

# Compassion

Extract taken from 'The Happy Twins: Dzogchen and Mahamudra'<sup>1</sup>

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## Some suggestions on how we might reflect on compassion

Normally, we think of compassion as, "Oh, I'm so sorry to hear you have this diagnosis. Can I help you in some way?" So it's a thought. You, as a person have some problem. I, as a person, feel some resonance with you in your problem. I am called upon and feel something arise from me. I would like to make it better. It is normally a kind of resonance or empathic attunement. I come into the wavelength that you are in, and then I respond in some way. Clearly, someone indifferent wouldn't be doing that.

We say that the mind is like a mirror. A mirror does not care. However, a mirror does not block either. The mirror allows the reflection to be seen. So from this point of view, the starting point is to see how people actually are.

We live in a world where we are all blind. We don't see because if we really did see we would be screaming in horror; we would be running insanely down the street. Like it says in the texts, when you reflect on these four thoughts that turn the mind from samsara, known as the *lo-dog nam-zhi* [Tib. bLo lDog rNam bZhi], you should be like a person with their hair on fire. "What the hell! This is awful." However we see wars everywhere, we see the suffering of animals... and we become

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<sup>1</sup> Two texts were studied on this retreat. The Mirror of Luminous Revelation (from Nuden Dorje Drophan Lingpa) and The Mahamudra Middle Way of the Ganges (from Tilopa)

indifferent. That is a different kind of indifference from the mirror's indifference. That is a dull, stupid, locked-off indifference. Indifference in terms of the mirror means 'without bias'.

We hear the whole shebang; we see the complexity of things, and then we try to find a way to relate and respond within that field of complexity because, from the dzogchen point of view, compassion is connectivity. When we see that everything is connected from the very beginning then of course the pathway of responsiveness is there.

The general buddhist teachings say that all beings have been our mother in a past life. That consideration is emphasised because it builds bridges between us. It is used as a way of creating a sense of connection. *"I don't know who you are, and I have no idea what you want. But anyway, you were my mother in a past life, so I'll do my best."*

However when you see that everything is arising from the same ground — that everything is in the mind, that I am arising within awareness and you also are arising within awareness — then we all have equal status as events emerging within awareness. That is then the basis of responsivity in the dzogchen and mahamudra views. The text uses the term *thugje kunkyab* [Tib. Thugs rJe Kun Khyab]. I translate it sometimes as 'all-inclusive kindness' and sometimes as 'all-pervading compassion'. Compassion or connectivity is all-pervading; it is always already there because we are always already connected with everything. Because of these connections, we have to respond.

The Bible tells the story of the Good Samaritan who went out of his way to help a stranger, someone from an enemy tribe. He could have ignored him and kept walking down the street but instead of seeing the person as a member of the 'wrong' tribe, he saw a person who was unwell, who was in trouble, and he responded on that level. All the wars in the world begin with how we identify someone. These are terrorist groups, or these are our habitual enemies, or these are the people who've taken our land.... Then we don't see that they have eyes and ears and hearts. We are blanking out and editing out a lot of the resonance of fellow feeling. We are saying, *"One of them, not one of us"* and cutting out their identity as fellow humans.

Compassion is inclusion. It is kindness. It is kindred. We are all kin. We are all on the inside; we are related from the ground. Everyone is from the ground. When we think of mothers in past lives, that is related through time. 'From the ground' means in this moment — this is it — we're in it together. Therefore turning away from you, turning my back on you, abandoning you, wouldn't be a good idea.

How much you can relate to someone, and how close you get to them or not depends on all kinds of factors. The key thing is that even if it's not going to work out, we shouldn't abandon people. Once again it is like the wave. You do what you can. If it's not your cup of tea, you let the wave go down. You don't have to get trapped, but you also don't have to cut. A lot of human relatedness is very crude. People stay trapped in terrible marriages and can't get out, or they cut and run and there's

no resolution. Of course, both partners have to accept the resolution. Compassion doesn't mean that you bind yourself forever into something.

The bodhisattva comes into the world as the nirmanakaya. There is an intervention; the bodhisattva does something and life goes on. It is a bit like going to an osteopath: they make an adjustment, you loosen up a bit, and life goes on. However, our interventions can get a bit tricky when we want to insert ourselves and get involved: *"I want to help you, and I'm going to help you, so you had better let me help you. But I don't see any signs of improvement. Is this resistance? Are you wasting my time?"* Then all sorts of other feelings arise too. We live in a world of pulsations. We can pulsate with kindness. We can get close, something happens, and we work with that. If there is going to be a space for you to interact it should be done with delicacy. Acting very hot and then suddenly very cold is not good; acting very cold and then suddenly very hot is not very good either. Like the wave – just pulsing – like breathing. Compassion has that flavour.

I was asked by somebody here why we don't talk very much about compassion and love. Why? Mainly because it's an idea. When we are actually relating to people, in their presence, then there is an interplay of all kinds of possibilities. None of us are going to be pulsing with the same intensity with everybody and all the time. There are some people it is very easy to talk with, and some people it is very easy to kiss. It is very unlikely that the whole shebang is one hundred per cent with one other person.

That is why there is ambivalence in relatedness. We go hot, we go cold, we go close, we go away. We have to accept that our connectivity is mediated through our embodiment, and our embodiment is carrying all kinds of traces of wounds and hopes and fears and seeking compensation: *"Now I have found you. I was never loved as a child, but you're such a good mother. I'm sure you want to adopt me as an adult. I wouldn't cause any trouble. I will just tell you what my favourite foods are and the kinds of lullabies I need you to sing."* A lot of relationships are based on that: looking to the other to provide a compensation for our lack.

