilitators of social change constantly reveals that they are attuned to the complex reality they find themselves in, and understand significantly the crises humanity faces. Still, they all too often express overwhelm and hopelessness. The greater the national and global crises, the more they turn inward, focusing on the domestic or personal realms. In this space of the individual, an area limited in context, young people are becoming psychologically entangled, losing significant social relationships, and battling mental health demons that are often the business of a public health emergency and not a private affair. This implosion of self in the world sorely needs agency, voice, and social

engagement as its medicine. Our desire may be for the old world order that has produced the climate emergency to implode, but we certainly don't want our children and youth to implode. This is no answer for finding our way into the future. So, how do we begin to map routes for ourselves, young and old, to become the change we urgently seek?

I recently worked with a large team of professional facilitators for gender-based violence (GBV) prevention for a mining company and its surrounding communities in a remote, arid region in South Africa. Over three months, we engaged with peoples' stories about micro and macro gender-based aggressions, stories of traumatic memory, and stories that spoke to the present unspeakable crisis. Our purpose was to listen to diverse peoples' stories from all sectors and levels of the workplace, within the mines and communities, to witness those stories and reflect them back to those who had the courage to tell them publicly. GBV is a complex matter. It requires a depth of engagement that goes to the heart of what social change requires. A challenge arises when the problem is of epidemic proportions, just like in a war context, where everyone is implicitly or explicitly implicated. Our job is to activate and unravel the stories of violence enacted through the politics of gender; to name the problem so we can understand what it is we need to address; and to find ways to keep people listening and engaged.

Early on in the process, I needed to reflect personally on how I was showing up. Here I was, inviting stories about violence into the public space, no matter who the teller was and what the content was, with the promise that I could hold, witness, and reflect them back, without judgement. On the one hand, I was entering the space as an activist seeking to unearth the causes of the triggers of violence, whether large or small. My position was clear. We needed to fight this scourge in our society. On the other hand, I needed to be a compassionate witness the storytelling to elicit a public understanding of the violence. It was, in this instance, a moment of spiritual reckoning. Not only did I need to reflect on how GBV has permeated my life, but I also had to revisit the permeable relationship between victim and perpetrator. In this, I was guided by my training, professional experience, and approach. Alice Walker's work served as a guiding force. The cyclical nature of the abuser and abused when trauma remains buried and unconscious is at the heart of this work. But, still. This was not enough to give me the grounding, integrity, and authenticity I was personally looking for.

What did I need to do to face a group of people with integrity?  
What did I need to do to be present, to listen, and to hold space without

judgement, fear, or unconscious punitive nuances indicated in the eye, head, hand movement, or verbal utterance? How could I be compassionate in my presence?

In a moment, standing before white Afrikaans men whom I'd grown up fearing because of the historical, cultural, and political violence; meeting the eyes of Black men and women who distrust men like me with white skins; facing men who fear and hate Queer men like me; being repulsed by those who clearly don't believe GBV is a problem; and looking at women and men who hold painful, anguish-filled stories, I meditated. If I love myself enough, I said to myself, I can love you.

In that moment, I could stand separate, firmly rooted on the ground, present to who was in the room, and open to receive their stories. All of their stories. I could be the activist helping to unearth the individual, social, and systemic stories of trauma, and I could be the compassionate witness who hears the stories of psychological, social, and professional cycles of abuse. Being compassionate with myself, with all of who I am, allowed me to not lose myself in the overwhelm of trauma and stress embedded in each and every story. bell hooks' legacy of transformative love was my teacher here. Being compassionate allowed me to be separate, but connected with every storyteller. It sustained my ability to keep showing up as a compassionate activist. Sustainable change in a time of unprecedented crises that emerged from love.

It is here that Lucy's *The Compassionate Activist* offers a significant way forward for our work in education, development, therapy, and activism. Drawing on her own rich experience that cuts across three continents, carefully bridging Western traditions of learning and science with Eastern traditions of spirituality, and landing in Southern Africa, Lucy manages to lucidly navigate and integrate pathways for becoming a transformative activist in the 21st century.

