Compassion
Lovingkindness and Compassion as a Path to Awakening
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So this morning we introduced the compassion practice, and I really want to, in a way, amplify and extend some of the things I talked about this morning, and to fill that out, to broaden it, and look at what's involved in the practice of compassion, and also the question, what actually *is* compassion? What does that word mean?

So as you know, compassion is the second of the *brahmavihāras*. Loving-kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity – it's the second one. We *could* say that compassion is the heart's natural response to suffering when not preoccupied with self, or not caught up in a negative self-view. Compassion, perhaps – one way of looking at compassion is the natural response of the heart to suffering when not preoccupied with self, or not caught up in a negative self-view – so it includes *our* suffering.

And compassion is that quality, that energy, that wants to alleviate the suffering that it meets. It wants to do something about it. It wants to heal it – wants to alleviate, wants to heal, wants to soothe, wants to comfort, wants to free that suffering either in ourselves or in another being, either by changing the circumstance, by comforting, by providing some understanding – in any way at all. And as I said this morning, when the stream of loving-kindness, the stream of *mettā* – if it's running, when it meets suffering, it turns organically and very naturally into compassion. Loving-kindness meets suffering, and it will become compassion in that moment.

So we have this word 'compassion,' and it's a great – it's a beautiful word. In a way, 'compassion,' like all these other Dharma words, is a kind of composite. There are many factors and aspects involved in it. It's great to have one word, and it's helpful to have one word, and to know what we mean when we say that. But when we start really looking at what compassion is, it has many, many aspects to it.

Compassion includes empathy, and I'll speak about that more tonight. It includes giving, so giving is an aspect of compassion. What are we giving? And as such, compassion is something very active. Even if it's just energetically on the cushion, in the meditation, but very much in the world, it's giving something.

Compassion also includes equanimity, this steadiness of the being, steadiness of the mind and the heart. And that's actually an indispensable factor of compassion, if we want our compassion to be sustainable, to be strong, to be open, to last in the world, to be able to bear up, keep open, face up to the suffering that we encounter in this world. Compassion has wisdom in it. And this is really crucial. In a way, as both wisdom goes deeper and compassion goes deeper, they begin to really come together. But compassion as such is not blind. Compassion has in it some degree of understanding of what the causes of suffering are, and in it, a willingness and a wish to uncover the causes of suffering, at as deep a level as possible. So very much has wisdom in it. If we talk about wisdom and insight, that's what that means: we want to understand how suffering comes about, in ways that bring freedom.

[4:28] Compassion of course has *mettā* in it, has kindness in it. Compassion has acceptance in it, so that's an interesting one. Alongside the wish to alleviate suffering, it also has acceptance of the fact of suffering. Compassion can have humour in it, often *does* have humour in it. So it's not necessarily a

heavy energy; it can be very light. Compassion has listening. Listening is very much a quality of compassion. Sometimes we encounter someone, we're with someone – there's nothing we can do for their situation except listen, except open ourselves in that way. And that's compassion. When in a way one's giving the listening, although it's a kind of receiving, one's giving that, offering that. Opening – compassion has this quality of opening. Compassion actually has joy in it. Happiness is a factor of compassion. Compassion has faith in it – this is a very interesting one – has faith in it.

And like we said with the *mettā* practice, it's not just a feeling. So sometimes we get a definite *feeling* of compassion and that tenderness and that resonance and that warmth flowing out, that healing energy flowing out. But it's not just a feeling. It's actually much more than that. And if in our life our compassion is restricted to when we *feel* it, that's too limited. Sometimes in our life we *don't* feel it, but we act still. We *do*, we *act* with compassion. We embody that intention. We cannot feel it all the time because feelings are impermanent – same as what we talked about with the *mettā*.

Now, most people, if we're honest with ourselves, the relationship to compassion or the idea of compassion is ambivalent. We have a pretty ambivalent relationship to the intention of compassion. Very, very common, and very understandable and easy, to see compassion, regard it as a kind of burden. Here, somehow, am I going to be burdened with the suffering of the world? And everyone in this room is aware of the kind of magnitude and enormity of the suffering in the world. And somehow the idea of opening to that feels like a burden – despite, or alongside, our best spiritual aspirations.

We aspire to be compassionate, and yet there's this ambivalence. We also feel, "Well [sighs] … I don't know. I don't know." We feel, we fear that compassion will overwhelm us, will drown us, will make us unhappy. We *can* fear that. When insight gets deeper, we realize that actually, lack of compassion, if our hearts are *not* open in compassion, *that's* actually suffering. Something about the closed-over heart, the hardened heart – that's suffering. And we could talk about, again – it's not a great word, but this word 'maturity' in practice. Part of maturity in practice is when that insight has got deep enough, that we know that it's more suffering for the heart to be closed and to live without compassion than it might be to feel overwhelmed by suffering.

