

Nigel Wellings and  
Elizabeth Wilde McCormick

# Present with Suffering

Being with the Things that Hurt



**KARNAC**  
*firing the mind*

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*Elizabeth Wilde McCormick*

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## FOREWORD

*by Henry Schukman*

Robert Frost once said that a great poem is like an ice cube placed on a hot surface. It melts down upon itself, never shifting from its place. So the poem rests in and on its subject, and settles down into itself, until it is done.

Something analogous happens in Buddhist practice. The great mercy of Buddhism is that it places suffering at the centre. Nothing extraneous, nothing imaginary, nothing grand: just let's fully address suffering. It's a little like Chekhov said: that a story is fulfilled not when a problem is solved, but rather when it has been fully explored. So Buddhist practice invites us to fully explore suffering, our own and others', but generally starting with our own, until its origins have been clearly recognized, and its nature fully accepted.

The promise of this kind of practice runs something like this. Find your suffering, come to know it well and accept it, and compassion will naturally arise – the very compassion that melts the suffering from within. Suffering, rather than being the problem, is also in a sense the solution. If fully entered, embraced, allowed, above all through the practice

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of mindfulness, whereby we come to know it as sensations in the body, it becomes its own path of healing and awakening.

To many of us who have come to explore Buddhist-inspired practices, the possibility of addressing suffering – our own and others’ – in this direct way, with the kinds of support and guidance the teachings encourage and offer, turns out to be a magnificent act of kindness. Rather than having to take on beliefs or sign up to unproven creeds that may exclude many, or wait for magical, other-worldly succor, the teachings reveal that to know what our pains, losses, hurts and agonies are, as actual phenomena in the here and now, without rejecting or resisting them, can not only marvelously reduce them, but also lead us to the kinds of liberation and ‘realization’ the traditions speak of.

*Present with Suffering* is a wise and compassionate book, a compelling double-act between two deep practitioners, both of them therapists and teachers, who have found solace and healing by looking into the last place we might want to look – namely our suffering itself. Through having thoroughly accepted their own hurts and griefs, they can speak from the depths of experience. Liz Wilde McCormick lost her beloved partner at a relatively young age, and the heartbreak that followed eventually turned, through her practice, into

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profound heart-opening. Nigel Wellings points us to the marvel of ‘emptiness’ as known in Mahayana Buddhism, that is the liberating treasure hidden within the pain of emotional ‘emptiness’, in which many of us may at times find ourselves stranded. Again, through non-rejection and non-resistance of that second kind of emptiness, namely the emptiness of distress and despair, and instead through allowing them, we can come to taste the boundless loving awareness that is a property of the other kind – Buddhism’s miraculous ‘emptiness.’

In the case of either approach, the isolation of emotional distress gradually opens to the healing power of connection. The frozen heart thaws and opens to others. Emptiness turns from solitary anguish to the liberative experience of boundless openness, which reveals a universal connectedness. The deep core of our being is touched into new life. And equally, in both cases, the entry to this renewal is through the pain of suffering itself, which both of these authors and trail-makers have gone through, and come to know intimately. They map their paths, and give us practices to point us along the deep, old ways they have found.

The pledge of Buddhism’s first ‘ennobling truth’ is fulfilled here. Suffering exists; accept that, stoop under its lintel, rather

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than refuse it, and we find an endless path of healing opening before us.

This book is a welcome and treasurable guide to finding that path, and to following it. Deep suffering, grievous loss, traumas old and new, all take a heavy toll on our mental health. How we can grow through them, rather than deny or seek to avoid them, is the great gift offered here. Read and be restored, renewed. Follow the practices outlined here, and find the heart opened, healed and awakened.

Henry Shukman, author of *One Blade of Grass*,  
Guiding Teacher, Mountain Cloud Zen Centre,  
Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2022

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contemplating a subject such as suffering in loss and bereavement calls on many deep personal recollections and influences. I am grateful to have begun this conversation on suffering with my friend Jane Ryan while we were walking our dogs along the coast path in Suffolk. Conversations bring our thoughts into conscious awareness and become the building blocks for further thought and investigation.