This book is a powerful road map for seasoned and young activists worldwide. And here, I speak of activists as our future leaders, teachers, economists, therapists, artists, social workers, farmers, and climate change and sustainable environmental practitioners. It is a deeply felt and gentle evocation for all of us to take stock of our internal resources, attitudes, and assumptions about activism, guiding us to explore what will sustain us in becoming genuinely compassionate in, and through, our activism.

Above all, and importantly, it offers hope in a time of many and immense challenges.

*Warren Nebe, Founder, Drama for Life, University of the Witwatersrand*



# Preface

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In December 2004, I embarked on a dream holiday. Flying from Botswana to Thailand, I was bound for a yoga retreat on an island paradise. Although I arrived alone, the yoga practice opened hearts and minds, forging lasting friendships.

A few days after I'd left the yoga centre, shocking headlines dominated the news, accompanied by devastating images of the tsunami that had wiped out large areas of Asia, including the yoga centre where I had stayed. Within a week, I was back on the coast of Thailand, working alongside the retreat manager, Bodhi Garrett, the Thai staff, and the overseas volunteers, to set up the North Andaman Tsunami Relief organisation.

It was a time of great sorrow, as we witnessed peoples' losses, again and again. Entire villages had been washed into the sea. We cried together at the suffering of the tsunami victims and their families. Yet we also connected, played and laughed, drawing great meaning from the work. Joy somehow seemed to co-exist with our sorrow; the fellowship of people working together with a shared intention. I took on the role of storyteller, communicating with overseas donors to develop a sense of solidarity, and accompanying Thai village residents as they worked to rebuild their lives.

Without feeling the depths of sadness, I'm not sure we could ever have appreciated the bubbling moments of delight; of helping to plan and rebuild houses, schools, and businesses. We witnessed people making conscious choices as to how to navigate their lives going forward. These sights, stories, and experiences somehow turned the disaster into an

opportunity for development. Joy and sorrow were the warp and weft that weaved together a consoling blanket of humanity. It was a deeply inspiring year, during which I was able to learn that running an organisation from ethical principles could give enormous power and reach to our efforts.

Disaster relief is a specific type of activism. The world was on our side, sending money so that we could support the communities to develop in whichever ways they chose. It was a year of magic and manifesting; whatever project we were asked to develop, or support, seemed to come into being almost spontaneously.

Fast forward five years, and I found myself in Johannesburg, setting out on the path of a PhD at the University of the Witwatersrand, an institution known for its commitment to the end of apartheid. I was conducting research on mindfulness in education, as my own experiences had revealed its powerful impact on me, my relationships, and my work.

I wanted to see whether the student teachers who learnt these practices, could find meaning, joy, and compassion, in their classrooms, and inspire a new generation of learners. What I actually found was story after story of suffering: a student thrown out of his accommodation by the Red Ants (an eviction company), stories of hijackings and break-ins, tales of families divided, and the pressures placed on first generation black African students whose families were depending on them to study, work and send money home.

The results of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale that I administered were higher than for clinical populations in other countries, yet these were students going into schools; students from whom we expected compassion and care – qualities that they so rarely received or experienced themselves.

I was overwhelmed by the enormity of the problems in the Education sector, and when I started connecting with other educators and changemakers, I could feel that sense of despair and exhaustion, even cynicism, from all sectors – social entrepreneurs, human rights' advocates, and climate justice activists. It seemed that the promise of the Rainbow Nation had lost its brilliance, and everything was turning grey. The political transformation of the '90s had not been matched by social and economic transformation, and a sense of despondency and bitterness was palpable.

I started wondering how I could navigate these dual experiences – the inspiration, joy, and social cohesion, in Thailand, and the polarisation,

and sense of overwhelm, in South Africa. Over time, it became clear that I wanted to share how to keep touching into joy with others, even in the midst of sorrow. To this end, I've since been exploring how contemplative practices can inform the work of changemakers and activists.

