

Joy of Compassion (2 of 5) Joy of Attunement

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Welcome to the second talk on the joy of compassion. This is a very important concept – that there can be joy and compassion together. Keeping this as a reference point for our compassion is a protection from the compassion becoming tense, strained, oppressive, or exhausting.

It can be difficult to be present for suffering, whether this is one's own suffering or the suffering of others. Part of the medicine for suffering is compassionate presence and care. For it to be healthy for everyone involved, compassion has to avoid tension, strain, assertion, collapse, or any way of being that is not sustainable because it causes exhaustion.

The very idea that there's joy or well-being in the experience of compassion puts a question mark next to any other way that we are – any strain or difficulty we

experience when we have compassion. I'd like to believe that the notion of joy in compassion encourages us to slow down with our compassion, to not be in a hurry to act, but rather to take the time to find a healthy way of relating to the suffering of others and the suffering of the world.

One of those healthy ways is to be attuned. When we are aware of suffering, we can have a certain openness or receptivity – we receive it just as we would be a receptive listener in order to hear a friend of ours talk about their challenges. The friend doesn't feel that we are reluctantly or half-heartedly listening, or listening in a judgmental way. We are just listening, receptive, and aware.

So in the same way, we attune ourselves to the suffering of the world before we act, before we rush to do something. Because that attunement has an absence of strain or assertion, an absence of conflict with ourselves or others, there can be joy. There can be well-being, a sense of nourishment, a lightness, and a sense of rightness.

Even if it's very painful to be with suffering in the world, with attunement we might not necessarily feel joy, but there's something that feels right in being present. There's openness and a relaxed sense – "Okay, this is how it is."

This is also where it's very important to be attuned to oneself. Sometimes with compassion, there is an idea

that it's all about the other person, that the suffering is out there, and we're not supposed to count. We can lose touch with ourselves in the rush to act or in the rush to be focused on the suffering out there. But it's also important to be present and attuned to oneself.

This is where the guideline of dividing our attention fifty-fifty between out there and within ourselves actually allows for greater attentiveness to others than if we give our attention wholly to others. The reason for this is that if we are attuned to ourselves here, we tend to overcome the conflicts, distractedness, tightness, and all the ways we are that make our attention out there incomplete and partial. If we keep enough attention on ourselves, we can relax and open up, and actually give much greater attention to others, rather than giving partial attention while straining, so that it only seems as if we're paying attention to the other person.

Rather than having less compassion and care for others, there is actually more when we are attuned to ourselves as well. We learn the art of not being in conflict with anything that's going on inside ourselves, even those things that are unfortunate or not so wonderful. We've learned to be attuned without giving in to the stress, being pushed around by it, or acting on it. Then we can make space for how we are.

As we make space for ourselves, we develop the capacity to make space for others. We begin there, before we rush to judgment, and before we rush to fix

and to change. As a result, this lack of conflict, this attunement, this harmony is a delight. It feels so good. It's refreshing to be attuned in the world. This is partly because attunement to self and others means that the very act of attunement is not a strain. Attunement is an opening, a kind of relaxing outward and being present, receptive, and here. It feels delightful to be alive in this way and to have the capacity to connect to others this way. So there can be joy in the attunement.

If we really allow our compassion to flow out of attunement, then the compassion will share in that joy, lightness, sense of well-being, freedom, and rightness. I use many words, not only "joy," because suffering can be so difficult sometimes that saying there's joy in compassionate presence might seem like too much or not quite right. But there is something that does feel right – a goodness, sweetness, and gentleness.

There are many different circumstances and positive states that are present in the compassionate attunement to others. These positive states can be nourishment for us. They can have a positive influence on us and maybe they can be nourishment or have a positive influence on the world around us.

Sometimes I've rushed to solve problems, and in the rush to take care of people, I don't really show up with the best of myself. For example, I might feel strain or tension. That tension comes along with compassion and people can feel it. But if I arrive attuned and without

tension, then my presence, I hope, helps people to relax with their challenges.

As we become more and more attuned, then at some point we're ready for action and we can do something. But as we explained in this series so far, the emphasis is on creating the foundation for compassion whenever there's a chance. Don't rush to compassion. Then as you act with compassion, stay attuned to yourself in order to recognize whether there is joy, well-being, and a sense of freedom. It's so easy to lose those as we get involved in the action and in relating to other people.

There are many forms of joy that can come along with the joy of compassion. Yesterday I talked about the joy that comes with being aware and having an awareness practice. Today it's the joy that comes from being attuned and having a practice of attunement. Even while not doing something 100% successfully all the time, there can be joy in engaging in the process of doing it well. There is room for our tentative or incomplete efforts – those ways in which we're still practicing and finding our way.

May you find the joy of attunement, the joy of listening, of staying present and being sensitive to the suffering of others and yourself. As you go through your day, you might look around. Can you find occasions where there might be some sense of the joy of attunement in being present and being attuned to others? Is there the joy of

being in harmony, not in conflict, even when there may be disagreements?

Tomorrow we'll talk about the joy of appreciating others, which may seem an easier way of understanding how there can be joy.

Thank you very much.