So there's this ambivalence. And at the same time as this fear or trepidation we might feel, at the same time we have a real intuitive – I think most of us wouldn't be in this room if we didn't – this intuitive love and almost a yearning for compassion. It's like we sense something there. The being, the heart, senses a possibility for itself, senses a depth of possibility for itself, and beauty for itself. And a part of us yearns for that, longs for that, senses that possibility, because I think a part of us realizes that through compassion and in compassion, there's a very deep connection going on. There's a very deep *reconnection* going on. We are reconnecting to ourselves, some very deep aspect of ourselves, of our being, of our heart. Reconnecting with our heart. Connecting and reconnecting with 'other.' Very much and very deep – the compassion practice has something very deep about that reconnecting, and we long for that. As much as we shore up our own individuality and separateness, we long for this connection that comes so powerfully through compassion practice.

We may also have a sense of the sweetness in compassion practice. So even though there's this trepidation, we can sense that there's a sweetness there for the heart, a really lovely sweetness. Compassion, too, is energizing. It's actually an energizing quality. I'm going to come back to this later. Compassion should be energizing rather than tiring. Compassion should also be pleasant rather than

unpleasant. Even though we're opening ourselves to suffering, we're tuning into suffering, we're looking at it, we're willing to let the heart resonate with it – still, compassion is a pleasant quality. It's a pleasant abiding, a sublime or divine abiding.

There's warmth in it. There's lovely warmth in compassion. And as the Buddha would say, it's something that gives the being nobility. It gives the being a very deep and beautiful, organic nobility, a natural nobility to the being. Something of which we can feel proud. When that quality is there, we can feel proud in a very healthy, non-egoistic way.

There's also a sense – we might have this sense with compassion that the movement into the depths of compassion begins to, or *will* begin to, dissolve the kind of prison of self-interest. So we may feel in our lives, or the more practice – as we begin to practice, we may feel how this self-interest is a prison. We're binding ourselves in it. So we have this sense, this intuitive sense, that as we go into compassion, perhaps that prison of self-interest will be a little dissolved, or a *lot* dissolved. Now, we may be very attracted to that, but again, we may be pretty ambivalent about it.

[11:53] In a way, a fundamental part of the fundamental delusion, Dharmically speaking, is this belief in a separate, independent self. Somehow we're caught up in that belief, and we believe it, and we keep reinforcing it with the self-interest. And through practices like loving-kindness and compassion, and as the insight comes out of those practices, as the *samādhi* deepens, as the heart opens, there is a sense of that self softening and opening, in a very non-linear way – very gradual, glimpses of it at first, then a bit more, etc. The sense of self begins to soften, can begin to open, and insights into the whole nature of self and other, etc., come with that – *can* come with that.

But alongside that is a sort of very basic insight, and it's that we begin to realize that we can't really be fully fulfilled pursuing happiness through self-centredness. It just takes time, but eventually the coin just drops. It just drops. This is the pattern we inherit. You could [say], in strict Dharma terms, we inherit if from our previous lives, this self-delusion that's caught up in a way of looking for happiness, searching for happiness, going about it through self-centredness. Something can begin to happen through insight and through compassion: that whole project, we realize, cannot fulfil us. It's backwards, and in fact, searching for happiness through self-centredness actually leads to suffering. And we can all say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know." But it takes a while, it really takes a while to digest this in a way that one's living it out.

But I would say, and I really would say this, that there can come a point with practices like these – insight and love and compassion practices – it's almost like the consciousness reaches an edge. And one can feel rising in oneself a conviction: "I'm not interested any more in living a life with self at the centre. I'm just" – that whole view and outlook of life which seems so natural, *so* natural, it just begins to lose its compulsivity or its convincingness. And a person can really reach a point – something's like, "It just doesn't do it for me any more. I'm just not interested in that any more." Something has, you could say, broken in the heart. Something has melted in the heart. Don't want self to be the centre of the stage any more, or the centre of the life stage necessarily. As these practices go on – again, they're very non-linear, but there comes a deeper and deeper commitment to this, a deeper and deeper commitment to love and to compassion and to living less from the self, about the self, for the self. So the Dalai Lama is fond of saying, "My religion is kindness."[1] So instead of explaining all the complex Buddhist philosophy, etc., he just says, "My religion is kindness. My religion is compassion."

So, like I mentioned – was it the last talk? – we need to be asking questions with this. Compassion practice has a lot of cultivation in it, but it also has a lot of questioning in it. All these practices, there's an aliveness of inquiry. And part of what we're asking is, what is compassion? What does it mean? But we're also asking this other question, or we're asking a *number* of other questions. And it's important, it's *crucial*, it's really crucial for a life of practice that we're asking the right questions both of ourselves, of our lives, but of our practice. Are we asking the right questions? It's so important.

[16:35] I only know two things about Gertrude Stein, the writer. One of them is that when she was on her deathbed, she was surrounded by her sort of entourage of admirers. You know Gertrude Stein the writer? [laughter] She was surrounded by this entourage of admirers. She was obviously dying. She was slipping in and out of consciousness, in and out of – I don't know if it was coma or what, but in and out of consciousness, certainly. And it appeared to the people around her that she would sort of go into the 'next world,' so to speak, pass beyond, and then come back. And she kept doing that. And one of her entourage, whose name, I think, was Mildred something or other (I can't remember), because it seemed like she was passing beyond and sort of coming back – "Well, maybe she's coming back with some wisdom and knowledge that she could impart to us of greater things." And so when Gertrude sort of reappeared and had a bit of consciousness, she said, "Gertrude, what's the answer?" And Gertrude sort of opened her eyes. "Mildred, what's the question?"[2] [laughter]

