

Compassion Part Two (Compassion for Ourselves)
Lovingkindness and Compassion as a Path to Awakening
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February 5, 2008
<https://dharmafeed.org/teacher/210/talk/11949/>

I was perhaps a little even more long-winded than usual last night, and as a result there were a couple of things I left out, which I just want to touch on today. Today we add the self, compassion to the self. So we keep compassion to the person who is obviously suffering, and we add compassion to the self. I'm going to speak a bit about that, which should have gone in the talk last night had I not been so long-winded. Actually, there's an old Jewish proverb that says, "Why say something in twenty words when you can say it in two thousand?" [laughter]

When we move on to compassion for the self, very, very common, this is very common: we've just been with someone obviously suffering, and the feeling that comes up or the reaction that comes up, and it's understandable, can be, "But I look at myself, and I just see others in the world are suffering much more. I'm aware of my suffering, but when I compare that to the suffering that I know of in the world, that I read about, that I hear about, it seems unfair to stay with myself and give the compassion to myself." This is extremely common.

I remember taking a month with some Dharma friends, and working at a leprosy community in India, and having a long conversation on the long train trip down from Delhi with a friend. And she had done a lot of service work from a very young age, and was sort of saying that service was really much more needed in the Third World, etc., and it was pointless relating to sort of white middle-class people in the West, etc. But we had a long conversation, and then going to this leprosy community and actually seeing how much joy there was there – it was quite striking. People with leprosy, and recovering from leprosy, or having recovered from leprosy – a tremendous amount of joy there. And we had this sort of ongoing conversation and comparing that to some of the suffering that's around in the West. I really don't want to polarize East and West here, but sometimes where we think the suffering is isn't always where it is, in the most obvious sense. And anyway, suffering is not measurable. This is something we'll come back to. But suffering is not measurable.

But this reaction, "Others suffer much more" – extremely common. Sometimes it's just a habitual way of viewing, a habitual way of seeing ourselves and thinking. There's something – well, there are a lot of things really crucial about compassion to the self. One of them is that this suffering here is the suffering that we can be most intimate with. And because of that, there's the potential that we can actually learn most from it, in terms of, how does suffering arise? Remember, that's the fundamental question of insight, of *paññā*, of wisdom. So because we're most intimate with this psychophysical organism, that's where we learn the most. And that wisdom then translates and transfers into compassion for others, because we understand the roots of suffering. The more we understand the roots of suffering, the more compassion there can be for all beings.

[3:57] Compassion for oneself – tremendously healing. Really, really important levels of healing there. And it comes in lots of different ways. It comes, of course, through *mettā* to ourselves, through compassion to ourselves, but also through the *samādhi*, to whatever extent it's there. Just the calming

of the body, the calming of the mind, brings a healing. I can actually feel a healing going on sometimes. And also through insight, as I just said.

So this practice of compassion and compassion to oneself – you can actually enjoy it. And like I said last night, it doesn't have to be always heavy. Sometimes it feels, you know, the heart is reverberating with empathy, and it can feel – not heavy, but just poignant, definitely. But there's also an enjoyment in compassion practice that's available. And that enjoyment is very much part of the healing, as much as the being moved and the being touched.

This aspect, and I mentioned it, I think – well, definitely last night, and maybe even before – this balancing of the empathy and the giving, this is so important. Do I need to go over it again? I'm really happy to explain it again if people are not quite sure what that means yet.

Yogi: Could you explain the difference between empathy and sympathy? Because I get those muddled.

Rob: I'm not sure I know.

Yogi 2: Think sympathy's got a bit of pity with it.

Rob: Okay, maybe that's right. Thank you, Frances. Maybe in English usage of the word 'sympathy' has come to mean something which evokes a sense of pity, which has a sense of distance and somewhat looking down. I don't know whether it originally meant that. Just, you know, 'sym-pathy' – it doesn't imply that. But it's probably come to have been injected a little bit with that.