Many, many people have contributed to my writing in this book. I celebrate my work as a psychotherapist for over forty years and am grateful to all patients and supervisees who have shared their own suffering. Before this, when I was a volunteer with the Samaritans I learned the most basic and precious skill of sitting, listening and sharing emotional pain. I am grateful to my early teachers in psychotherapy particularly: Dr Tony Ryle, Barbara Somers, Dr Nina Coltart. To my wonderful friends and colleagues, many of whom read some of the sections of this text: Margaret Landale, Linda Hartley, Dr Wasyl Nimenko, Dr Andy Harkin and Annalee Curran. Thanks to Linda Hartley for permission to include her somatic practice on page 53.

Grateful thanks to the Suffolk Coastal sangha for our weekly meditations and deep sharing which has been



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consistent these last fifteen years. For my many retreats with Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum Village community. For the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh, Pema Chodron and Dale Asrael. Many thanks also to Henry Shukman for taking the time to write the foreword.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Nigel Wellings, my long-term friend, colleague and co-author. While writing this text I was in considerable pain waiting for a hip operation and became exhausted, something he noticed and kindly named. Our sitting together and conversations returned me to basic practice. That in all aspects of suffering we start where we are, we begin by just sitting and creating a space, breath by breath. Once I had returned to what I have known, experienced and written about, but forgotten in the drive to complete something, I was able to ponder more deeply on the process of writing and galvanize more energy. Nigel took over the writing of the introduction and edited some of the earlier section and I am deeply grateful to him and his wife Philippa as we all shared in the process of creating this book.

*Elizabeth Wilde McCormick*

After a lifetime of psychotherapy and Buddhism my gratitude extends to a very long list of people – patients, students and teachers – who are seminal to what is written here. But

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to keep it brief, first my wife Philippa Vick. We have always worked together, just about everything I write about here has come out of our collaboration. Furthermore, she has tolerated long hours of being an ‘author’s widow’ while I wrote her inspirations down. In fact it is she who introduced me to the Zen teacher Henry Shukman who has very kindly written the foreword to this book. Though I was very pleased when he said yes it was only a little later when I read his astonishing book, *One Blade of Grass*, did I realize how very fortunate we were. Next, Liz McCormick – our friendship and fruitful working partnership goes back over twenty years. I was initially reluctant to write this book but when I actually got going I found it really enjoyable and am now grateful that her encouragement prevailed. The most difficult section for me was the Buddhist understanding of emptiness. Here several good friends researched and read through my attempts to make something enormously opaque readable to a non-Buddhist audience. Terry Pilchick, longstanding Buddhist practitioner and mindfulness teacher gently probed my philosophical understanding and Brendan McLoughlin, psychotherapist and owner of a mercurial brain, helped me through a deeper appreciation of Yogachara, an area of Buddhist philosophy I have often struggled with. Together we grappled with ‘does the world actually exist beyond our perception?’. Once finished the piece was road tested by Clare Stent, Kay Cousins,

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Hennie Symington and Penny Campbell. Each in their own way made valuable observations that found themselves incorporated into the text. Lastly my 'twin', being born on the same day and year, Jane Ryan who with Liz conceived of the whole project and Christina Wipf Perry and her team at Confer who got behind it. Thank you everyone.

*Nigel Wellings*

# INTRODUCTION

by Nigel Wellings

*'Either way takes courage, either way wants you  
to be nothing but that self that is no self at all'*

David Whyte

This book's beginning starts in the spring of 2019 with Liz, my long-time friend and colleague, and Jane Ryan, the founder of Confer, a provider of CPD events for therapists. Walking their dogs together along the Suffolk coast near where they live they fell into a conversation about their experiences of loss – something they both knew well – Liz's husband had died over twenty years before and Jane's more recently. By the end of the year this exchange had evolved into a conference hosted by Confer on the subject of *Being Present with Suffering*, during which both Liz and I were the speakers – Liz choosing to focus on bereavement and I on the different meanings of emptiness. From this came the invitation to write this book.

Life presents events we often have no control over. These events we then take and try to make sense of and those events that contain much pain may – at best – become invitations to engage with our life in a different way. As

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Liz says, ‘Sometimes it is our experience of suffering that leads us to a deeper understanding about what it is to be human, and that we are all more than the sum of our parts.’ Talking with Liz she reminds me that it was in 1992 that she went through a debilitating period of illness when suffering from meningitis. This led to her first encounter with the Buddhist monk and much-loved Vietnamese Zen teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh. Reading his books and beginning to attempt the meditation that he describes within them enabled her to find some stability and stillness – something that felt like a miracle at the time. From her illness came her initiation into being mindfully present with suffering.