And in a way, it's very much … We're looking for answers, but are we actually clear what the right questions are? What are the right questions in life? One of the questions, a fundamental question is, how do we cultivate compassion? Not just what is it, but how do we go about it? What brings it about? It's very much a part of – we need to be actively engaged in that questioning. And so, as I mentioned this morning, there are many techniques involved, many techniques. We've chosen the phrases. It's fine. It's a good one to start with. *Tonglen* was mentioned, this Tibetan practice of – literally it means 'giving and taking' or 'taking and giving.' Very similar – we take in the suffering, and we give out the healing, the compassion. A person might wish to tune in, in a devotional way, to the energy of a bodhisattva, Kuan Yin, the bodhisattva of compassion (Avalokiteśvara is the Sanskrit name), Jesus Christ, some being who in an archetypal way embodies compassion, and just tuning the being into those qualities, devoting oneself to that being and the qualities that being brings.

Insight practice itself will bring compassion. Why? Because insight is this deep questioning into, "Where does suffering come from?" And so its correlate, or its exact opposite side of the coin, will be compassion. In asking the very question – "How does suffering come about?" – in asking that very deeply, the compassion will come automatically. So one *could* just give oneself to very deep insight practice, and compassion will definitely come. But of course, developing compassion is not something that we just do in a formal way, like it's not just something we do in formal meditation practice. It, in a way, *can* become or *needs* to become a current in our life. There's a current of compassion. What is it to live a life that has that beautiful, deep current of compassion running, in a way, in a very central place in the life? In a way, the life is actually running along, flowing along, carried along on that stream of compassion.

So what nurtures compassion? What allows it to grow? The sort of simplest piece of it, the most fundamental piece, is a willingness to open and to touch suffering. It's a willingness to allow the heart to open, to be touched by suffering, to draw close, to keep the eyes open, to keep the being open, and

touch, witness, feel suffering. That's what the Buddha calls the 'proximate condition' – actually what the *commentaries* call the 'proximate condition' – for compassion.[3] Now, willingness to open and touch suffering – for a lot of people in the world, that's not an obvious choice. There's suffering – "See you later! I don't want to know. I want to get as far away from it as possible. I want to protect myself, protect the heart. I don't want to feel that. I don't want to be hurt. It's too much. I don't want to be bothered" – either one's own suffering or the suffering in the world.

So it's actually not obvious to human beings that this is necessary. It's not obvious. Maybe for many if not all the people in this room, it does feel obvious by now. But that's probably because you've heard it over and over in Dharma teachings or other – spiritual intuition or whatever. But it's actually not *that* obvious. We need reminding of it. So even in the context of this retreat, we actually need reminding of it, that we want to develop this willingness to open to suffering and to be touched by it. Guarding, watching out, that we don't go numb through overwhelm. So for instance, watching the news every day, reading the newspaper every day, can actually be too much, and the heart just gets numb. So taking care of that ability to open and be touched.

[22:47] Slowly, over time, we develop a confidence that we can do this. We actually develop a confidence in the heart's capacity to draw close to suffering and not be bowled over. That comes definitely with time. We become more confident in our own capacity to do that. So this willingness to open and to be touched by suffering. As I said, insight, and the deeper we go into insight and this question of how suffering arises, that will automatically, *should* automatically bring with it compassion, particularly this strand of *anattā* that we keep picking up in this retreat, and going into that. The more we let go of self, the looser – rather, the more we loosen our identification, the more compassion is allowed into the being. It's like literally there is more space in the heart when we're less constricting around self-definition, self-views, ownership, identification.

Action. So, this is an interesting one. Sometimes as meditators we can tend to assume that all I need to do is sit here all day, or enough hours, sit and walk, sit and walk, sit and walk – and *bada-bing, bada-boom*, there it is! [laughs] Maybe, but maybe not. Action. So maybe compassion deepens through acting compassionately, through putting ourselves in situations of service, situations of volunteering, etc., where that's the actual environment. One actually acts on it. So there's certainly a movement from formal practice that flows out into the life, but the other way round as well. The actions in our life will flow back into the heart and the consciousness when we come back to sit. Most things in Dharma work both ways in terms of causality.

The Buddha has this very lovely piece of advice, and he says if you want to deepen in wisdom, associate with the wise. Basically hang out with people with insight, hang out with people who've gone deep into practice and who are living that understanding. Hang out with them, associate, let it rub off, let yourself learn from that.[4] Well, we could say, if you want compassion to grow, associate with the compassionate. Associate with those who have given themselves to service. And there are plenty of bodhisattvas in this world, living out a life of compassion, both in the first world and the second world and the third world and – all of it. And one can seek out these people and be around them. There are a lot of remarkable beings out there. And just to let that rub off. Let something of their compassion, but also, in a way, their *abandon,* because there's freedom in compassion. And one gets the sense of letting

their *abandon* and their freedom rub off on the being. The being absorbs that. Something very beautiful, I think, in that.