I believe that compassionate activism is about cultivating an ethic of care and engagement, bringing people together to address humanity's many challenges. This relationship with the world is accessible to more than just those who might identify with the identity and term of 'activist'.

I believe it offers an expansive and inclusive approach to staying involved with the world around us, based on the willingness to focus on change within ourselves.

Compassionate activism is for everyone; we can all bring joy and compassion to the world around us.



Pic 1. The Compassionate Activist, by Emma Mary Mills

# Introduction

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*“Yesterday I was clever;  
so I wanted to change the world,  
Today I am wise; so I am changing myself.”  
~ Rumi*



Rumi’s words ring so true when I look at the trajectory of my own life. At university in England, my friends and I would spend hours discussing how to end global disparities and north-south divides. We were horrified by the apartheid system in South Africa, and the power of multinational companies to hold developing world countries to ransom. We wrote assignments about the movement of capital around the world, and the cycles of boom and bust that left so many human and environmental casualties.

It was the late 1980s, and we already knew about climate change, unable to understand why no-one was doing anything. We’d take part in heated arguments, assuming everyone who did not agree with us was stupid, rather than trying to take the time to understand their point of view. We rarely discussed our own privilege, and the way of life we took for granted. Our focus was outward, not inward.

I started writing this book before the COVID-19 pandemic in an attempt to answer the question: “What can we do, in our individual and

collective lives, to create a shift to a more inclusive, cohesive, and life-sustaining world?”

The need seems greater now. We’ve become deeply aware of our interconnectedness, with other people, and with our natural world. We’ve also become aware of our human frailty, and the impact of isolation on our mental health. So many people have experienced deep suffering, and even more have shown their extraordinary capacity for care. The pandemic laid bare the pervasive and persistent nature of oppressive structures such as racism and sexism. I often get disillusioned that this structural oppression so severely limits the potential of the global majority, and I have to find ways to remind myself that when we transform as individuals, and come together in solidarity with others, structures can change, too.

The compassionate actions of individuals and communities have helped us to navigate this time of groundlessness. We may once have thought that our lives followed a predictable pattern, but the pandemic revealed how little control we truly have.

So, what can we do amidst overwhelming uncertainty?

We can attend to what is within, and around, us moment-to-moment. And we must also keep in mind the societal norms and structures that support, or diminish, this personal agency.

I’ve been heartened by the work of Erica Chenoweth, an American political scientist and professor of public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, which reveals that only 3.5% of a population needs to be involved in peaceful protests for political change to take place. It is my hope that the contents of this book serve as one more inspiration to access that tipping point into a caring and regenerative future.

Within these pages, I highlight the need for inner transformation, and the willingness to address the structural and global issues that harm so many living beings. I reflect on how to support the suffering of others, from an ethic of care, without getting mired in anger or sorrow, through the inclusion of both contemplative practices and practical actions.

This is activism as a relational practice, rather than activism as conflict. It is engagement inspired by love, not hate. It is mobilisation through the gathering of people, not blasting them apart. It is feeding, not fighting, because we need to feed ourselves, while we feed those around us.

The practices I share are drawn from the places I have lived, and the inspiring people I have met along the way. Although English by nationality, I was born in Sri Lanka and educated in the United Kingdom, before settling in Botswana and South Africa.

My feet are grounded in the Eastern wisdom traditions, particularly Buddhism. My head has been influenced by a Western style of education, and I'm fascinated by contemplative neuroscience and evolutionary psychology. More recently, and most importantly, my heart has expanded through the joys and sorrows of life in Africa. This is where I've learnt about the importance of community, and the relational philosophy of Ubuntu. My inner questions have shifted from, "Who am I?" to "How can I live well, in relationship with others?"

Admittedly, it's been hard to know when to stop writing, as I shift, and change, and engage, with the world in different ways. But at a certain point, I must draw a line, and set my ideas free to be tried and tested, and then improved upon by others. I offer this book onwards, with the deep wish that it evolves and grows as required by our world, and the beings that live within it. I sense that we have moved into a new time; time to transform the world from the inside out, and transform ourselves from the outside in.

