

Dharmette: Sources for Care-Giving (4 of 5) Compassion

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So good morning and good day. And this is the fourth talk on the sources of caregiving. And today's topic is the source of caregiving that's probably most commonly associated with caregiving, which is compassion. And many Buddhists put a tremendous emphasis on compassion. And compassion is, I think, a very profound emotion, attitude, practice. Partly because compassion belongs to someplace that has a very deep, personal, intimate source or operating system deep inside of us.

With compassion, when we have our open, we're cultivated a kind of presence, openness, sensitivity that taps into the deeper places of care and compassion. That we allow ourselves, we become people who are the suffering of the world, the suffering of others, can touch something very deep and essential and core in our very being. As we kind of, the layers of armor, the layers of resistance, preoccupation, disconnect we have, begins to relax and soften. And we start feeling more the deepest sensitivity within us, kind of almost like a core of what it means to be a human being. And to have the suffering of others touch this deep place means that we are somehow moved deeply. We care deeply.

And there's something about encountering suffering that touches this deep place in a very different place than a very different way than almost anything else. And not that it distresses us, not that it, because the source of distress in us is a very different place in this soft, deep sensitivity. Distress belongs a little bit more to the surface mind, belongs more to the story-making mind, or the mind of attachment or resistance or fear. And to have all those kind of surface kind of things settled, right? To feel the suffering of others can certainly be uncomfortable in very profound ways, but also there's a rightness to it. It feels right.

Sometimes it feels very sweet or feels kind of very kind of, dare I say, beautiful sensations inside or sweet sensations, or it just seems so amazingly right. Of course, if they're suffering,

I want to feel it, I want to hold it, I want to be there for it. It's right to be open to it. And so this word we have in English, compassion, comes from the Latin root passion that means suffering, like the suffering and the passion of Christ. And so come means a with. So on the surface it might look like suffering with others.

But it isn't that we want to have the same suffering as them and be as distressed, be as hurt, be as maybe sometimes incapacitated as other people can be in their deep suffering. Right. But the with for me means to accompany. We're here to accompany people. To accompany means to be present in a calm and stable way. Just like if you're someone's distressed, and they just need someone who can really listen well, listen attentively.

We sit with them and we're there to listen. Maybe lean forward a little bit. And nothing's required of us, but be a really active, good listener. Sometimes all we need is provide our presence. It doesn't have to, maybe that people don't want to speak, but they just want to be accompanied. Someone who has some great suffering might be very meaningful that you go for a walk with them and you walk in silence.

And so they know that there's someone there sharing the space, holding them, accompanying them, someone who recognizes and knows the difficulties they're going through. And just, that's enough. It's easier for them to be with their own challenge if they have that accompaniment. So suffering with, together with, accompanying with, being present with someone. And that's the beginning of compassion, is that ability to accompany and to listen and to hold in a way that feels very profound or meaningful for the person who has the compassion. So, of course I'll be here. Why not? I mean, this seems like the most important thing.

And then compassion often has the idea that we would want people not to suffer. We want them to be free of their suffering. And there's an art to that wish. And the art of it is, it can be very meaningful for people to know that that's what other people want them well, are well-wishing them, want them to be free of suffering, see have a vision of them becoming free. They're not being left alone to suffer. You know, just suffer and suffer that no one cares.

But to care means also to want that suffering to be over, to be healed, to be softened, to be liberating in some way. And to not feel that someone is not trying to fix you or feels like something's wrong with you that you're suffering, but accompanying you with something is right here. Something is right, not in the causes of the suffering, but something is right about really caring, attending, accompanying suffering so that the self-healing of the heart, the self-healing of our own inner life has a chance to function. It's phenomenal the capacity of our inner life to self-heal, given the right conditions. And in our practice of mindfulness, one of the right conditions is a non-reactive, clear mindfulness that learns to accompany even our

own suffering. We learn how to be with it without fixing it, without being struggling with it.

We just hold it like we're listening deeply so that it's not our thinking mind, that is trying to fix and try to solve the suffering, but rather is a thinking mind that's there to support this gentle, open, deeper sensitivity that can hold calmly, calm attention to suffering. Right? And so when we're with other people wishing their suffering comes to an end, that begins with that. Just people feel that. And I know in my own life, one of the biggest moments of... of experience, transformative moments that I felt compassion from someone else, was I just felt the person's care for me, attention, fully there, feeling, knowing, recognizing my distress. And I could feel the person wished it were otherwise, but was just making lots of space. Yes. To let it be there. And that was the right recipe for some deep, really deep feeling of respect and possibility and openness that I had never known before.

And then, after these two things first, learning to accompany with calm attention, listen deeply, having a real sense that you would like it to be otherwise for the person, then, if it's appropriate, compassion can be put into action. Where maybe we find someone a glass of water, someone's been in a car accident and they're shook up. And so we go sit next to them, we put a blanket over them, we make sure they have water. Very simple actions to kind of stabilize and support people. And bring people a band-aid. Bring them food. Whatever it might be that we can do to make a difference, but rather than it being a performer, kind of just giving them something because they need it, and that's all we have to do, that doesn't really convey the depths of what compassion's about.

The depths of it, so it really can touch the depths of someone else, and we can share the depths of this human experience, is to have learned how to deeply take in and feel the suffering of the world, know how to accompany it calmly and stably, learn to listen and be present that way for others, recognize this wish that we have for the suffering to end, and somehow skillfully kind of let that be in the relationship, and then to offer or to offer some way to support and to help, whatever seems appropriate in the time. So compassion. Compassion is because of its deep connection to someplace core, to what it means to be a human being, that maybe touches us or activates something very different than generosity or very different than goodwill, very different than not wanting to harm. For some people, it makes compassion one of the most profound forms sources of caregiving. Yeah. And so maybe so. But we have one more source of caregiving, which is the one that I feel is really the most fundamental one that holds all the others.

And rather than emphasizing how profound it is, it's almost, I want to emphasize that this is the most fundamental form of caregiving that's a source of all the others, is also one that is

most ordinary. So that'll be *anukampā*, or I translate as care, a word that I keep using this week as I've been talking. So in the meantime, today, look for opportunities to recognize, to learn about, to run into the suffering of our suffering world. You don't have to look very far. And maybe don't look for the greatest ones, but look for situations, look for experiences where you see it, know it, read it, witness it, accompany somebody with it, and see if you can do the first step of compassion. Just simply accompany, simply listen. See what it's like to allow it to touch the deepest place inside of you, as if you don't have to do anything more, but accompany it. And see what that's like. And because in doing that, you're also accompanying yourself as you experience the suffering of the world. Thank you.