What nurtures compassion? Happiness nurtures compassion as well. So this is an interesting one too. I have a friend. I think I mentioned her the other day in one of the talks. She suffers from depression periodically. And in those periods of depression she is unable to manifest, to open her heart, to allow to flow out of her what's actually very, very beautiful and deep compassion that she has in her heart. So taking care of our happiness – through all the different ways, cultivating the beautiful qualities, generosity, *samādhi*, *mettā*, all the rest of it, building the happiness gradually over our life – that happiness allows compassion. It's a foundation for compassion. The more happiness, actually, the more compassion.

[27:12] I think I heard Mother Teresa say once that she wouldn't take on a nun who wanted to work in her order (which is, you know, great service; that's their primary thing, working with the poorest of the poor in Calcutta), she wouldn't take on a young woman or an older woman who wanted to be a nun unless that joy was there, either there already or very much there coming from the giving. That she would just say, "No, it's not right for you." So this is *one* piece, but taking care of our happiness is significant.

We might ask the flip-side question: what blocks compassion? And this is, again, a very important question. What blocks compassion? If you remember when we were talking about loving-kindness, and we talked about the near enemy of loving-kindness being attached love, love that had strings attached – so there's one near enemy of loving-kindness. There are *four* near enemies of compassion, which in a way gives an idea of – it's actually a more subtle quality, and it's a richer quality. And in a way, it's a deeper quality. So it's very delicate. So the four are: (1) fear, (2) anger, (3) pity (not *pīti*, but pity), and (4) grief.[5] Fear, anger, pity, grief. And I'll go into these a little bit.

But first to reiterate this point that I said in that other talk, I think: it's not wrong that these come up and come into our practice of compassion, either in formal meditation or in our life. They *will* come. They actually should come. It's not wrong at all to expect them. Absolutely to expect them. It's part of our humanity. It's also part of how we learn, how we learn what compassion really is in its purity. And I remember when I first heard about this, and sort of reflecting on the presence of these qualities in my life, and just actually wondering, "Well, maybe I've *never* experienced compassion. Maybe I have no idea what it is." And that's probably swinging to too extreme a view, because I think we *all* know what compassion is, and we have *all* experienced that. But it's good to bring in this questioning. So this questioning is, as I said, as much a part of learning this practice as the actual cultivation and the *samādhi* and all that.

(1) Fear, first one, fear. Touched on this. We fear opening to suffering. We fear that if I open to this person's suffering, it's going to hurt me. I'm going to feel hurt by it – so common, so normal. We fear that how can little old me hold all the suffering that's in the world, even open to a small fraction of it? How can *I* hold that? This little sense of self will feel overwhelmed. It will feel too much. There's a real fear of that. Unfortunately, the fear itself is not neutral. And the presence of the fear actually tends to either make us feel overwhelmed, which is what we were fearing anyway, and/or increases our sense of suffering when we are open to the suffering of others. So the fear is exactly doing what we're afraid we would feel anyway. It's having the opposite effect. I'll come back to this one, the fear.

(2) Anger. This is a really interesting one, anger. Now, oftentimes we witness suffering in the world, any form of suffering – social, environmental, political – all kinds of suffering. We just witness one person being cruel and hurtful to another, to animals, etc., to the natural world. How easy it is, and understandable, how easy it is, for the compassion to kind of get diverted, and instead of staying with the compassion, we veer off. The heart veers off into a kind of righteous anger – *so* common and so, in a way, normal and easy for that to happen. Instead of staying with the suffering and the compassion in relation to that, we veer off into blame, judgment – either of ourselves or another. Or in the case of ourselves, "I shouldn't be feeling this" – and we judge ourselves just for feeling, for experiencing suffering. But often we're pointing the finger at someone else and blaming and getting angry, feeling justified in the anger, and we've moved away from the compassion.

So it's quite a subtle, sort of seductive movement away – very common. Anger is complex, and I touched on that also in another talk. But Dharmically speaking, that movement – the blame and the judgment – it's missing an understanding. It's missing the understanding of the causes, of what really, really does *cause* both suffering and what allows someone to act in ways that cause suffering. It's missing the dependent origination of that, and I'll explain what I mean.

About three or four years ago – I can't remember – I did a couple of months' personal retreat on loving-kindness and compassion. And when I got to the difficult category, I had one person that I knew and two people that I didn't know. So I had a selection, an assortment, of difficult people. And the two people are two politicians – I won't say who they are, but who it seemed to me, you know, a lot of the stuff that was happening in the world and is happening, they had a part in it, put it that way. But then as I began to take them on as part of the difficult person, I started to reflect, or needed to begin to reflect, instead of just "They're terrible," etc., beginning to reflect on the causes and conditions that, in a way, brought them into being, enabled them to be, to act, to choose, to be blind in ways that they seem blind. And in one particular politician, in the instance of one of them, just reflecting, "Well, look at his family. Look at his father and the lineage of where, what he came from. What was he educated with?" The whole movement right from day one in his life was to see a certain way, to see the world a certain way, to see others a certain way, to see self a certain way. And was educated that way. And probably through education institutions, etc. And beginning to take it away from self, *his* self, and see more in terms of the conditions that came together.