## **Readers of this Book**

My intention is to offer support to all changemakers, wherever you feel called to make an impact. You may be an extroverted activist, energised by being out in the world, getting things done, and working in social or climate justice arenas. Alternatively, you may be more introverted, drawn to the contemplative, creative, or academic side; sitting alone or in nature, focusing quietly on your family and community, while creating knowledge or art. Every now and again, you may find yourself being called upon, perhaps unwillingly, to engage.

Whatever role you play, we all need the support of others. I've witnessed too many wonderful, passionate, and open-hearted people burn out. They become cynical and overwhelmed by the fear of what life might be like for their children, and the never-ending challenges to humanity.

I've also met many meditators and spiritual practitioners who know that inner transformation is necessary, as it's where we have the most

ability to affect change. Yet sometimes, they extract themselves from the world, believing that they are not wise enough or compassionate enough to engage with social and climate justice issues. My suggestion is to make our relationship with the material world into a distinct aspect of our spiritual practice. It can be a powerful place to put compassion into action. You may never feel that you're transformed enough to act with pure, altruistic intention, yet it is through the engagement itself that you can monitor your spiritual development and see where transformation is still required.

Wherever you fall on this contemplative-activist spectrum, it is useful to note that our combined skills can be of enormous benefit to society. It's time to work in solidarity with others, and not on our own. We need to harness the qualities and talents of everyone. Van Jones, an African American changemaker, describes this potential:

*“The convergence of spiritual people becoming active, and activist people becoming spiritual, creates a lot of possibility for real change. It's very difficult to make change externally if we are not emotionally healthy enough to get through conflict. We need 360 degrees of change inside and out, to survive as a species.”*

*Van Jones*

## Underpinning Theories

The ideas in this book have been informed by my interest, research, and practice in three different fields: Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, Contemplative Science, and Evolutionary Psychology. My Buddhist teachers have been hugely influential in my life, offering a vast range of meditation techniques to address all situations, as well as to focus me on the bodhicitta motivation to help all beings.

Contemplative Science, particularly neuroscience, has provided the proof of what meditators have long been aware of – that training the mind can change the physical structure and neural pathways in the brain. Additionally, my readings of Evolutionary Psychology have provided me with an understanding both of why we have such an incredible capacity for love, and our shadow side, where hate and aggression reside. It shows the full spectrum of human capability and affirms why training in compassion can support our on-going evolution of consciousness.

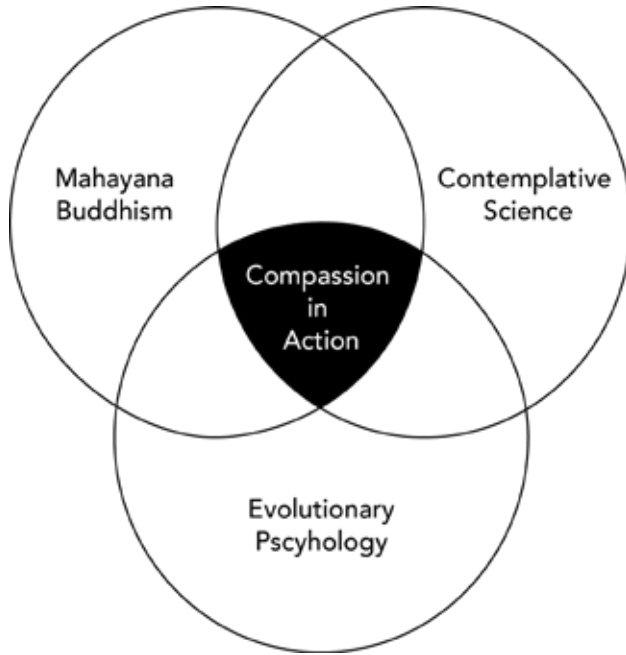


Fig 1. Underpinning Theories

We need to move beyond affiliation only for family, and like-minded social groups, to affiliation with all beings – human, animal, and the planet itself. And it’s worth asking, if we viewed the natural world as a living being, like you or me, would we still treat it as badly as we do?

