

Seven Factors of Compassion (4 of 5)

Tranquility and *Samādhi*

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

attune, harmony, appreciation, respect, attention, honoring, valuing, aspiration, suffering, effort, joy, beneficial, clinging, attachment, resistance, burden, *dukkha*

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Hello and welcome to our fourth talk on the seven factors of compassion. Today we will talk about the tranquility and the *samādhi* factors of compassion.

To review: a few weeks ago, I gave a series of talks on the foundational elements for compassion – the things that ideally would be in place so that compassion could come forth in a healthy and useful way. We learn to be aware of what's happening within us in a calm, careful, nonreactive way, so we can track our response to compassion and how to be compassionate. Then to be attuned – to attune ourselves to the people we are with and the compassion we are being present for in order to find the right way to be in harmony with the situation

before we act, maybe even before we focus on compassion. Then appreciation – to have deep respect and appreciation for ourselves or others, so that when we're compassionate, it is not pity or feeling sorry for someone. There may be something more important than compassion, which is deep honoring and valuing others and oneself. Then there is an aspiration that people not suffer – that we don't have suffering, we come to the end of it, and we support the end of it. Finally, there is action.

When those five things are in place, compassion has a healthier foundation to be supportive and nourishing in our lives. Rather than being debilitated by compassion because it's painful and exhausting, we find that compassion is actually enlivening and valuable for everyone.

This week is about continuing to practice with the presence of compassion once we have it, rather than taking it for granted or seeing it as something we have to live with as it is. It's about appreciating some of the different elements that follow in the wake of compassion.

If compassion is healthy, as we live compassionately, there will be mindfulness. If we are coming from the motivation of being present for someone or ourselves with compassion, there will be a kind of natural, easeful awareness. We don't have to work on being mindful so much. It just comes along in the wake of compassion.

This awareness that comes along is useful – we can see more clearly what's happening as we're compassionate. We can see if there are ways we are operating that are harmful or beneficial. Are we straining a little bit, or under the burden of responsibility, and contracted around that? Are we a little bit afraid? Do we feel like we have to jump in? How are we with it? We can see the difference between a way of operating that is not healthy or beneficial, and one that is. Rather than straining to learn how to be present and engaged with ease and relaxation, and rather than clinging to something, we can find a place of non-clinging so that compassion can flow more effectively.

As we make these distinctions and see our challenges with compassion, we adjust for those. This is the effort factor of compassion. We make some effort to follow a path. We choose to go in the direction that is more easeful, where it's more free, where there is less clinging, less attachment, less resistance, and less burden. So the effort factor of compassion comes along with compassion and supports it.

There is the appreciation and joy side of compassion. This is a kind of sweetness that comes from healthy compassion. If we don't feel that sweetness, we probably should go back and review the other steps – maybe even go back to the four A's: awareness,

attunement, appreciation, and aspiration, to see what's going on with us.

Next is tranquility or calmness. Healthy compassion has a calmness or tranquility to it. Sometimes I've responded with compassion to try to take care of something in the world that needed to be taken care of right away. But because I acted reactively – feeling agitated and that I had to do something, and jumped right in – I ended up making a mistake.

Once I thought there was a little fire in the distance on the farm where I was living. I wasn't calm – I got immediately activated. I didn't take the time to take a second look before I called the fire department. They came. I don't remember what it was – it was so long ago, over 50 years ago. It wasn't a fire. If I had actually taken the time to look, I would have seen that it was not a problem.

With the calm factor of compassion, the idea is to have enough calmness to see clearly. That is supported a lot by the ability to trust easeful awareness – to trust awareness that is not straining or under the burden of our needs, desires, or fears. This is not easy to find, but part of the gift of this practice is discovering an easeful, calm awareness so compassion can exist with calmness.