Also, to see that a person can be causing suffering for an other. When they cause the suffering for an other, they're actually causing suffering for themselves. So it might just be that they're in the world in a way that's greedy. It's not any obviously overt hurting, but they're just greedy. But what are they cultivating? What's going on for their consciousness, for their heart, for the growth and evolution of their heart? In the world, choosing that way, and they're actually cultivating greediness through acting on, through choosing. They're cultivating greed.

Cultivating, developing, reinforcing – remember these habit pattern things we keep talking about. You get a record in a groove. And we're saying, with the *mettā* and compassion, you can change that groove. Someone might be in the world reinforcing the groove of insensitivity, of self-preoccupation. These are all grooves of habit. And so we might look at this person, politician, or whoever it is, and we might think, "They don't seem to be suffering. They seem to be causing suffering, but I don't see any suffering. I see them smiling. I see them rich. I see them going on holiday." But I have a question: how

much deep happiness is available for someone cultivating those qualities of heart, cultivating greed long-term? How much deep happiness is available to them? Cultivating insensitivity long-term – so, sure, they might have the riches, and they might have this and that. But in the heart, how much deep happiness is available? They're actually – when *any* of us acts that way in the world, we're closing the doors for the possibility of deep happiness.

[37:13] I remember when I lived in the States. In the last couple of years, I lived in Boston – well, I lived in Boston all the time. In the last couple of years, I moved away from the centre of the city and out to a suburb that was more kind of green and leafy and quieter. And a little time after arriving there, I would go for walks and stuff and enjoy the green, and I began to notice how many SUVs there were. You know what SUVs are? I don't know what the English … What's the English for SUV?

Yogi: Seriously Useless Vehicle.

Yogi 2: Personal Assault Vehicles. [laughter]

Rob: Yeah, big four-wheel drives that people – really big cars, yeah. [laughter] And I began noticing how common these were in the streets. And people seemed to own, sometimes, even two of them. And it was at some point during those couple of years, 9/11 happened, and the terrorist attacks, etc. And then, I kept being struck by this. Are people not seeing the connections? You know, my rudimentary political analysis – are people *not* seeing the connection between oil, American oil interests in the Gulf, and SUVs, and oil consumption, and then anger, etc.? Not to get into politics right now, but …

And I began to feel more and more agitated by the whole thing. And I went to my teacher, Narayan, at one point, and I explained this to her, what was going on for me. And she said, "Send them *mettā*. Send them lots of *mettā*." And then she said, "Not only that – wish them more SUVs." [laughs] I was like, "*Pff*, okay." [laughter] Actually, the second part of it, I couldn't do. It just seemed not possible and not even that wise, actually. But the first part was helpful. And what happened, what happened at some point was an insight arose, and a kind of coin dropped, and I realized that ignorance, delusion – these people were very nice (well, for the most part), very nice, lovely people just living their lives in the way that they thought was good. But there was, as I saw it at the time, delusion about the consequences of choices like that. And that delusion, what the Buddha calls ignorance or delusion, is not-self. Again, it's *anattā*. In a way, it doesn't belong to anyone. So here was a particular instance of delusion, which I was extracting out and then, "You are deluded. You. You. You." And just seeing: ignorance, as a quality, is something we all share. We might differ in the way it manifests in our life, but ignorance does not belong to self. Ignorance does not belong to self. We could … Let's leave it at that. I'm worried about the time.

[40:37] In blaming and pinpointing the ignorance and sticking the ignorance to the person, the people, where's the compassion? The compassion actually cannot flow. So sometimes, just realizing that ignorance doesn't belong to anyone – we all have ignorance until we're Buddhas; it just comes out in different ways – allows the compassion to come in. Sometimes, when we're angry at people, "remaining" – Buddha's words – "remaining percipient of what's beautiful," tuning into their good qualities.[6] So whoever it is, tuning into something that's lovely about them. Sometimes what we need to

do, when the compassion is diverted into anger, is actually redirect the compassion towards ourselves – because when we're hardened in anger, that's *dukkha*. That's suffering. So leave the other person, and just come back to yourself. Give the compassion to the self, and the being, the heart, can soften and open. And then perhaps the compassion can flow. When we're caught up in anger, we are hurting. When we're caught up in blame and judgment, we are hurting. Sometimes we don't realize it. So, compassion to the self.

Generally, this anger, this second near enemy – compassion wants to alleviate suffering, but it doesn't want to push it away out of aversion. It's more that it holds suffering. It embraces suffering, holds it, accommodates it, and then adds healing, and adds understanding. So it's not an aversive movement; it's a holding, and a bringing in of healing and understanding. It's subtle, but it's quite a different quality.

(3) Fear, anger, **pity**. 'Pity,' in English, as opposed to 'compassion,' means when we look down at another: "Oh, poor them, suffering like that." And we feel above it in some way. Very interesting, this is – all these are going to creep into the practice. You'll be sitting here in the room, walking up and down, and you'll just notice, "Oh, look, I've just got a bit above the person. There's just a bit of looking down come in." Sometimes it's extremely obvious; sometimes it's very subtle. Again, it's okay. Pity's an interesting one. It's disempowering. Compassion empowers; pity disempowers. So we can see for our self, when we pity ourselves, when we're caught in self-pity, it actually disempowers our self, disempowers our capacity to do anything and to move beyond the suffering. There's something almost draining and paralysing about pity. It keeps the suffering there, whereas compassion moves it, heals it, dissolves it. So compassion to self and other is empowering, not debilitating. This is very interesting.