## How to Use this Book

The structure of this book is a 10-week course that combines theory, stories, and home practices, and you can work through it as a self-study guide, keeping a journal record of the practices, and your insights. It can also be helpful to work through it with a friend, or an accountability partner, week-by-week.

For those who find it supportive, you may opt to have a facilitator as you progress through the pages; someone who holds the space each week for meditation and discussion. This can also be in a peer-led group where you rotate the facilitation role.

Learning to step into a leadership role is important, as is learning to step back and be led by others. It all forms part of the reflective practice



required by this work. I strongly feel that this process lends itself to a peer-supported approach, as a way to acknowledge each other's incredible potential for creativity and altruism, while also caring for each other's shadow side.

If you are doing the course within your organisation, you might first need to develop trust with your colleagues. To assist with this, I give guidelines for running weekly sessions at the end of the book (in Appendix A, entitled Cultivating Trust).

## Foundational Practices

In each chapter, you'll be invited to experiment with several practices that form the foundation of Compassionate Activism. These are 1) Contemplative practices, 2) Engagement practices, and 3) Shadow Integration practices.

Some of these practices ask you to turn inwards, while others encourage an outward turn, so that you engage with the people and the world around you. Shadow Integration practices invite you to face what you find difficult; an act that can take significant courage, supported by self-compassion.

You may already be familiar with many types of Contemplative practice, but it can be useful to list them. Let's divide them into three categories: a) Calming practices, b) Insight practices, and c) Practices to cultivate positive qualities. Each of these helps strengthen the other, but it's not a linear path. Rather, it more closely resembles an ever-expanding spiral.

Calming meditations use a specific point of focus on which to concentrate, such as the body, the breath, or the senses. These have helped me personally to train my mind to stay present, despite external distractions. Once I'm able to achieve a basic level of calm, I find that it's easier to open my mind to the experiences that move through moment-by-moment. I can then gain insight into how my habit patterns run the show, until I can identify them clearly. These are usually habits from times in childhood when I had fewer resources or means with which to cope with life's challenges. Once I notice them and acknowledge that these habits were once skilful responses to difficult circumstances, they transform or sometimes, even disappear.

Through these practices of calming and insight, we begin to live with a greater sense of contentment and ease. We also experience greater harmony with others, and when there is disharmony, it becomes easier to identify the cause by looking within ourselves, rather than attributing blame externally.

In terms of cultivating our innate positive qualities, the practices will allow us to look to the virtues described in all spiritual traditions, such as love, kindness, gratitude, generosity, and compassion. Compassion is at the heart of our approach to activism, and there are two types of compassion: aspirational compassion, and compassion in action. First, we must aspire to develop the capacity for compassion. We do this quietly, at home, using the ancient practices that have supported meditators for generations. Then we put this capacity into action, ensuring that it lives beyond us and beyond our own lifespan.

By developing the aspiration to help others, we're able to expand our circle wider through experimentation with Engagement practices. They offer a method of gaining insight into our intentions and habit patterns, both the helpful and the harmful ones. And in light of this, we're soon able to see whether our intentions are self-centred or genuinely altruistic. If we can engage, without craving for appreciation or reward, we're moving in the right direction! We're slowly finding our way towards equanimity, where we can hold ourselves steady in the face of suffering and be of great benefit to the world around us. I explore a variety of different ways to engage in this book, from helping a friend to participating in collective action.

Personally, I think of Shadow Integration practices as the bridge between contemplation and engagement. When we engage, and difficult emotions arise or things go wrong, it is usually a sign that something within us needs to be taken care of. The shadow aspects of our mind still need to be integrated. When we have the courage to turn and face our own shadow, we can transform our disturbing emotions and tendencies into powerful insights and wisdom. By facing injustice from a place of clear-seeing and compassion-based engagement, we avoid the tendency to perpetuate the same problems through our own behaviour. And this requires the uncomfortable realisation that we're often complicit in the difficulties we see in the world around us.