Yogi 3: I was wondering about our look at this word 'pity,' whether that's something to do with a Western approach rather than the original maybe biblical terms. May have *been* compassion, but we've interpreted it as something from a distance, you know, something we look at from a distance.

Rob: Yeah, very possibly. Yeah, and probably originally the word meant something much more like compassion. But that feeling might still have arisen for people. And so I just want to use words to separate out what one might notice in one's practice when one's a bit distant, a bit aloof, a bit almost superior.

But this piece about balancing our empathy, how we're resonating, how we're feeling the suffering, opening to it, taking it in, and balancing that with the giving out. And tasting, feeling in the body the loveliness of what we give out as a way of making the compassion sustainable.

When we come to compassion for our self, in a way, this balance and this process still applies. Usually in insight practice, when we have a pain – emotional or physical or mental, whatever it is – the instructions, part of the instructions, are to really go into the pain, and really feel it in a very bare way, open oneself to it, get into the texture of it, be right there with it. And so, quite standard insight meditation instructions – very useful, very powerful, very beautiful. Slightly different emphasis with compassion to oneself, in that one is aware of the pain, whatever it is – emotional hurt, physical pain, whatever – but it's almost as if that's at the centre of something. And one is conscious of it. One's feeling it. One's even feeling the suffering of it. But in a way, one's more interested in what's *around*

that, in the – someone in their note, beautifully put – the *holding* that goes *around* the pain. So it's as if this pain is at the centre. And we're not denying it. We're still feeling it, but we're not going right into it. We're more interested in the warmth and the tenderness and the holding that's around it. And the attention is a little bit more even in that. So it's, again, picking up on this quality of what's bathing, what's giving, what's going out.

[8:41] Another issue that can come up when we give either *mettā* or compassion to myself is the question, “Am I feeding my ego? If I spend too long just relating to myself with love and compassion, am I perhaps feeding the ego and feeding this sense of self?” Good question. But when we look carefully, we actually see that the ego-sense is dependent on the *wrong* kind of attention to the self – on an obsession, or judgmentalism, or criticism, or that kind of thing. A wrong kind of self-attention feeds, builds the ego and builds the self-sense, whereas an attention that's full of compassion, full of tenderness, full of acceptance and care, full of insight into questioning, “How is it that this suffering has come about?” – that kind of direction of the attention towards self does not build the ego, will not build the ego, will actually soften things, will actually allow things to become looser and more spacious.

And as I said before, when there's a lack of self-love, we tend to look out for nourishment. We look outwards, in a way, too much, in an off-balance way. And somehow that actually *also* feeds the self. So there's a basic practice for compassion to oneself: just using the phrases, using the intention, feeling that energy. And just a word here in response to someone's note, actually, to repeat something I said: compassion, I feel – not everyone will feel this, but some people will definitely feel this – compassion is a lighter energy. It *can* be a little more subtle. So what that might mean is you might want to really back off on the phrases. Some people don't want to use any phrases at all with compassion, because it's more delicate. Some people just use the phrases much more lightly, and this allows the sense of drawing close to the suffering, of empathy, and also of giving. So play with that. Play with how heavily and tightly you hold the phrases.

Okay, so there's the basic practice of compassion to oneself and all the lovely healing, the beauty of the healing that's involved in that. There are two more possibilities I just want to put out there. Again, some of you will be interested, and some, it's fine to just let these go. But I want to put them out.

(1) Sometimes we're directing the compassion towards our self, and we're actually not feeling much suffering in that moment. There's nothing particularly dramatic going on. There's no big suffering in the here and now. But **because of the practice, there can be a *climate of compassion***. It's as if there's a softness and tenderness come into the inner climate, and some degree of *samādhi*, of settling – it doesn't have to be a big deal – some degree of settling. And perhaps one's gone down to one word or one phrase and just really simplified and lightened the practice. There's no particular, dramatic suffering, but something quite powerful is potentially possible here. You can **use that whole climate and the practice as a kind of lens to look at one's experience in the moment, and to see any kind of suffering, any kind of subtle suffering, and to unhook it**.