All these near enemies, all of them, arise when there's too much self-view. So again, we're back to this *anattā* business. Too much self-view – when I'm too worried about myself in fear, or too much defining the self of another in anger, or pity: "They're like this. I'm like this." Or self-pity: "This is how I am. I'll always be like this," etc., "Terrible, poor me." Too much self-view of self and other comes in, and the near enemies come up. We can counter this in practice by contemplating or seeing the commonality. We see the commonality. One's sitting in practice, giving compassion to someone, and we feel a bit above them. Remind oneself of things that are common, human things. So instead of looking at the differences – "I don't really do that. I don't suffer like that," how easily that can come in – remind oneself of what's common, the common humanity in that moment.

(4) So fear, anger, pity – the last one is **grief**. And this is a very interesting one. Very easy when we're encountering suffering, either our own or others', to be overwhelmed by it, to feel overwhelmed. And when the grief comes up as a near enemy – which sometimes can be hard to tell the difference – again, it's debilitating. Long-term, it's actually tiring. Grief is an energy that's tiring. It's a complex one, because in many instances, we actually need to feel grief. It's part of a healing process. It's a necessary quality. But at a certain point, to begin to look into it and see, is it possible there's a mechanism here that grief is actually spiralling and building? When there's grief around, if it's grief, it will be tiring. That tiring, that tiredness, it kind of makes the being, makes the heart, more vulnerable to more grief, which makes the heart *more* tired. And it spirals on itself that way.

[46:46] Let's go into this a bit more. There are two aspects of compassion – this is a really, really important point now, and I'll probably repeat it anyway, but this is really, really important – there are

two aspects of compassion that need balancing. And we can talk about what I said, what I meant when I said "empathy." So that's one aspect: **(1) empathy**. And the other aspect is **(2)** the **giving**. And I'll go into this.

(1) So first of all, what is **empathy**? Empathy is this openness, this receptivity, this resonance of the heart with the suffering of another, feeling moved, touched by the suffering of another. But there is a kind of, I would say – spaciousness and sweetness in it are marks of empathy. So sometimes, we notice, we see the suffering of another, and somehow we've got sucked right into it, and we're just suffering the same as the other. So empathy is a little bit different. It's a bit broader and more spacious, and it has a quality of sweetness. It's actually something very beautiful and attractive for the heart in the quality of empathy.

I have a family member who I know loves me very much, but sometimes when I have some difficulty going on or illness or whatever, there's something in her concern that's a bit too identified and too fearful, and it's almost that comes into the compassion, and it becomes not helpful. It feels not helpful. It feels almost like a burden for the suffering person. You may know, you may have experienced this in your life.

But this empathy is something very beautiful, and a very lovely, precious quality of the heart. And we may feel, at times in our life, very drawn to opening this quality of empathy. There's something – it's almost like we want to pry open the heart, pry open the being, and we want to take in the suffering in the world. I remember I'd just finished a year retreat here some years ago, and was having some time off, actually, before coming back again. And one of things I did was I took a train across Europe, and I went to Auschwitz concentration camp, extermination camp in fact. And it was sort of a bit of a pilgrimage. It was as if a part of my being wanted … I felt – it was almost a mystery to me, in part, but a part of my being wanted to go to this place where there had been an *indescribable* amount of suffering. I don't actually know the figures; I've forgotten how many million people died there or were killed there. And wanted to be there and just drink it all in. It's like the heart wanted to be wide and just drink it all in.

And actually being there – I don't know, some of you may have been – it's palpable somehow. A lot of the remains of the barracks and the gas chambers, etc., are still there. There's something palpable there. Something in the being wanted to drink it in. Just – this is the suffering. This is part of the suffering of the world. I just want to absorb it somehow. I think that's a beautiful movement, and a beautiful aspiration. At times in our life, we feel strong enough to do that; we feel open enough and spacious to do that. But there's really an important balance here. Avalokiteśvara is the bodhisattva of compassion, and one of the meanings of that is One Who Listens to the Cries of the World. Beautiful. One Who Listens to the Cries of the World. Receptive, hearing the suffering. It's a very receptive image. But the statue, the image, the *rūpa* of it has – I don't know how many hands or arms – a lot.

Yogi 3: 1,000.

Rob: How many? 1,000 arms and hands. Why? To reach out, to give. So there's a balance of this **(1) empathy**, taking in, and **(2) giving out**. This is so, so important. We can actually address this in our practice. So you might have found today in the practice that you felt – I don't know, it's a question,

actually: did you feel at times burdened, or like it was a bit heavy, or overwhelming? Yeah. Very, very common. Extremely common. It doesn't have to be this way. You can play with this. Again, you can experiment with this. We feel the empathy. We're aware of the empathy, what we're taking in. We're tuning into the suffering. But also we're aware of this – even if we're just imagining it – a healing energy going out. And we imagine that energy flowing from our body, etc. So there's something coming in and something going out.