Slowly, with the support of these practices, I've begun to experience longer-term, bottom-up changes within myself. I'm not triggered quite as

often by external circumstances. However, there remains much work to be done – and in this, it seems like I’m not alone. There are many ancient stories of meditators who spend years in a cave, only to walk back into daily life, and start arguing with their family members. They swiftly return to the cave for some more years of meditation!

The table on Contemplative, Engagement and Shadow Integration Practices is one way of categorising the techniques you’ll find in this book. It offers a brief description of each practice and its benefits. Audio versions of the contemplative practices offered in the chapters are also available for download from my website ([www.lucydraperclarke.com](http://www.lucydraperclarke.com)).

You may be familiar with other practices from your own spiritual or religious tradition. There is no ‘best type’ of meditation, as it needs to be adapted to your personality, and your moment-by-moment needs. Because of this, it’s ideal to work with a teacher or spiritual director who can offer support and suggestions. You can also find your own way initially, with friends and mediation apps, until you build up the confidence in your capacity to find balance.

## Contemplative, Engagement and Shadow Integration Practices

<b>1. CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES</b>		
<b>a) CALMING PRACTICES</b>		
<b>Practice</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Benefits</b>
Moving Body-Based Practices	Yoga, qi gong, tai chi, walking meditation, running, dance, drumming	Improves interoception, cultivates awareness of the embodied mind, calms the nervous system, and releases trauma
Supine Body-Based Practices	Body-scan, yoga nidra, muscle relaxation	Shifts into the parasympathetic nervous response, soothing.
Breathwork Practices	Pranayama, abdominal breath, activating, balancing, and calming breath practices	Soothes, balances, and energises, while shifting into parasympathetic nervous response
Focused Attention (Mindfulness Support)	Concentrating on a chosen object e.g. breath, sound, a candle, a mantra, or chanting	A peaceful, yet alert state of mind, a concentrated mind, focused on the present moment
Prayer	Connecting with a higher power and asking for guidance	Gives rise to a feeling of connection and support

<b>b) INSIGHT PRACTICES</b>		
Practice	Description	Benefits
Open Monitoring	Witnessing moment-by-moment changes in experience and noticing habits of the mind	Non-reactive monitoring, non-judgment, identifying our unique pathways of habit
Reflection	Dropping questions into a calm mind	Deep listening to inner, embodied wisdom
Contemplation	Focusing on a text or guiding concepts	Learning from the wisdom of others
<b>c) CULTIVATING POSITIVE QUALITIES</b>		
Practice	Description	Benefits
Gratitude	Using a daily journal, or a letter to another	Eases depression, shifts focus away from toxic emotions
Loving-Kindness	Sending out well-wishes to self, others, difficult people, and all living beings in ever-widening circles	Cultivation of kindness with consequent experience of joy
Self-Compassion	Focusing on mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness at times of difficulty	Builds resilience, reduces rumination, overcomes difficulties
Compassion	Tonglen – giving and taking on the breath	Builds compassionate motivation and resilience
Forgiveness	Releasing the constriction between self and another	Distinguishes between the person who causes harm and their actions; reduces our own suffering

Visualisation	Bringing an image of an inspiring person or place into the mind	Uses the creative aspect of the mind for self-regulation and personal transformation
<b>2. ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES</b>		
Practice	Description	Benefits
Change for Change	Offering small change to those in need	Always having something to give
Supporting a Friend	Offering practical and emotional help and care	Learning equanimity - being equally open to appreciation or rejection.
Donating a Meal	Giving up a meal and offering the money equivalent to a soup kitchen or charity	Fasting helps shift focus from self to other; donating overcomes greed
Tithing	Offering 10% of your income or time	Experiencing the benefits of the two directional flow of giving and receiving
Collective Action	Bringing people together around an issue	Learning that 'I can't, but we can'
Nonviolent Direct Action	Public gatherings to express objection or dissent towards an idea or action, or to propose alternatives	Demonstrates solidarity with those negatively affected; opportunity for creative interventions that move people emotionally.

