

## Compassion

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My dear friend Kami's going to join in the moment. Thank you, Jose. I'd like to say a few words to introduce Jōzen to everybody. Good morning. So, Jōzen Tamari Gibson began formal meditation practice in 2004 through Sōtō Zen while living in Japan, joined by a Theravāda practice in 2010. Jōzen is a participant in the 2017–2021 Insight Meditation Society Dharma teacher training program and also serves on the New York Insight Meditation Center's teacher council with certifications in embodiment studies in yoga, qìgōng, indigenous focusing-oriented therapy, and complex trauma.

Jōzen lives to provide and nourish contemplative mind, heart, body, alignment, practices, and space. It's rooted in wellness, anti-oppression, and interdependent liberation for all beings. Jōzen honours the wisdom and compassion of all teachers, including their mother Kimi and Dharma root teacher, Pamela Wise. Thank you for joining us, Jōzen. Kami and the gathering's support can be deeply appreciated.

So again, this is a compassionate practice. If you are familiar with practicing in a meditation center, meditation hall, or zendo, some places you may see a Buddha on one side of the meditation hall. Directly across, you may see Kuan Yin, the embodiment of compassion. In Zen centers, in front of the Buddha is Mañjuśrī, Mañjuśrī being the bodhisattva, the spirit, these embodiments of wisdom—Kuan Yin, compassion; Mañjuśrī, wisdom. That is a reminder of wisdom and compassion, this metaphor being the wings of a bird of our practice.

In order to fly and to move with some ease, wisdom and compassion move together. They flow together. When we understand that wisdom is arising but not much compassion, there is some difficulty in how we are engaging in the world, perhaps. Or if there is an abundance of compassion but not so much wisdom, not so much insight or awareness, some other things are happening in our world. In the between is mindfulness, the awareness. How aware can

we be of what is honoring our wisdom and distracting our compassion, of what may be nourishing our compassion and disconnecting us from wisdom?

And in this practice, Buddha Dhamma of practice, the Buddha believes, as do I, and has taught that we are all innately embodying these levels of wisdom and compassion, *karuṇā*. But we have been taught in many ways that we need to focus on the head space, the mind, not the wisdom of the heart. Not the wisdom of the body. Gil beautifully reminded us this past week that what is most fundamental in our life is love. And so that is most fundamental. May that be where we enquire: What is our relationship with love?

We may begin with understanding how we define love for ourselves, or even how love was defined for us. Coming into relationship for ourselves of these terms, and this innate being, this innate embodiment, this innate felt sense that may not even have words within that understanding. Gil also reminded us that what is most fundamental is love. In everything, there is support of love. Everything else supports love. And if not, it is the recipient of love, the recipient of love.

And so here in this short offering, I'd like to focus on the recipient piece. This is an external understanding from an internal place. So what if we were to understand the embodiment, the expression of compassion, the recipient of being everything? What is this form in front of you that a mama named Jōzen? What if this form is compassion? What if your form is compassion within the Buddha Dhamma?

This also means that there is wisdom that's present within the *Brahmavihāras*, these Brahmin abodes, these heavenly abodes, these dwelling places, of these attitudes, of the heart-mind-body. Compassion, *karuṇā*, is when compassion, when love meets the suffering of the world, when it meets some external suffering and internal suffering. So there's compassion that is being that. But then our condition comes in some way, you know, the type of this endemic, the top of it. For us here in this unceded Lenape territory in northern New Jersey and New York, you know, this was March of 2020. We became the so-called epidemic of coronavirus, COVID-19, for the United States.

Many in our community, we started calling coronavirus, COVID-19, "No Rona" or "Rona," especially within our Dharma circles, because we understood Rona as a teacher. We understood that there is something to be learned here, and so how do we receive the lesson compassionately? How do we receive the lesson in the midst of everything else that had been going on in our world, in our lifetimes, for centuries, for millennia? This is what the Buddha saw during his time. This is elements of what the Buddha taught during his time in the ask of his disciples to bring it into our contemporary modern day times compassionately, with wisdom rooted in

classical teachings, the wisdom of the classical teachers, compassionately meeting this day and age, evolving the way in which we meet one another through language: the language of the heart, the language of the body, the disconnect of the minds.

This practice is how we can bear witness to suffering, how we learn how to accept what is happening without condoning the causes and conditions that brought it forth. Accepting and condoning—very different. This practice is not easy, though it is simple. We as human beings just find ways to make it challenging, that make it difficult. Can we learn to be compassionate with each other? But we have to learn to be compassionate with ourselves first and foremost.

I want to read you a quote. This is from Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, and this is a piece on educating compassion; it's a very beautiful piece. It goes very deep and wide and spaciouly into how we educate ourselves to be more compassionate. So this is a small quote from the larger section where Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu says:

It's a well-known principle in all meditation traditions that a moment's insight into the pain of the present is far more beneficial than viewing the present moment with disgust and placing one's hopes on a better future.