Most people will – without even thinking about it, without even realizing it – lean the balance into more empathy, into really going into the empathy, and not so much into feeling the quality of the energy coming out: the healing, nourishing brightness, actually happy energy of what's coming out. The thing is we can play with that balance in the practice. You can actually play with it as you're sitting there. Be aware of where the balance is, and just incline the mind more towards feeling the lovely healing energy as it's going out. So you can really play with this. It's not a static balance. In other words, you're not going to find, you know, stick the dial on 5 and leave it there. You'll always be moving, and it's fine to move. And sometimes you're more in the empathy – fine. But I would say a little bit of balance towards the feeling of the loveliness and the happiness makes compassion enjoyable, sustainable, steady, equanimous, something that we like doing. And we need to kind of feel that energy in the body, that energy going, or even just imagine it. And that's really, really going to help.

[53:40] I'm not doing very well for time. There's a third aspect of compassion, okay? So there's the empathy, and there's the giving out. There's a third aspect, which at first is not so visible, but it makes itself more known over time. In a way, I'm giving a bit of an overview this evening. **(3)** The third aspect has to do with **spaciousness**, a quality of spaciousness or an awareness of spaciousness. It's as if the sense of the heart expands and *can* expand so that it feels almost like it fills the space, or as if the suffering in the world is being held by a compassion that, in a way, is part of the fabric of the universe. It's a kind of universal compassion.

So it moves, again, very non-linearly, very gradually. Begin to get glimpses of it, and it's not to make too much of this. We can sometimes get a sense of a compassion that it's not the self doing it. And it's almost like we open to some bigger sense of compassion, that the suffering in the world is *held* – held, we could say, in the love of the universe, in the compassion of the universe, in the heart of God, whatever language works. It's almost like something deepens, and the true nature of the heart is seen as not limited, but actually infinite and vast. And it can, it has limitless capacity to hold suffering. And so this aspect of holding suffering is very much a part of compassion as it deepens. It just comes naturally. And a person might look at this in terms of God or the energy of a bodhisattva – it's all fine; it doesn't actually matter what label you give to it, to an extent. But we find that kind of opening, that kind of perception in a lot of different spiritual traditions. Julian of Norwich, the English Christian mystic: "Love is without beginning," she says. "Love is without beginning."[7] It's the sense of a whole other, deeper sense of what love is, and what compassion is.

I'm going to skip a couple of bits and come to them in the instructions tomorrow morning. When we are suffering – compassion for self now – when we are suffering with whatever it is, it can be really helpful, it can be extremely skilful, whether it's loneliness or the body hurts or tummy ache, headache, confusion, anxiety, sadness, a sense of loss, of grief, whatever the suffering is, when there's my

suffering and we're feeling it, to realize, to reflect deliberately: "My suffering is actually not different from the suffering of others." So again, how easy it is for us to compound our own suffering with a sense of isolation. And thinking – sometimes it's not even a conscious thought: "It's just me that has this. I'm the one that goes through this. No one else has this." Sometimes it's not even a conscious thought, and we're adding, we're stacking on the suffering by this isolating of ourselves.

So it can be – and again, something to play with – you can, when there's suffering, just step back a little bit and deliberately reflect: "Someone, somewhere, probably even right now, is going through something extremely similar, something very similar if not almost exactly the same." Drop that in as a reflection. Sometimes our suffering – we feel our suffering, and we're actually unable to meet it with compassion. Partly this isolating of ourselves that we do is blocking the compassion. So dropping [in] this reflection, again, of the commonality of it, of the non-difference of our own suffering, dropping that in, and we open to the humanity of our own suffering. This is so crucial. And in that humanity, in the realization of the humanity, there's a kind of softening. And the being just softens. Instead of being rigidly, brittlely wrapped up in a kind of self-isolation, a self-definition and separateness, just dropping in the reflection of that commonness, that sharedness, the humanity, allows it to soften. And in the softening, there's an opening, and the compassion can begin to flow. So play with this, play with this.

[59:09] As we move on to giving compassion to others and we do the friend and benefactor and all that, sometimes we want to give compassion to someone. We look at them. We say, "Well, they don't seem to be suffering much. There's no obvious suffering. They seem pretty okay. They're pretty happy." And then one can bring to mind the vulnerability of life. So we touched on this the other day. Just reminding oneself that life is vulnerable – on a physical level, at the emotional level, at a situational level. The uncertainty of life – what a challenge it is! Even if this person seems like they're doing really okay, it's basically challenging to be human. It's basically challenging to be human. It's not easy. It's not an easy manifestation. It's not an easy territory. So sometimes to reflect on that, if one feels like this person doesn't suffer much, just to lubricate it a little bit, bring the juice in. Also to reflect, "I actually don't know. Even if I know this person well, I may not know really what's going on for them, and what possible suffering there may be there. I don't know. I don't know."

One can also reflect on this oneness, and begin to incline the heart and incline the mind towards oneness. We are one. You know, at some level, we are one – in this vulnerability, this physical vulnerability that we have. This body can get injured at any time. It can get sick very easily. The body is vulnerable. We are vulnerable to death. Reflecting, we are one in that. We share that. There's a oneness there. We are one in our uncertainty. Again, we're living in a world where things are uncertain. What happens, what will happen tomorrow, is uncertain. What will happen in the next year, for all of us, is uncertain. It's not certain at all. And probably we all know people whose life can be changed in an instant. Something happens – a piece of news, an accident, this or that – and the life is changed in an instant, dramatically, drastically. We share that. We are one in the vulnerability of that uncertainty.