<b>3. SHADOW INTEGRATION PRACTICES</b>		
Practice	Description	Benefits
Noticing Disturbing Emotions and Triggers	Bringing awareness to the rejected aspects of the psyche	Identifying both the dark and golden shadow, allowing integration of the psyche, learning to feel without reactivity
Exploring and Understanding Disturbing Emotions	Identifying when difficult emotions arise and understanding their evolutionary necessity	Choosing what to water and what to weed out
Transforming Disturbing Emotions	Using non-violent communication to engage with situations when difficult emotions arise	Expressing our feelings and needs, without triggering others

### Relationship with the Practices

You may feel a sense of safety and connection when doing some of the practices, while others can bring up huge resistance. There may be many that feel neither pleasant, nor unpleasant. When I first started to meditate, yoga and qi gong really helped regulate my breath and prepare my body for the sitting practices. Only after movement could I quieten down and focus. In contrast, when I was introduced to walking meditation, I felt really irritated. My relationship with walking was about reaching a destination, and getting there fast. The slow, mindful steps felt pointless and frustrating. My reactivity pointed clearly to my preference for product over process, and pace over patience. Having observed my relationship with walking meditation change over the years, I've also been able to witness my inner world shift slightly.

Pay attention to the practices that feel supportive for you, as they help to sustain you on this long road of personal transformation. Equally, bring curiosity to the practices you resist, the ones that feel tight and uncomfortable. The easier ones are very important for downregulating your nervous system so that you can respond, rather than react, to life's obstacles. Those that challenge you will point towards your internal places of resistance. They are asking to be integrated and transformed.

Learning self-compassion felt like a huge weight of judgement had been taken off my shoulders. I was so relieved that I was allowed to be a flawed human being and to adapt my practice to suit the way I was feeling during each meditation session.

Often, we can default to a familiar meditation practice, even if it would be more beneficial to use a technique that provides the antidote to our state of mind. For example, if you are feeling distracted and scattered, a calming, focused attention practice might help re-centre you. Or if you are experiencing sadness or difficulty, a self-compassion practice can be the most effective way to take care of your needs, or an engagement practice that shifts your focus from yourself to others.

To live fully is to experience the full range of human emotion. We learn to respect the information our body and heart provide and use those impulses to know when action is required. Controlling your emotions in public may be more socially acceptable, but we are allowed to feel, and a daily meditation practice gives us the chance to do this.

Different practices produce different results, and many of the ancient meditation practices, taught for over two thousand years, have recently been investigated through neuroscience research. Studies, on gratitude for example, have revealed what meditators have long been aware of through their own experience: meditating changes the way we view and respond to the world.

One way of gauging the fruits of our practice is when those close to us start to comment that our habit patterns are changing because they often notice, sooner than we do. I remember hearing a lovely story about a mother with a young family. She was being pulled in so many directions that she was feeling overwhelmed. After finding a meditation course, she carried out her daily practice diligently. She would take herself off to her room and meditate quietly. Of course, her children didn't like it. When she



was practicing, they would suddenly call for water, or snacks, or help with something. However, she persevered, telling them that she needed some quiet time and would attend to their needs as soon as she was done. After several weeks, the course ended, the school holidays came, and she had an influx of visitors. With so many people needing her care and attention, she found that she could not prioritise her daily practice. She let it slip, not noticing initially the differences in her method of coping with external demands. It was then that she overheard the children talking about her; the same children who had resented her practice initially. Her son was saying, “I wish Mummy would go back into her room and do that thing again. She is so much nicer to us when she is doing it every day!”

We don't easily notice the change in ourselves when we are doing practice because our inner world still feels chaotic, and we are constantly distracted by thoughts. However, as we learn to be aware of thoughts and feelings, and can respond to them with gentle acceptance, other people can pick up on these qualities, and feel safer in our presence. When people feel drawn to us, then it is easy to bring a community together around a specific issue. This is where the meditator can become a changemaker.