Once again, Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu says and shares that it's a well-known principle in all meditation traditions that a moment's insight into the pain of the present is far more beneficial than viewing the present moment with disgust and placing one's hope on a better future. So this reminds us of the Pāli word, the language of the written text of the Buddha Dhamma, the Buddhist teachings. In Pāli, the word for mindfulness, *sati*, starts in—many of you are familiar with this. Many of you have heard it translated as such, as mindfulness. I feel it is very important for us to remember a key definition of *sati* being to remember, to remember.

We're all going to have our unique doorways and entryways into what we remember and how we remember our conditioning. And what this practice is asking us to do is to be in awareness of our conditioning, to study and investigate mindfully through the body, through the heart, wisdom of our conditioning, to de-condition ourselves, to decolonize the ways that we have been taught to be in this world, this world that centers division that may not be your unique world. That may not be your embodiment. Yet we are living in a world that very much feeds that, and nourishes it, and supports it, and funds it. So accepting that, not condoning.

There is one, my favorite—this is not in comparison as a hierarchy, but favorite in terms of how it resonates with my body. There is this group called the Nap Ministry. In the Nap Ministry, you can find online, social media websites, a beautiful group that directly centers a form of

compassion that is rest, in learning how to rest. That goes against the stream. Against the stream is the way that the Buddha talks. This practice, this is going against the stream of dominant culture, the dominant culture that says we need to do, do, do, do.

As late as that says, now there's no need to be done. Not focus on being the body, and the mind will follow the body, and the heart will follow the mind. Wherever the mind goes, the heart and the body will go. That's not true. Our bodies break down, our heart breaks, our mind fights itself. Can we learn how to be in relationship, this deep compassionate relationship with our bodies, knowing our capacity levels for any given moment?

Many of us are engaged in the world. For some, during this pandemic, we have learned folks who have been deeply engaged in the world for generations and generations. We call them front line workers. Do we understand the ways in which we need to be in relationship with our capacity in this moment to be of support for other people, other beings, all beings best? As we're able to spot this grand wish, we practice on behalf of all beings, all sentient beings, millions of billions of beings. But yet in our worlds, these smaller pockets of the world—it's like Jōzen's world.

For example, on any given day, I may be able to be in connection with five people, like actual direct one-on-one connection. Not talking about online in this way where so many millions of people can connect. We talk about how we connect one-on-one, or two-on-two, or small groups. Be mindful of how much energy it takes to engage. We need to. We need to rest. We need warmth and we need shelter. We need water.

This is my thought, reminding me to take a sip. This precious element here, being in gratitude with all these forms, not taking them for granted, allowing ourselves as well to rest, to sleep as a necessity. Some people say, "Well, when I meditate, I fall asleep and I don't want to do that." So what if we shifted our attitude, our perspective on that? Sometimes when we sit to meditate and we start to fall asleep, yes, we may understand sleepiness as a hindrance, as something that we don't want. But what if it's something that we actually need in that moment?

And what if that meditation was soothing enough and allowed us to be who we needed to be in that moment—and that's to sleep? What if? And then it can be the intention at another time. If we want to feel into the intricacies and the wisdom that sleep provides the body, then we can have a lot more intention and bring some more energy into that intimacy with sleeping as we are meditating. And sometimes when we are sleeping, we bring that inquiry forward, "Oh, let's get curious about this. Let's get curious about this felt sense of sleepiness." That in itself brings some energy. But we want to be mindful of how we do that, that level of

energy that comes forward. It can be a way of striving. It can be this subtle way of wanting to do more, wanting to overcome sleepiness when we're interested in overcoming anything. We're interested in being with and allowing that to be our guide through understanding.

Again, accepting as it is, not condoning. Compassion, *karuṇā*. This is how we begin to remember in the moment. Or we come into relationship with understanding the heart-body as wisdom, just as we understand sleepiness as wisdom, as compassion, as a place of awareness. Before I close here, it is wise to say something about them. There's been a lot of conversation and a lot of investigation and greedy investigation into what compassion fatigue may be for folks.

And I am of the deep belief—this is through my own practice, in what I've seen in my teachers and my elders, for example, and even the youth who have been beautiful guides for me over years—that compassion itself does not fatigue. Same way, as we understand, wisdom itself does not fatigue. Awareness, mindfulness, is not anything that has a finite limit to it. These are very deep old wisdom energies, ancient energies and emotional energies, old, present, to-be energies. We'll be so lucky to get to a point where we could actually view the fatigue of compassion. I don't believe that to be possible.

