

Amritam Gamaya

Lead us to Immortality (Part 1)

Chapter 100 'Sympathy and Compassion.'

Children, at first glance, sympathy and compassion seem alike, but if we look deeply, we will see that there is world of difference between the two. Sympathy is a momentary feeling that passes through the mind on seeing the sorrowful plight of another person. This feeling neither touches one deeply nor influences one greatly. Seeing the other person's sorrow, one might extend a little help or speak a kind word in order to ease one's own anguish. Compassion, however, is a state in which one experiences the sorrow of another as one's own. There is no duality there, only identification and oneness. When the left hand is injured, the right hand will caress it because the pain belongs to the one, undivided whole.

Once a disciple asked a Guru, "What is real compassion?"

The Guru took the disciple to a street near the ashram and asked him to observe carefully a beggar sitting by the wayside. After a while, a poor old woman passing by threw a coin into his begging bowl. Moments later, a wealthy man gave the beggar 50 rupees. Sometime later, a child came by and, seeing the beggar, smiled sweetly at him. The boy went near him and talked to the beggar as if he were his older brother. The beggar was touched and pleased. Turning to his disciple, the Guru asked, "Who among the three had real compassion?"

The disciple said, "The rich man."

Smiling, the Guru said, "He did not have an iota of sympathy or compassion for the beggar. His only intention was to make a show of his generosity. The old woman had sympathy for the beggar, though she did not see the beggar as her own or have an intense desire to alleviate his poverty. The child had compassion because he behaved as if the beggar was his own kin. Even though he was unable to help the beggar materially, there was empathy and a bonding of two hearts. What the boy demonstrated was real compassion."

What the world needs today is not fleeting sympathy but heartfelt compassion. Compassion dawns in the heart that see the joys and sorrows of others as its own. Such hearts will be filled with love and a readiness to serve. Compassion is the only medicine that can heal the wounds of the world.

- Amma