Most of the practices in this book are simple, but this doesn't mean that they're easy. It is helpful to practice in a group, so that you have support as you move along this challenging path of self-awareness. It is worth it, though, so don't give up. The more freedom we feel within ourselves, the greater support we can be to the people and world around us.

## CHAPTER 1

# A Call to Stillness

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*“Only when it is dark enough can you see  
the stars.”*

*~ Martin Luther King Jnr*



We're facing several concurrent crises - the climate crisis, mental and physical health crises, and a crisis of consciousness. Communities are increasingly polarised, and people are becoming more isolated and more lonely, despite our technological connectivity. We seem to have lost touch with the fundamental truths of interconnectedness and reciprocity.

How are you feeling about the state of our world? I find myself fluctuating between hope and despair, joy and sorrow, often accompanied by overwhelm or even anger. With the news we see on our devices, it's easy to get overwhelmed, to feel that nothing can be done to shift the direction in which the world is headed. Given the States of Emergency we've created, I often notice a contraction in my body, and the energy leaching out of me. I struggle to find the words to express what I'm experiencing and feel the urge to close off and hide or find someone else to blame. But why is this?

When we experience times of difficulty, we tend to respond in one of two ways: hyper-arousal or hypo-arousal. Activists largely tend towards the former, and get 'stuck on', always needing to fix and change the situation

in front of them, without necessarily being able to identify the underlying cause. This is hyper-arousal. Alternatively, we can also get overwhelmed and move into hypo-arousal, where we get ‘stuck off’, and feel like there is nothing that can be done. Both approaches have negative repercussions for us, as individuals, and for the people around us, and the systems in which we’re embedded.

Neuroscience research has revealed that humans have complex brains, which are broadly divided into three parts. One part, the brainstem, focuses on survival. Another, the limbic system, is linked to emotions and our need for social connection. The third, the prefrontal cortex, controls intellectual functioning, language, and self-awareness.

When we experience, or just read about, frightening events, our brain defaults to the survival instinct. Fear and anxiety impair our immune system, organ health, and brain function. We find ourselves triggered, sometimes physically ill, and unable to access our creative capacities. It is this reactive survival mind that can send us down the pathway of despair, unless we can train it to stay focused on the reality of life in front of our own eyes.

## Restoring the Balance

There is a beautiful Tibetan word, *sowa*, which means healing difficulties from the past, and creating the conditions for future health and wholeness. Taking care of our childhood wounds through therapeutic practices, and then learning how to work skilfully with our emotions, means we do not pass on trauma to the next generation. In recent years, trauma specialists such as Deb Dana have started using the terminology of the Window of Presence or Tolerance (Figure 2), which refers to the healthy functioning of our nervous system. It is the place of emotional and mental balance.

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*Lucy offers a unique perspective on compassionate activism drawn from her decades of living in Africa ... Her work is authentic, heartfelt, and deeply beneficial.* **Charlie Morley,**  
Bestselling Author of 'Dreaming through Darkness'

We are living through a time of environmental and humanitarian disasters, underpinned by a crisis of consciousness. Communities are polarised and people isolated, despite our technological connectivity.

**The Compassionate Activist is for changemakers, meditators and activists, offering guidance to transform our wounded world from the inside out. What can we do in the midst of uncertainty and overwhelm? Attend to what is within us and around us, moment-by-moment.**

This book is for all who see activism as a relational practice built on an ethic of care. It calls for engagement inspired by love not hate, and the mobilisation of communities through solidarity not separation.

Each chapter of this journey book offers ideas and practices from contemplative science, Buddhist philosophy and evolutionary psychology, to inspire inner reflection and outer action. Mindfulness meditations, engagement challenges and shadow work reflections are introduced to develop skills and insight. Readers are invited to reflect on their successes and struggles, and to take action steps, inspired by wholehearted intentions, to guide their own unique way forward.



Lucy Draper-Clarke is an educator, retreat facilitator and researcher, with a PhD in Mindfulness and Teacher Education. She runs retreats throughout Southern Africa and supervises postgraduate students at Drama for Life, the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg.



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