We're also one in our bewilderment with all of this. So this is what the Buddha talks about. It's fundamental delusion. Life – we don't have it sussed yet. We don't have it figured out until we're completely Buddhas. We share that *avijjā*, that delusion, that bewilderment. And to extents, we all go looking for happiness, well-being, security in places that don't bring it. We share that. We share that

bewilderment. We're one in that. So the more we contemplate this oneness and bring it in, the more the compassion can flow.

There's a beautiful poem by – she's actually a Palestinian American poet called Naomi Shihab Nye. It's actually called "Kindness." Some of you may know it. It's called "Kindness," but what she's really talking about is compassion. So when you hear the word 'kindness,' just hear 'compassion.' And she says:

[1:03:01 – 1:04:38, poem][8]

So contemplating that oneness. Final point, and it has to do with this *anattā* and this emptiness. We talk about *anattā*, the emptiness of self. We could also talk about – looking at it from another point of view – the *infinite* nature of the self, the infinite nature of a person. So I think we've touched on this already. I can't remember. This body – where did it come from? I saw a great programme the other night about comets landing on the planet and how life actually was started by the elements that were brought from comets. Was either coming from comets or Big Bang – not Big Bang, but some supernova of other stars. Now, all this can sound kind of sci-fi, but it's actually science, that this body is coming – the elements in it come from elements that were generated in massive stars, and then those stars exploded and flung out these elements into space. And all the elements that make up our fingernails and our cornea and whatever it is – everyone in this room, the elements that made that were born in the same star. I think it's amazing! [laughter]

Going back even further, even further, it was all one in the Big Bang, that the universe was actually tiny, shrunk into this little ball. The whole of space and time was encapsulated there, and it exploded. It was all literally one. Everything that was in the universe was literally one. But – I think I did mention this at some point – the breath we take, we are permeable with the rest, certainly the earth. We breathe in air. When does it become 'me'? And breathe out. And we share the air with each other and with the trees and with the rest of life, and with the planet. There's this permeability of what I call 'me,' just on a bodily level. And the food – I think, is it Stephen Batchelor's example (can't remember) of eating a banana? It's something very mushy. Or porridge – that's another example. It's mushy. At what point does the porridge become *me*? You understand? It's going … [laughter]

Walt Whitman – I think it's from "Song of Myself." It's a long, long mystical poem of Walt Whitman, 1855:

> I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars.[9]

Lovely. That's what he's talking about. You know, where did he get it from, 1855? Joni Mitchell – some of you are old enough to remember. [laughter] "We are stardust."[10] Bodily level.

The other day I talked about, at the level of consciousness, that all I can see when I look inside is perceptions, perceptions, perceptions. Those perceptions – look, here's the radiator, here's the wall – all I can see is perceptions. Is the perception *me*, or is it out there? There's a non-separateness of self and world because perception is a double-sided feature. I need the world to see myself, because when I see, all I see is perception. When I look inside for a self, all I see is perceptions. To have a perception, I

need the rest of the universe to perceive. So we can talk about emptiness. We can also say emptiness is fullness: *this* is *full* of everything. This being, these beings, this self is *full* of the universe. The mind and the body (we'll have questions after) – not separate, not separate. So it's just another way of seeing it.

Interpenetrating – so 'interconnectedness' is a word that's used a lot in the Dharma, but in a way, it doesn't go deep enough. Interpenetrating. Literally things, cells, beings – all things are interpenetrating. Now, we can hear this, and I'm well aware, we can hear this, and either it sounds like an extremely dated hippie concept hung over from the sixties or just some kind of intellectual, you know, if you're at a cocktail party and you can't think what to say, you bring this up to amuse someone. It doesn't have to be just a nice idea or something intellectual. Again, it's something that we can bring into the practice. You can actually be in the practice, doing the *mettā* or the compassion – bring this in. Think about Big Bangs, and think about stardust and the way the breath is permeable. Bring it in, and see what happens. It needs practice, but it will lead to love and compassion.

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[1] Margaret Gee, *Words of Wisdom: Quotes from His Holiness the Dalai Lama* (Kansas City: Andrew McMeel Publishing, 2001), 23.

[2] Cf. James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 468.

[3] Cf. Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*, tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Onalaska, WA: Pariyatti, 1999), 310.

[4] Iti 104.

[5] Grief is identified as compassion's near enemy in Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, 311–2. Pity is identified as compassion's near enemy in Ayya Khema, *Being Nobody, Going Nowhere: Meditations on the Buddhist Path* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 1987), 36. Anger, fear, and grief are listed as near enemies of compassion in Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995), 91.

[6] *Appaṭikūlasaññī vihareyyan*, "remain percipient of unloathsomeness," e.g. at MN 152, AN 5:144.

[7] Cf. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2006), 197.

[8] Naomi Shihab Nye, *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems* (Portland: Eighth Mountain Press, 1995). Archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20201004093657/https://poets.org/poem/kindness, accessed 31 Oct. 2020.

[9] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1902), 70.

[10] From Joni Mitchell's 1970 song "Woodstock."