Until we have got a sense of our own profile and our energetic organisation, words like 'love' are pretty sneaky. Are you able to love? Can you actually see another person without projecting your hopes and fears? Can you be in the undefended moment? Can you be naked and fresh? No past, no future, just really open and see what the flavour of that is? I think that's quite rare.

These are all some suggestions on how you might reflect on compassion.

Another thing — very often compassion has a particular focus. So, some people put all their energy into rescuing stray cats, or stray dogs, or donkeys. I see many different charities advertising on television and they show suffering children or animals with great big beseeching eyes. They hold these shots for a long time. They broadcast in the afternoons when many older people watch TV and

they squeeze money out of lonely old people who've often got soft hearts and have nothing else to do but watch television. I find it off-putting because it's a kind of blackmail system. Each charity is trying to say that they are the most important — that they represent suffering better. They privilege certain types of suffering so that you isolate this one group of suffering beings and give all your energies (and money) to your one 'special' charity. This is the one for you. Donkeys, cats, bears, children in one country or another... Each is presented as especially deserving.

In the past most of us believed that universities were solely dedicated to the pursuit of truth. Now universities are just in the marketplace, scrabbling around. The main focus of their unified activity is multinational corporations which don't want to be firmly located in any country because they try to avoid paying taxes. They are free-floating like the internet cloud. They have an allegiance, but not to a country or a group of people, only to money. In fact money is so pure; it is much purer than truth! Truth you can always argue about it, but money? Multinationals buy up the universities. The state doesn't give enough money to the universities, so every research department is scrambling to get grants. Who do they get grants from? From the multinationals. Too much power is located in one place.

In dzogchen we want dispersal. On this retreat we work together here and we see that each person here has qualities; each has all kinds of brightness inside, all kinds of capacity for relating and doing things. Nothing is special, and no one is special. Because once you make one thing special, the rest goes in the dark. We have to stay open, relating to all experiences. Compassion is all-pervading.

CR Lama used to say that there is no virtue in the family. If you take care of your children, this is not virtue because they are your children and so your caring for them is a self-referential activity. Virtue begins with strangers. Now that is quite radical — not only taking care of your own ageing mum, but taking care of someone else's ageing mum. That is the difference. When you isolate something or someone, and invest it as important, in and of itself, then you get a distortion in the field. When the dzogchen text we are studying here refers to indifference it means that we should try to stay open with the field.

Of course, our energy is directed in different pathways according to family structures, cultural structures, and so on but when value goes with energy that is a different matter. Energy is one stream, like the sound of the bell. *"I'm going to give my time to these people."* Value is another. *"I'm going to give time to these people because they are special. I want to be with you because you're more interesting than anyone else here. In every break, I want to come and talk to you because you are the person here who is the most interesting."* That is not how we practise. We find ourselves in the break talking to all kinds of people. We move around and we have different sorts of conversations. And it's true that you see how amazing things are hidden inside each person once they start talking about something. There is all this richness, but it only comes available if you let it reveal itself.

Focusing on the one, staying on the pathways of the known, if it is simply energetic because that's the structure of your life then that is one thing. But if you distil particularised special value which you then attribute to that person as being inherent in them you create a distortion in the field. Everything is buddha. Everything has buddha nature. Everything is within the mind of the buddha. Equal in value. It's very important for us.

So relax and open; stay open to everything and then when the meditation period ends we get up and start to move around with other people. As soon as we move with other people there is a particularisation. We can't talk to everyone in the break, so we are giving more attention to one person or another and it may be a beautiful moment or it may be a difficult moment. Whatever moment it is, it's just that and then it's over. Then you move and you talk to someone else. It doesn't mean that you don't care about them.

Yesterday when I said that I am not very interested in people I think I was not very clear in what I meant by that. I am sorry if I caused some upset. I meant that I'm not interested in *thinking* about people. I'm interested in meeting people, and when I meet people and I relate to them I am not relating to people, I am relating to presence. Someone is there and I am looking at their face, and I see how they are breathing. They start to talk and something is emerging; we are in it together. That is fresh and precisely this. Once you start thinking about the person then it is not that person. They have gone from being a presence to being a person, and the person is a construct in your head. That person doesn't exist. But the more you hold on, as we've looked before, the more you hold on to that object-relation – that mental formulation of the other – the more it becomes a veil.

Novelists look around in cafes, and watch what people do. They are getting storylines in their mind and imagining people. We don't want to imagine people. We want to open into the moment of what's there and not cover people in our imaginings about who they are and what they are doing. Why are we wondering what they are doing or might do? What is that going to do? *“Oh, I'm just phoning you up to find out how you are doing?”* What do you expect the other person to say? Before you pick up the phone, look at your own life. Is it one simple direct line, or is it quite bumpy and complex like a maze? If you are living in a three-dimensional, four-dimensional or one-hundred-dimensional existence then when you phone someone else, what are you asking them? To shrink their life into a few words and sum themselves up as if they were a thing? It is a violence to ask people how they are doing. Because how *you* are doing, you can't say. Maybe you could dance it, or sing it. But isn't that the truth of our life?

We have to be aware all the time of how concepts shrink everything — because the concept is a method of apprehending; of taking hold of what is going on.