

Seven Factors of Compassion (5 of 5) Equanimity

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dissociation

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Hello, everyone, and welcome to the final talk about the seven factors of compassion. We have been talking about compassion for some time – three weeks ago and now this week.

There are many characteristics of compassion or many supportive conditions that come together in order to have a healthy form of compassion. Many people may not realize that. If they have the capacity to feel compassion, they may assume that whatever way they happen to feel compassion is *the* way to experience it. When there is just one way, it might be a good way sometimes, but it might not be universally useful – for

example, if the suffering of the world touches wounds or insecurities we have, or if being present for the suffering of the world frightens, distresses, or depresses us. All those things can happen. If those feelings are mixed up or entangled with compassion, then compassion is being influenced by them, and that compassion might not be the most healthy way to be in the world.

Learning to bring these other qualities to bear on compassion and including them is a protection against being harmed, exhausted, fatigued, troubled, and depressed by the suffering of the world. These qualities keep us fluid, open, and transparent in a certain way to the suffering of the world. This way, the suffering of the world doesn't land on the places we're holding onto a sense of self, protecting a sense of self, or asserting a sense of self – those ways that we want to see ourselves or know ourselves. This way, the suffering doesn't get interfered with by our desires and animosities.

We can begin to appreciate the different characteristics and qualities that can come along with compassion. For example, mindfulness can come along. A sense of investigation can also come along, where we see the distinction between the ways of being present for suffering that cause harm to us, limit us, and cause us suffering, and the ways of being present with suffering that are more opening and freeing. We can really feel

that distinction and see what's happening inside as we meet suffering.

We can make effort and choose the path of less suffering, strain, and tension – the path that creates more space, peace, and openness around the capacity to meet suffering. We can appreciate that compassion can come with a sweetness. In fact, if there isn't something that feels sweet or has a feeling of rightness in it, then compassion is probably mixed up with unnecessary things. Then we go back to the awareness practice to see what's really going on here. We go back to making distinctions, seeing clearly the two paths – that which leads us to feel stressed and that which leads us away from stress. Then we can choose to act on and live in the one that is more beneficial.

Tranquility can come along with compassion. When we are compassionate, if we feel agitated and restless – which can happen very easily – we know that the compassion is not going to be as clean or spacious. When we are agitated, we are more vulnerable to some of the ways that we can be undermined and impacted by suffering.

Next comes the *samādhi* factor, the sense of being really at home, stable, unified, centered in this bubble of compassion, care, and love. *Samādhi* is like our home. We feel as if we are home with it – as opposed to

something that we should do, or we have to kind of gear up for, or tense up to try to have it, or we're constantly being distracted from it.

Finally, today, the equanimity factor of compassion. Sometimes it's hard for people to appreciate that compassion and equanimity can come together. There can be a very strong idea that we are supposed to be distressed and upset. We think we're supposed to feel the suffering of the world in such a way that we suffer as well, and if we don't feel it that way and suffer, then we're not really connected to it.

But in fact, we don't have to feel the suffering of the world in the same way. Feeling and sensing the suffering of others is a kind of loving recognition. It is a kind of sensing without suffering. We're not suffering with them – I don't know if there would be any hope then. But we are feeling them and knowing them fully. There is a kind of accompanying, a kind of recognition, and a capacity for caring, accompanying, and respecting others, but without us suffering as well.

Equanimity is part of the heart of compassion. It is the capacity to be untroubled, unagitated, and nonreactive in the encounter with suffering. To some people hearing that, it might seem that compassion is aloof or indifferent, but in fact, it's the opposite. The ability to have compassion with lots of breathing room for

suffering, lots of space for it, without clamping down, without creating limits, contraction, and tightness in awareness – this actually allows us to be more fully present, to be more sensitive, more intuitive, and attuned to other people.

One meaning of equanimity is a very satisfying, peaceful, non-reactivity of the mind. I say “satisfying and peaceful” because non-reactivity by itself can be kind of an indifference or dissociation. It can be a neutrality that is like not caring or closing down. But equanimity is not a neutral state. It’s very satisfying; it is peaceful; it is available to be present for things – and it is not reactive. Feeling that the mind is not being hijacked by reactivity is such a delightful medicine, a relief, and a joy for the mind.

When we no longer have a reactive mind, we can finally feel: “Oh, now I’m home. Now, I am more fully myself. This is a healthy state.” When we have a very reactive agitated mind, we don’t feel this. If we don’t know anything else, it might feel as if that reactivity is who we are. Deep equanimity is more like, “Oh, now I am who I am.” It’s that satisfying.

The seven factors of compassion are reference points for understanding the full potential, beauty, and strength of compassion. Keep them as a list to refer back to when you’re encountering suffering and feeling

compassion and care. Bring along mindfulness in the middle of compassion – don't forget to be mindful. Or, recognize that mindfulness comes along.

Recognize that being careful about where the suffering is and where the freedom from suffering is, *is* the movement of compassion, and that brings along effort, investigation, mindfulness, joy, tranquility, *samādhi*, and equanimity. One reason why this distinction is such a beautiful reference point is that when compassion is strongest, most healthy, most itself, and most clean, the seven factors of compassion come along effortlessly. We don't have to practice them; they are just there. If they are not there, then we know where to work. We know what to explore and practice with so we can evoke or release the natural capacity of compassion to have these seven beautiful qualities.

Exploring this is a life's work. It is not something that we can expect to do overnight or do well all the time. But rather, compassion is a wonderful mirror for us to see ourselves better – see where we get hung up, where we limit the mind, or limit awareness to a more contracted state. It is a lifetime exploration. Spending a lifetime on the journey of discovering, practicing, acting on, and living by compassion – it is a great journey. It's a great adventure. It's a valuable treasure. It's a gift we give to ourselves and others.

May the talks this week give you a heightened appreciation and love for compassion, and a heightened appreciation and love for all the people that you meet. Thank you very, very much.