

Compassionate Action (5 of 5) For Its Own Sake

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

self-preoccupation, freedom, healthy, wind-drag, oneness, unity, immersed, simplicity, care, well-being, resistance, self-concern, dishwasher, absorbed, participation, relaxation, obligation, responsibility, stress, awareness, respect aspiration, attunement, appreciation, whole-heartedness, richness, benefit

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This talk will be the fifth and final talk on compassionate action. The focus of the talk is compassionate action for its own sake.

Compassionate action is often considered to be focused on the welfare of others. Sometimes there is self-compassion, and sometimes there is caring for oneself while one compassionately cares for others. It's possible to have compassionate action and care for both self and others along with an open-hearted vision of how to be in the world. We wish for *everyone* to benefit and be free, not just the parties involved.

There's a fifth kind of compassionate action that some Buddhist traditions consider to be the highest pinnacle of compassion. This is when we're so involved and engaged in compassionate action that we forget ourselves – not through sacrificing our own well-being, but because we know how to care for the world and for ourselves in a healthy appropriate way. In that healthy way of being, it's a beautiful thing to give ourselves over so completely that the self as the agent of activity falls away.

Some Buddhist traditions speak of the oneness of the compassionate person, the recipient of compassion, and the act of compassion itself. There's a cycle, a unity. They are inseparable. There is no division, and somehow, we are immersed in it. We don't have the thought, “It's me being compassionate. I'm helping another person.” Even the idea that it's a compassionate action can fall away. Once we have decided that this is the right thing to do, we give ourselves over to it fully. There's simplicity and freedom in the action.

This is true for anything we do. If we wash dishes in the sink, there can certainly be a lot of self-preoccupation – “I don't like doing the dishes. I wish I didn't have to do it. I'm always doing it. It's not fair.” Or, “I have important

things to do. Let's get this over with quickly because I have to go do something I really want to do.”

There are a lot of different types of self-concerns there. They might be concerns about being the best dishwasher in the neighborhood and trying to prove to everyone that you're a good dishwasher. There's also just washing dishes for the sake of washing dishes. There is a kind of giving oneself over fully to dishwashing with no resistance. There's full participation. There's no judgment or self-concern in washing the dishes. Maybe no one's in the house with you. You're not trying to prove anything to anyone.

Giving yourself over to a healthy activity is one of the qualities of freedom, happiness, or delight. It is akin to being absorbed in reading a good book, doing a hobby, doing art, playing music, or being involved in a sport perhaps. These are all things in which we almost forget ourselves in the activity. There still might be a lot of attention, monitoring of what's happening, and adjusting ourselves, but not through the ordinary filter of “me, myself, and mine” – self-concern, self-preoccupation, and “what's in it for me.”

If we're talking about compassionate action, one of the beautiful ways to practice it is to have learned how to give yourself to something fully – to participate fully – so that a certain kind of wind-drag of self – self-concern –

is not there. There's a refreshment that comes from dropping self-concerns.

Many people have a lot of stress around “Me, myself, and mine, what's in it for me? What's going to happen to me? What do people think? Will people still like me? Am I doing it right? Am I doing it wrong? Do I need to apologize?” and “I'm sorry.” All that is wind-drag. All that interferes with what could be a simple, relaxed way – it doesn't have to be vigorous or forceful – of giving ourselves over to the activity at hand. In this case, the activity is compassionate action.

Relaxation is often not associated with compassionate action because the emphasis is often put on helping someone who is suffering. The emphasis is on doing something. There can even be a sense of obligation and responsibility, “It's up to me. I have to do it. I'm the one who is going to help.” All of that is wind-drag. All of that adds stress.

If you've decided this is a healthy way of acting, all of the things I've been teaching over these last weeks about compassion come together in the actions we do. The different component parts of an action – all the things that come together to inform compassion – include well-developed capacities for awareness, for attunement to others, oneself, and the situation, for appreciation and respect for others, and for considering

what we aspire to. What's our wish that goes along with compassion? What's a healthy aspiration? All of these come together in our actions. Then, we also consider what the right action is.

These are the principles I offered earlier this week. When all these come together, over time they become second nature without needing a lot of thought and consideration about them. We can, at some point, give ourselves over to the activity at hand – driving someone to the emergency room. We're just there for that activity. Bringing someone dinner; cooking dinner for someone who's sick; spending time with someone who's in crisis; going for a walk with them or sitting with and listening to them; putting a band-aid on a small child's scraped knee. These are all ways in which we can be compassionate, but at some point, we give ourselves over to it fully, with whole-heartedness and full participation, so that self-preoccupation falls away.

The advantage of that is, I believe, that compassionate action can be clean, unclouded, and not agitated by things that aren't compassion. More often than not, self-concern – self-preoccupation – is a hindrance for the purposes of compassion. Another advantage is that compassionate action becomes a vehicle for our own freedom, freedom from self. We learn so much about letting go when we give ourselves over wholeheartedly to participating in healthy activities.

The culmination of this week of talking about compassionate action is to come to a point where compassionate action is done for its own sake. Of course, before this, we do it for the sake of others or for ourselves. But as we act compassionately, at some point we can just let go of all those thoughts and concerns and give ourselves over to the simplicity of what we're doing.

By doing this, we benefit ourselves in a fantastic way. We benefit ourselves by getting a taste of freedom – freedom from self. It's then that I think the joy and happiness that can come with compassion have the most chance to flower and develop. One of the great things about compassion is the way it can be a source of happiness, joy, well-being, and a way of being on the path to freedom.

Those are my thoughts about compassionate action for this week. Depending on how we count it, the past six, seven, or maybe eight weeks of teachings have all been focused on compassion. I'm hoping it has enriched you to understand the different aspects, the different streams of attention, and the reflections we can bring to compassion. I'm hoping that these thoughts can really enrich the world so we don't think of compassion in simplistic ways, and so we don't just jump to act in a

compassionate way without giving any thought to the multi-faceted and valuable richness of compassion.

I so appreciate the chance to explore this topic with you all for these weeks. I look forward to doing more of it.
Thank you.