Next is the fascinating, wonderful capacity of compassion to support concentration (*samādhi*). This is the *samādhi* factor of compassion. *Samādhi* is a unification, a gathering together. I like to think of it as feeling so at home in our experience that we settle really deeply. All of who we are settles together and feels at home with itself.

What this means about *samādhi* is that it is not meant to override our *dukkha*, our challenges, override the way we're distracted, or override our suffering. *Samādhi* should wait until we find a way to be present for what is challenging for us – find our way through it with mindfulness, compassion, care, and attention – so that even in the midst of challenging experiences in life, we have found an inner home. We are at home in our hearts; we're home in our inner well-being.

Again, that's not at all easy to come to. It might take years of practice for some people to find that. But at that point, we can appreciate how compassion is an ingredient for *samādhi*. Compassion is part and parcel of being collected, settled, contented, and really gathered together, so that the focus of our compassion, the focus of our attention, is effective for being just here with what needs to be done – just here gathered together in the moment.

When we have this easeful, relaxed way of being present and this at-homeness, even if we are not at home in the external world, we're at home with ourselves. We feel like we belong to ourselves, we belong here, we belong in this universe in some way, even if the people around us maybe don't feel that we belong. We carry our belonging with us; we carry our settledness with us.

That is part of the gift of *samādhi*, especially if *samādhi* is not held on to as only being some kind of deep state of concentration in meditation, where we hold on and attach to it as something special. Deep states of meditation happen and they're called *samādhis*. But the *samādhi* in daily life, meeting the world, is more the aftereffect of being settled and calm. Whatever ability we have to settle and calm, be centered, belong, and feel cozy and at home here – and if it is deep states of concentration, then kind of the aftereffect of that teaches us how to feel and be at home with ourselves. I think of the aftereffect as a kind of *samādhi*. So, to allow for that reference point to be there. And then it's really a fantastic thing.

With that *samādhi*, we have the ability to gather around and let the concentration just be, and the attention can be present for what really needs our attention. This is part of the sweetness that can come from compassion.

In an example I gave on Monday of a little girl who scraped her knee in the playground, we care for her. We try to be sensitive to and attuned to her. We care for the wound and for her in the kindest, most supportive way. There is an ease there. We're not alarmed because she's not in great danger. We are present in a kind, caring way.

We almost become self-forgetting in caring for someone in that way. In that self-forgetting, if we're at home in and collected in ourselves, that gathering of attention to care for her and her knee comes along with our capacity to gather in, unify, and become focused and concentrated on the task at hand. This has a sweetness to it. It's sweet to have the ability to be focused in this way. This is the *samādhi* factor of compassion.

We have the last factor tomorrow – the equanimity factor of compassion. I'm hoping that you'll learn from this series not to take compassion as a fixed thing, as if you are either compassionate or not compassionate – you're compassionate whatever way you're compassionate, and you don't want to hear anything else – “This is my way of being compassionate!” Or maybe you never thought about it, and you're just compassionate the way you are, and think you're supposed to be that way. You are not aware that compassion has many flavors, many component parts, and many aspects. Many things interact with compassion.

When we learn to be mindful of compassion, appreciating the different factors of it, then we can start playing in the playground of compassion. We can start exploring it, adjusting it, and find out how the best of compassion can come forward. Compassion does not just happen to arise. What we call compassion might sometimes not be so healthy. We find the compassion that is healthiest for ourselves and others.

Today, if you would like, maybe focus on tranquility and calmness. If you have an occasion to have compassion for the suffering of others, and the circumstances allow you to take some time with it – if you don't have to jump into action – you can explore how you might feel warm-hearted, tender compassion for somebody else or yourself, while letting tranquility be part of it. Maybe compassion can float on tranquility or be supported by tranquility. The compassion itself is tranquil. Try not to fall into the trap of worrying that you are betraying compassion by focusing on tranquility. Actually, tranquility supports and helps grow healthy compassion in a wonderful way. Thank you all very much, and I look forward to our time tomorrow.