And so what is actually happening is the mind may be fatiguing. The mind may be bumping up against something. The heart may be bumping up against something. I can go into a million different things, and go into a million different stories, how we may be othering, pushing away this separation piece. So what actually may be happening is within this realm of what some of us are calling like these far and near energies that are either opposites of compassion or masquerading as compassion. You may have heard of these as far and near enemies. I like to refer to them as impostors because they are impersonating our innate selves in these ways.

So, for example, a far impostor, something that we are very familiar with, it does indeed must instigate investigation. Doesn't mind need much inquiry? This, for me, is what we may call cruelty or hatred. In our own lives, we have very familiar relationships with it, or we know other folks, we're able to see it very clearly. When we need to be a resource in that way, when we need to hunt the horn, to kind of come in the middle and be a resource, compassion is a resource in that way. But that type of sound, that type of reactivity in that horn, we can—we're known with that, we have some familiarity with that's more reactive. What we're looking for is a more appropriate response, the near impostor, the one that takes a little bit more agitation and some curiosity. We name this as pity, p-i-t-y, when it's this energy.

When we are either looking down at someone or separating someone from our experience,

when not connected, we don't understand that we're interconnected in this life. We pity that being or that situation, "Oh, I'm glad that's not me." There are ways in which this shows up and can masquerade as compassion. Many of our ways in which we dominate to charity. We fill it up. Our money can do our talking for us. In many cases, it is a representation how we can extend our reach to places. But if the intention in how we're giving, as we all look at those poor people, is no—pity, that's what—I'm glad that's not me. Here's some money. That's not compassion.

We're talking about true interconnected compassion, honoring everything, all things, the foundation of everything as love. So in closing, I remind us again of Gil's words. Where Gil says to pause for a moment—if anyone else remembers Gil's words, would you figure out for yourself for a moment? Okay, we are talking about the fundamentals of love, the foundations of love. So Gil says, what is most fundamental is love. Everything else is support to love, or is the recipient for love. What is most fundamental is love, and everything else supports love, or is the recipient for love.

And so this week we are practicing recipient's compassion, self-compassion, establishing our capacities to be with what is in a moment, accepting, not condoning, nourishing our bodies, eating, being warm, sheltered, resting appropriately to be of service as best we are able in the world for others, on behalf of others. So that's all for my gift. Thank you for your practice. Thank you for showing up here best as you are able. Thank you for allowing me to enter into your space. Thank you.

I scanned the chat before a little bit just to see what any questions are coming up to this robot. I saw a question about the nap organization. I can't put it in the chat. Just look up Nap Ministry. They may be [napministry.org](http://napministry.org). If you're on Facebook or Instagram, they'll pop up beautifully. You cannot miss them. They're very powerful.

Yes, gratitude for the lovely raindrops, Northern California. Yes, right. In a way, the rain and that element of the rain, the water that we talked about—look at earlier. Just noticing the elements from an external perspective. But really, from this internal perspective, will you notice even a fire element, the fire element that allows that warmth, and that coolness to be known, but also the fire element? We even look to nature in this way. I know it is hard within reconciling this, within what's been happening with the wildfires. But may we learn from nature in these patterns as we rebuild, as we honor and mourn what we have lost. There's wisdom in these elements. For quite some time, nature herself has used fire to undo and rebuild, to nourish the soil so that new growth can come up.

So how are we learning from nature in that way? The rain falls—raining here earlier this week.

It took some while for us to get that level of rain, and we recently got our first snowfall here as well. These rain elements are exceptionally beautiful. Yeah, sorry for anyone that the audio quality was low for you. I know that's my connection. Could be my voice. I won't turn it up on your end—revisit this recording and turning up on your end, see if that's helpful.

And I got a message from Kami, maybe repeating—I think it may be what I shared from Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu. Repeat that here from Educating Compassion, Bhikkhu Ṭhānissaro:

It's a well-known principle in all meditation traditions that a moment's insight into the pain of the present is far more beneficial than viewing the present moment with disgust and placing one's hopes on a better future.

Once again, it's a well-known principle in all meditation traditions that a moment's insight into the pain of the present is far more beneficial than viewing the present moment with disgust and placing one's hopes on a better future. That is Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu from Educating Compassion. And so I would stop here right now. Again, this is an embodiment practice. Being careful as we engage with these questions and these reflections of how we start to come up into this head space, this cognitive space, and try to figure it out. This is not something that we're trying to figure out; it's something that we're practicing to be with and then to understand. And from that place, allow yourself to go in and be it, investigate for yourself. These elements, especially as Gil continues to guide us this week, to Gil's perspective on compassion. So again, big gratitude to each of you. I do hope to be at Insight Retreat Center sometime when we can meet together in person.

Definitely, IMC. I was supposed to be at IMC last year. Something personal came up, but I'll make sure to be there in person at some point as well. Thank you all for brightness. Be well to each other. Be well to yourself.