

# Joy of Compassion (1 of 5) Joy from Awareness

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## **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

Maui, fire, flooding, care, love, support, harm, benefit, happiness, lightness, sweetness, rightness, free, attachment, self-preoccupation, self-concern, identify, fatigue, judgment, evaluation, recognition, knowing, effortlessness, serve, selfing, self-referencing, self-challenges, aggrandized, self-efforting, allowing, relaxing, opening, spacious

## **Gil Fronsda**

I'm returning here after being away for a couple of weeks, with many momentous events happening in this country and around the world – among them the fire in Maui. The tragedy of that keeps growing as we learn more about it. To anybody who lives in Hawaii and Maui, I send my condolences and my love, and also to people who are dealing with the flooding in Southern California. You are in our hearts.

I hope that this practice we do is really for the benefit of this world. I hope that the way that it benefits us makes

it possible for us to offer the right attention, support, love, compassion, and care to the world around us. Maybe it's just the very local world of a few people around us, or maybe it's a broader world, but this practice does orient us to live in a way that doesn't add to the harm of the world, but instead, adds to ways in which we can benefit the world.

For the last few months, I've been teaching about compassion. I wondered if I had finished with this series, but thinking about it the last couple of weeks, I wanted to do one more week. It felt important to actually spend a whole week on the joy of compassion, the happiness of compassion.

For those of you who have been listening to this series on compassion, as you start to understand the ecology of all the different pieces of compassion and how they come together, perhaps you can appreciate that there is a potential for our compassionate relationship to the world to bring joy and happiness, or a sense of lightness, or a sense of sweetness, or a sense of rightness. This can lighten us and make the suffering of the world not so heavy and oppressive for us to live with.

One of the great aspects of compassion is when compassion is free of any kind of attachment, self-preoccupation, or any way in which we get caught

in and identify with suffering, when the suffering of the world doesn't move through us in a free and light way. Then the full potential of compassion – how beautiful, profound, and important it is to have it – is limited.

This week I want to talk about the joy of compassion. I'd like to do it by pointing to the joy of the four different supports or foundations that need to be part of compassion for compassion to really fulfill its full potential.

Many times when we have compassion, it can be genuine but it hasn't really moved into its full potential. It might even feel overwhelming and difficult to have compassion. There can be compassion fatigue, for example, when these different elements haven't really come to fulfillment.

I've talked about the four aspects that come together to benefit compassion: awareness, attunement, appreciation, aspiration, and action. Each of these is associated with a kind of joy, delight, and happiness.

The first one is awareness. Healthy compassion comes with a well-developed capacity for being aware. We learn the art of being aware without identification or adding judgments and evaluations of me, myself, and mine to awareness. This is where the knowing (the awareness, the recognition, the mindfulness) can operate with a certain kind of effortlessness.

Applying effort to being aware is all too easy, along with the idea that *I'm* the one who's applying effort. Because of that “I” thought, all these associated ideas come along such as who I am, and why I'm doing this, and judgments about my capacity. All kinds of things come along.

Independently of that, many people just go around with a lot of self-concern. Everything is measured by what this experience says about me – what this is for me, how this is against me, how I'm a victim of this, or how I'm a consumer of it and I just want to have more. Some of this is not wrong, of course, but when it limits us, when it actually contributes more suffering and more attachments, and limits our capacity to serve the world in a free way, then there is another way.

The other way is a kind of mindfulness that has a certain quality of effortlessness – an awareness that is just there. It just arises. We can enter into or return to a clear sense of attention to the present moment where there is no self-efforting or making oneself do something. Rather, there is an allowing, an opening, and a relaxing into the awareness, into the knowing.

This is where knowing or awareness can start providing feelings of joy, happiness, or lightening up, because so much of the self-concern and self-preoccupation that we

live with dampens down the joy and the freedom that we have. Self-concern limits joy quite a lot. Many of the ideas about joy that people have in their pursuit of happiness build up a sense of self. The self gets praised, or the self gets aggrandized, or the self proves itself as being somehow wonderful in the eyes of others. Some of the unhappiness that people have is also connected to this sense of self – feelings of failure, not being good enough, and feeling that somehow they are wrong.

The radical nature of this awareness practice is in the way it points to the possibility of being alive, aware, and present outside of the limitations of these judgments and evaluations of ourselves that we live with. In the simplicity of awareness and its effortless quality, there is a way in which it is not really the self that does things. Maybe there is an activity of being aware, but there's not a sense that I'm the one who's doing it or it's about me.

This freedom from self-preoccupation and constantly being concerned with ourselves is the reason some Buddhist teachers will say that if you want to be happy, have compassion for others and live for others. The joy does not exactly come from living for others. They say this because the joy comes from not having the tight, contracted, agitated, painful ways that we live when

we're self-concerned. We kind of loosen that self-concern, step out of it, and forget it.

The self-forgetting that compassionate service can provide is maybe why some people do it. But if we only do compassionate work in the world to forget the self without addressing our self-identifications, it can be a distraction from self. There can certainly be a lightning and easing up that happens when we forget about ourselves or we are distracted from all our self-identifications.

But in healthy awareness practice, we learn how to honestly be present here for ourselves, with all the different ways in which the mind works, even the self-preoccupations, self-concern, and evaluations we make. We see them, know them, and are aware of them without identifying with them or adding more attachment and more self on top of them. It is almost as if we are beginning to hold who we are – how our mind works, and our identifications – with lots of expansive space. We identify a little bit more with the largeness of space than we do with the smallness of self-identity.

So we cultivate and develop awareness practice and have that awareness ready to encounter the suffering of the world. This awareness is free, light, open, and spacious. The awareness is not self-concerned and not self-referenced. We know ourselves well and we start

knowing the world of others around us. Then compassion has a chance to be present and can share the joy of freedom – the joy of just being aware.

The final joy of awareness practice that I want to emphasize is the joy of having an awareness practice – the joy of the faith, the appreciation, of knowing we have a practice that can meet our own suffering and our own selfing, our own self-challenges that we live with. Aren't we lucky to have a practice that helps us to work with these, to work through them and find a way with them, and to find freedom from them.

It's not always easy; it takes time, but there's the joy of knowing that we have a practice that brings so much good to ourselves and others. So, as we get a sense of that possibility, of the sweetness of awareness, we can have the joy of awareness. Then we're in a better place and more ready to experience the joy of compassion.

We'll continue on this theme. I'm happy to be sharing it with you. Thank you.