Liz reminds us in her part of this book that suffering is inevitable and perhaps because of this we have all evolved our own and different ways of dealing with it. When we can find within the bleakness of our loss the possibility of something new then our grief, and all the past griefs that are carried within it, may be made more bearable. Recalling a conference she attended in 2012, in which the psychiatrist and psychotherapist Mark Epstein challenged the established beliefs about the process of bereavement, she releases us from the necessity of having any pre-identified sequence of emotions. Instead what is offered is the possibility of being with whatever our experience

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is, just as it is, for as long as it is. In this way grief may be allowed to take its own course and our relationship to it is to simply be present, perhaps consciously aware of our impermanence and the reality of the dying away and renewal that this implies. Here she draws upon the death of her husband John. As part of her grieving process a year later she visited Plum Village, a community that Thich Nhat Hanh had established in rural southern France after his expulsion from Vietnam following his political activism. Arriving there she describes her anxieties, that she would not fit in, that she would do it all wrong – fears derived from her childhood. However, what she in fact finds is an experience of coming home. Wrapped in love and acceptance by the community of practitioners, the *sangha*, her fears are dissolved. This second initiatory experience adds something to the first. We may be mindfully present with what hurts us but this is enormously strengthened when we have the support of others around us. This recognition of the part those close to us play in the experience of bereavement is a signature insight of Liz's writing here. Repeatedly she reminds us we cannot do it alone nor are we alone when we can open to others.

For myself I cannot clearly say where this book began. I guess the problem is that once we begin to think in terms of emptiness – my subject within this book – we

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find there are no beginnings and ends within seamless change. However, there are themes and the two here are narrative and presence. These emerged in Liz's and my work together over twenty years ago while we were both newly appointed directors of training at the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology (CTP) in London. Prior to this the Centre's curriculum had been dominated by the Analytical Psychology of C. G. Jung and the Psychosynthesis of Roberto Assagioli, two systems of psychotherapy that particularly value making a meaningful narrative out of the unique events of a person's life and the centrality of the self. But now the Centre had been entrusted into our hands and we began doing something a little different, extending the curriculum to embrace new ideas from Transpersonal Psychologists in other parts of the world and, most importantly, introducing the practice of mindfulness.

Two books came out of this period. In 2000 Liz and I edited a collection of essays *Transpersonal Psychotherapy, Theory and Practice*, written by the Centre's new staff members. My own contribution was a chapter on psychopathology which drew upon Stephen Johnson's work found in his *Character Styles* and a second chapter, 'Naked Presence', that for the first time fully introduced into the Centre the work of the philosopher Ken Wilbur and the clinical psychologist John Welwood – two big names in the world of American

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Transpersonal Psychology. The evolution of both these chapters may be found in this book. Johnson's work remains a framework I use when trying to understand and describe the deep wounds that we carry from the earliest period of our life and the subsequent events that compound them. It is these we often meet when we let our meditation reach deeply down into ourselves and paradoxically it is working with these wounds that unfolds into spiritual awakening. But it is John Welwood's contribution that was particularly formative. In his seminal paper, *Reflection and Presence*, Welwood laid out a path of psychotherapy leading to and overlapping with Buddhist practice. A path that starts out with reflection upon our personal narrative and that leads, via being present with the felt-sense within our body, through mindfulness to non-dual contemplation. At this time, the discovery of this paper was a revelation. It laid out cogently the relationship between psychotherapy and Buddhism that I had myself been trying to formulate and, besides this, provided the scaffolding for CTP's new curriculum – an attempted marriage between a celebration of individual journey and the deeper insight that there was no journey or anyone upon the path. It has also stood the test of time – this model continues to inform what I have written here.

The second book from this period was published in 2005 – *Nothing To Lose, Psychotherapy, Buddhism and*



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*Living Life.* It represents where Liz and I had reached by the end of our time with CTP. Continuing with the themes of narrative and presence we had taught along two parallel lines. One was the value of making meaning from the circumstances of our life, seeing life as an initiatory journey. A journey that it was important to have witnessed. The second was the necessity of being able to let go of our story when it becomes an impediment, causing more distress and confusion than it promised to resolve. As Zen would have it: ‘dropping the self’. This perhaps needs some unpacking.