So one's actually using a kind of insight practice through the lens of compassion, in a way that the lens of compassion is tuning one into any subtle manifestation of suffering. And what can happen because of the compassion is one sees these subtle sufferings, and it just unhooks organically. One sees what one's doing, what one's clinging to right there and then, and it just can unhook it – because there's

this attunement to suffering, because of the compassion practice. And there's a natural letting go, can be a natural letting go.

This can be a very, very beautiful and powerful way of practising. It tends to kind of consolidate whatever insights we've already had. So one might have – I mean, it can be anything – just the insight that when I get too involved in story, and I build up my suffering through the story, I'm actually creating more suffering. We've all seen how consciousness can do that. We get too – we drag in the past and the future and the story, and we build suffering. So in this climate of compassion, relatively calm, one sees the beginnings of that. And somehow in the seeing and the softness, it just unhooks. It just unhooks.

It consolidates our previous insights of seeing that story-building is *usually*, not always, but usually unhelpful. Or could be just we sense we've moved out of the here and now, we've moved out of an immediate presence. So in this way of using compassion practice, there's a bit more openness to what's actually going on in the moment. It's not just tunnelled into the phrases in the compassion. It's a bit more open, and the compassion is embracing the experience in the moment. Could be we just sense we've closed down, the heart's just closed, and we don't need to. And again, the climate allows it to open. Or we feel we're grasping at something. And we're just aware of the grasping. And again, the lens of compassion sees it and can just let it go. But it can be any range of insights. Identification – we see that we're identified with something. If one has the practice, we see, "Ah, I'm not seeing the emptiness of something. I'm believing in something's inherent existence, whatever it is" – can be a whole range of subtlety here. It's all there, possible.

So again, just putting this out as a possibility. As a way of practice, it's actually a very beautiful kind of mix of insight practice and compassion practice, very lovely way to go about doing insight practice, and a way of deepening and expanding the compassion practice.

(2) Second possibility – and it's just a possibility – giving the compassion to the self, and as the calming deepens or in moments of calmness, we look inside at what we're giving the compassion to, and it can sometimes seem, or sometimes becomes clear, that this is really **compassion to mind moments**. So when I give compassion to myself and there's suffering – big suffering or little suffering – what I'm really encountering is moments of mind, moments of awareness with something going on in them. Not a self – I don't ever encounter a self. What I encounter is moments of mind with something happening in that mind moment, moments of awareness. Or you could say the self that I encounter is just really mind moments. It's just mind moments.

What this can do, what it *does* do when we see this, is it frees up the sense of self. Again, instead of a solid sense of self – my independent, fixed, solid self – it frees it up in a way that's very spacious, can be very spacious. And in so doing, it frees up more compassion. The more spacious this sense of self, the more compassion. And once we've seen that in ourselves, we can actually do that to another. So we're giving compassion to someone else. Who am I giving compassion to? There's no one there. It's just mind moments, with something happening in the mind moment.

So in a way, we're giving compassion to ownerless mind moments, mind moments that have no owner. This is another way into the *anattā*, this not-self business. And the paradox is there: the less the receiver of compassion, and the less the giver of compassion, the more compassion there is. How odd!

But these are just suggestions, and take them on if you want to explore. By all means, take them on if they feel useful. Otherwise just let them go. File them for another time, whatever. It's fine. The Buddha has a phrase: "If you're digging for water, if you want to dig a well for water, dig one hole and dig it deep. Don't dig lots of little holes – you're not going to get enough." So the same with all these possibilities. Just take one or two things that seem, "Ah yeah, maybe I can work with that," and dig deep with them. See what happens. Keep the rest for another time.

Okay, pretty good, twenty minutes! Let's do a practice now then.