

Compassion

"Compassion can be roughly defined in terms of a state of mind that is nonviolent, nonharming, and nonaggressive. It is a mental attitude based on the wish for others to be free of their suffering and is associated with a sense of commitment, responsibility, and respect toward the other."

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *The Art of Happiness: a Handbook for Living.*

"Compassion enjoins us to respond to pain, and wisdom guides the skillfulness of the response, telling us when and how to respond. Through compassion our lives become an expression of all that we understand and care about and value." Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness: the Revolutionary Art of Happiness.*

In the *Dharma*, it is said that compassion is a powerful healing force that reaches out to alleviate suffering. Reaching out with compassion can sometimes feel like the strength of courage to face what is difficult. Reaching out can also feel gentle, like a soothing balm that offers some relieving kindness when we can sincerely say to someone, "*I care about your pain.*"

Kamala Masters

"I know most people try hard to do good and find out too late that they should have tried softer." Andrea Gibson

"Of all the dangers we face, from climate chaos to nuclear war, none is so great as the deadening of our response." Joanna Macy.

"Sit in pairs. Face each other. Stay silent. Take a couple of deep breaths, centering yourself and exhaling tension...Look into each other's eyes...Now, as you look into those eyes, let yourself become aware of the pain that is there. There are sorrows accumulated in that life, as in all human lives, though you can only guess at them. There are disappointments and failures and losses and loneliness and abuse...there are hurts beyond the telling...Let yourself open to that pain, to hurts that this person may never have told another being...You cannot fix that pain, but you can be with it. As you let yourself simply be with that suffering, know that what you are experiencing is the great compassion. It is very good for the healing of our world....."

Joanna Macy, *Taking Heart: Spiritual Exercises for Social Activists*, from *World as Lover, World as Self.*

It is difficult to know what to do with so much happiness.
With sadness there is something to rub against,
a wound to tend with lotion and cloth.
When the world falls in around you, you have pieces to pick up,
something to hold in your hands, like ticket stubs
or change.
Since there is no place large enough
to contain so much happiness,
You shrug, you raise your hands, and it flows out of you
into everything you touch. You are not responsible.
You take no credit, as the night sky takes no credit
for the moon, but continues to hold it, and share it,
and in that way, be known.

Selection from "So Much Happiness" by Naomi Shihab Nye

When you cry I guide your tears toward the garden of kisses I once planted on your cheek, so you know they are all perennials. Forgive me, for not being able to weep with you. One day you will understand. One day you will know why I read the poetry of your grief to those waiting to be born, and they are all the more excited. There is nothing I want for now that we are so close I open the curtain of your eyelids with my own smile every morning. I wish you could see the beauty your spirit is right now making of your pain, your deep-seated fears playing musical chairs, laughing about how real they are not.

Selection from "Love Letter from the Afterlife" by Andrea Gibson

Self-compassion

"I visited all quarters with my mind
Nor found I any dearer than myself
Self is likewise to every other dear
Who loves himself will never harm another." Udana 47

"The very fact that one is engaging in compassion makes it almost inevitable that one will be soft with oneself instead of pushing too hard. [Compassion] encourag[es] a soft and allowing attitude towards oneself." Analayo

Dr. Kristin Neff: With self-compassion, we give ourselves the same kindness and care we'd give to a good friend. Having compassion for yourself means that you honor and accept your humanness. Things will not always go the way you want them to. You will encounter frustrations, losses will occur, you will make mistakes, bump up against your limitations, fall short of your ideals. This is the human condition, a reality shared by all of us. The more you open your heart to this reality instead of constantly fighting against it, the more you will be able to feel compassion for yourself and all your fellow humans in the experience of life.

"Burnout and self-sacrifice, the paradigm for the lone hero who takes nothing for herself and gives everything to others, injure all of us who are trying to bring the dharma to everyday lay life through communities of transformative well-being, where the exchange of self for other is re-envisioned as the care of self in service to the community." Mushim Patricia Ikeda, Buddhadharma, Fall 2016.

Mushim Ikeda also quotes Angela Davis: "I think our notions of what counts as radical have changed over time. Self-care and healing and attention to the body and the spiritual dimension – all of this is now a part of radical social struggles. That wasn't the case before."

"Those who do the most growing in this life are those who offer the most care, compassion, and understanding to the parts of themselves that have not yet grown." Andrea Gibson

Questions for Discussion

Think of a time when an attitude of compassion resulted in compassionate action toward another being. What action did you take? How did that feel?

Are you comfortable with self-compassion? Self-care? If not, why not? If so, talk about a time when self-compassion brought you through a hard time.