When we talk of personal narratives, the story of ‘me’ and my life, it is a two-sided blade. We are all beings who to be healthy depend upon making meaning out of our lives and when we cannot do so we may become both psychologically and physically ill. There is a deep, instinctive compulsion to do this – recall how in an instant we create an explanation for events that places them in some form of meaningful pattern. Those of us who are highly imaginative are particularly accomplished at this but even those who think themselves rational and down to earth do exactly the same albeit with less flourish! The activity of storymaking occurs on both conscious and unconscious levels. Most of us can readily tell a good listener about the highs and lows of our life and about the

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sort of person we believe ourselves to be. However, it is the unconscious story, the 'core beliefs' that we unknowingly harbour about ourselves that are, if anything, both more powerful and destructive. For instance the secret fear that I am unlovable or all on my own. The pervasive psychological sores left by trauma.

Another aspect of our personal story is that we defend it because when any element of it is questioned it feels threatening. Here again recall what it feels like when we are accused of being someone we feel we are not – outrage, resentment, hurt. Or the disruption when we lose something that feels integral to our being. My story of 'me' must on all accounts be protected because to not do so feels secretly like annihilation. And it is not just about me. We all hold conscious and unconscious stories about other people, other political beliefs, other countries, other genders and races. When these are fuelled by fear they quickly become discriminations in which the 'other' is cloaked in all sorts of fantasies, many of which are derived from those parts of our own disavowed personality: our projected violence, greed and stupidity. It is because of this dark side of our storymaking that it is a two-sided blade. Although we depend upon it for survival, it is simultaneously a deep source of misperception and the harm that stems from this. The stories I tell myself about

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myself and others can and do create great unhappiness and cruelty. And, deeper still, it is our stories that obscure knowing ‘how things really are’ – the Buddhist diagnosis of our continued discontent.

These profound shortcomings are in my part of this book challenged in section two by the Buddhist enquiry into self and perception, and in my third section by the slogans ‘thoughts are not facts’ and ‘feels real, not necessarily true’. Both bring our automatic storytelling up short and by questioning it hope to exchange unconscious reactivity with a more considered – and kindly – responsiveness. They also open us to the liberating possibility of simply not knowing. The real pleasure and freedom of an empty space in which many more things are made possible. The relief of not having to be oneself. As my wife, Philippa Vick, says, once we have read the book, *All About Me and What I Think*, 50 times, the storyline is no longer griping.

So if that covers the good and bad angel of personal narratives, what about presence? Presence has become one of those words that have many meanings. Its roots go back to something concrete – it means being here, being at hand, being available in the present moment. Here it is used as a synonym for being mindful – another much abused word – cultivating a sustained, clear and relaxed awareness of what is happening within and around us

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in each consecutive moment. So we may be mindfully present which means we are present in a mindful way. Attentive, non-judgemental, curious, neither dissociated nor identified with the sensations, emotions and thoughts that arise within us.

When we bring mindful presence to our narrative – our story of what’s going on – we see our story as no more than thinking. We step back. Mindfulness is the means to do this – we rest in the present moment and when we notice that we have been carried away by emotionally-laden thoughts we simply name this distraction ‘thinking’, let the thoughts go and return to the present. A movement away from the default setting of the mind to wander in the past and future towards present moment awareness. Mindfulness then is a training in not being seduced by the things we think and feel and this creates the possibility of choice. This is of fundamental value and for this reason Liz introduces it in her section on ‘Mind the gap’ and I then follow in my third section ‘Being present with emptiness’ with detailed instructions on how it is best practised.

One of the principle ways that this book uses the tool of presence is as a non-conceptual way to be with our emotions. Both Liz and I refer to being present with the ‘felt-sense’ – to be mindful of the emotions (and the meanings derived from them) in our bodies. When we

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are present with our emotions we just leave them as they are. We are not trying to explain or understand them, we are not trying to change or make them ‘better’ and we are certainly not trying to get rid of them. The premise is that they are fine already just as they are and if we can accept them, holding them mindfully and with kindness, they will naturally change of their own accord. What else could they do in a changing universe? It is only our fear and the contraction this causes that makes things appear to freeze and become stuck. This way of approaching things is the crux of the entire book. We do not pretend that painful thoughts and emotions can be ‘cured’ – that is, got rid of forever. They are part of being human, not an illness, but the real question is how can we be with this aspect of ourselves? How can we be with the things that hurt? Our answer is through awareness, acceptance, kindness and compassion – the components of wisdom.

