Noticing the Autopilot Respond to Suffering

**Instructions:** Between now and the next class, complete an imagery exercise. Start this exercise by first finding a quiet place where you can have some time to yourself (make sure the TV is off and that you won’t be interrupted by the phone or other people). Begin by closing your eyes or fixing your gaze on a spot on the floor or wall in front of you and by being mindful of your breath, as we have in our noticing exercises at the beginning of classes. Spend two or three minutes focusing on your breathing. After you have taken a few minutes to pay attention to your breathing, release your attention from your breath and think about a per­sonal struggle that you have, a difficult emotion or thought or sensation. Give this struggle an image. Imagine its shape, size, color, character, and other details. After you have formed the image, imagine it standing or floating before you. As you do so, see if you can just let it rest there without any effort to make it go away or come closer. Simply let the image be before you. Your job is to do nothing with respect to this image except view it. Allow yourself a minute or two to focus on the image. Then gently release your attention from the image and bring it back to your breath. Again, spend two or three minutes focusing on your breath and then gently allow yourself to return your awareness to the room. After you have completed the exercise, take a few moments to write about your emotions and thoughts in response to the exercise. Jot down what you observed or learned, whether it be negative or positive. Bring your notes to the next class.

Repeat the exercise a few days later, again spending time being aware of your breathing, and then reflect­ing on a struggle that you have. Give this struggle an image. Again, observe this image dispassionately, not trying to make it come or go but just observing it standing or floating in front of you. Write down your reac­tions to this second exercise, too. Describe any differences between the first and second exercise. Bring these notes to the next class also.