By the time of the publication of *Nothing To Lose*, Liz and I had already started to take what we had learnt together out into the different areas of our lives. This was an amazingly fertile period. At the end of the 1990s psychoanalysis had discovered Buddhism and books like Mark Epstein’s highly successful *Thoughts Without a Thinker* represented a rapprochement between the two previously antagonistic disciplines. Having first trained in

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Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy and then Jungian Analysis I now found myself returning to my first training as I realized its atheism sat more easily than the Jungian work that competed with Buddhism for the definitive spiritual vision. The psychoanalytic perspective seemed content to stay with the ordinary experiences of life whereas the Jungian, in its pursuit of ‘individuation’ now seemed to me somewhat narcissistic and hollow – plainly I had fallen out of love. Liz, for her part, was also on paths of new discovery during these years. Informed by her husband John’s heart disease and her therapeutic work with heart patients in the cardiac department of Charing Cross Hospital that had begun in the mid-eighties, she continued, as a founder member of the Association for Cognitive Analytic Psychotherapy, to participate in its development. From this work came four books about the heart including her ‘bestseller’ *Change for the Better*. All this provided a wealth of experience that is here reflected in her section on the heart. In parallel, in 2001 Liz attended her first Pema Chödrön Buddhist retreat in America. Here I remember thinking her very brave as she set out for something she had no previous experience of so very far away. However, I misperceived her; more intrepid than I realized, in 2002 she travelled with a small group to visit Thich Nhat Hanh’s root temple in Vietnam and

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then later with the group that accompanied Thich Nhat Hanh during his visit to China. And following this, in 2003, with my wife, attended one of the first Mindfulness Teacher Training courses run by Bangor University. An event none of us foresaw the implications of.

It is hard to imagine that in 2006 there were only a handful of books published on secular mindfulness. Now, I am told, there are hundreds of books or papers researching its efficacy published each week. During our transit from the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology, Liz, Philippa and I had created a group rather too grandly called The Forum for Contemplative Studies that met monthly to practise meditation and share the ideas that excited us. The inspiration for this had come from an American organization I had read about called Contemplative Mind in Society, which taught mindfulness within the spheres of the workplace, law, education and business – anticipating the secular mindfulness movement’s dissemination of the practice. Provocatively they had also taught the staff at Monsanto – not known for being on the side of the angels even then – and the question had been asked: whether the practice of mindfulness carried the seeds of ethical behaviour and would infect its Monsanto practitioners for the good or would mindfulness simply be corrupted as it was used to make the morally bankrupt more efficient?

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Out of the Contemplative Forum grew the Bath and Bristol Mindfulness Courses, started by my wife Philippa Vick and then joined by myself several years later. This gets a mention here because the influence of the courses we taught and developed over the subsequent fourteen years is also present in this book and may be found especially in my section three, 'Being present with emptiness' which largely parallels the content of our joint teaching, a section that also answers the Monsanto question.

During this time Philippa and I gradually moved away from the combined Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) that was first taught by Bangor University towards something that relied more on the Buddhist sources that had been their inspiration. This showed particularly in the simplified mindfulness meditations we taught which were derived from the Insight Meditation Society, and the fact that we, as practising Buddhists, naturally infused our teaching with a Buddhist background. Many see this as a fault but I disagree – the power of mindfulness comes from its Buddhist source and if it were not for Buddhism its capitulation to neoliberalism and 'market forces' would have been even faster and more complete. That said, the core MBSR and MBCT courses have a great deal that is valuable in them and it continues to fascinate



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and amuse me that one of the first concepts within the MBCT course is ‘automatic pilot’, an idea that nearly all Buddhist philosophers have spent the last two-and-a-half thousand years wrestling with. This part of the journey is recorded in my book *Why Can’t I Meditate, How to Keep Our Mindfulness Practice on Track*, published in 2015. Combining the shared insight of meditators, meditation teachers, my own learning and being very practical, it finds further expression throughout my part of this book.

Finally, it has been very interesting for me to see when writing this where Liz’s and my own work has presently landed. Perhaps the biggest change is the inclusion of neuroscience. Both Liz and I mention the neurobiology of grief and trauma and it is largely from recent discoveries about these states of mind that modern trauma ‘treatments’, such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), Somatic Experiencing and Sensory Motor Psychotherapy, now work from the body up, recognizing that the felt-sense is the key to being present with old hurts held within the coarse and subtle fabric of our body. As for Liz, she has more deeply cemented her practice of Vietnamese Zen that encompasses both Theravada and devotional Pure Land Buddhist influences. This very simple, emotionally warm and community-based Buddhism taught by Thich Nhat Hanh very much reflects the personality of my dear

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friend. She and her Suffolk Coast Sangha are present in the reoccurring note found in her writing that values the presence of others within community. People are dear and precious. For myself I have continued within the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism that I first encountered in my mid-twenties – the mention of Dzogchen, the Great Perfection, as one form of non-dual Buddhist teaching alludes to the centrality of this in my life. Writing this book, it has actually surprised me how ‘Buddhist’ my writing has become and how the personal narrative aspect has seemingly fallen away. When a client recounts something to me now, my go-to response is not to ask how they feel about what they have just said but how were they with the emotions that were evoked. A question that invites presence to the narrative. Have I just become bored with myself with age? What is particularly heartwarming for me is that this relationship between psychotherapy and Buddhism that John Welwood articulated over 20 years ago has now been picked up and embraced by many meditation teachers and Buddhist psychotherapists. Established teachers such as Joseph Goldstein, Pema Chödrön, Tara Brach and my own Buddhist teacher Tsoknyi Rinpoche all mention or have very similar methods that help us remain present non-conceptually with what we experience within our bodies. Tsoknyi Rinpoche calls this the ‘handshake

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practice' – making friends with our inner monsters – and it is identical in all but name. It seems like the day I was handed Welwood's paper on reflection and presence was one of the most important in my life.

And so we come to the end of the story – is it OK that it is a story? Of course it is, just as long as we remember it is all made up.

## Further praise for *Present with Suffering*

“At a time when we face so much personal, collective and planetary loss and suffering, this book comes as a timely and welcome support, a reminder of how by staying present with our grief and pain we might find ways through to healing. Sharing from her own experience of deep loss, Elizabeth Wilde McCormick guides us gently through psychological, cultural and spiritual paths that can sustain us in the darkest times; she shows how the practice of mindfulness and, in particular, the Buddhist teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh open the heart. Nigel Wellings then lucidly outlines core Buddhist teachings to describe the development of wisdom, embracing and transforming feelings of emotional emptiness into an Buddhism describes the ‘two wings’ that enable the flight of awakening as ‘wisdom and compassion’. This book truly is a gift for our troubled times.”

**Linda Hartley, author of *Somatic Psychology: Body, Mind and Meaning***

“This important book offers a heartfelt exploration into human suffering. By drawing on their personal experience of living and working with suffering, the authors offer a critical orientation of wisdom and hope for those navigating through the painful turbulences of loss, grief and trauma.”

**Margaret Landale MSc, psychotherapist, supervisor and speaker**

“The question the authors pose is: How can we be with the things that hurt? Their answer is: through awareness, acceptance, kindness and compassion – the components of wisdom. By exploring bereavement through embodiment and narrative (McCormick), and offering an explanation of emptiness that is unusually faithful to both Buddhist and therapeutic understandings (Wellings), together they have produced a short book resonant with awareness, kindness, compassion and wisdom.”

**Gay Watson, Ph.D., author of *A Philosophy of Emptiness and Attention Beyond Mindfulness***

## Further praise for *Present with Suffering*

“A thought-provoking meditation for everyone of being in the world, living in impermanence, emptiness and wholeness, and in harmony, with the help of Buddhist teachings. An invite for each of us to look at the essentials of what it means to be human. *Present with Suffering* teaches us to sit back in ‘our observing awareness,’ suggests how to ‘fill the gap of emptiness,’ and most of all, asks us to keep in mind the ‘not necessarily so.’”

**Marie-Anne Bernardy-Arbuz, clinical psychologist and CAT psychotherapist, Paris, France**

“An absorbing exploration reconciling the human experience of suffering with the spiritual insights of meditative practice. Seen through the lenses of Buddhism and psychotherapy, the authors explain that within the bleakness of loss arises the possibility that pain and grief can be transformed into something new, more bearable and ultimately liberating.”

**Dr Sarah Egger MB, BS, FRCPsych, Chair of the Janki foundation for Spirituality in Healthcare and former Consultant Psychiatrist at Imperial College London**

“Wellings and Wilde McCormick provide contrasting yet complementary voices on this important topic. The seeming natural impulse can be to turn away from suffering, that it's all too much. Within these pages we are invited to not just turn towards and be with suffering in all its guises, but also to lean on ancient Buddhist practices in so doing. These practices allow for an intimate communion with the body-felt sense of pain beyond story, and ultimately, the dissolution of this pain in the basic goodness at the core.”

**Dr Andy Harkin, medical doctor and psychotherapist**