

The Dalai Lama On Compassion

Sermon by Jerry Clausen

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Our mission statement at First UU starts Building community with compassion, service, diversity, and spirit. We express compassion through caring, love, and support for others. Compassion was placed as a first priority by those who built the mission statement.

One of the Dalai Lamas main themes is compassion. Two of his best loved books on the subject are The Compassionate Life and An Open Heart. Since all religions advocate love, compassion, and forgiveness we need to be specific. The Dalai Lama states, In Buddhism compassion is defined as the wish that all beings be free from suffering - - the wish that all beings be free from suffering.

Now that we know what compassion is, how do we get there? The Dalai Lama says, Our commitment to liberating ourselves from this mire of cyclical existence must happen before true compassion is possible. Fundamentally the basis on which you can build a sense of caring for others is a capacity to love yourself and once you recognize this love in relation to yourself, then you can extend it to other sentient beings. This is much like the Christian Love thy neighbor as thyself. As M. Scott Peck says in The Road Less Traveled and Beyond, we must deal with ourselves and our families first.

The Dalai Lama says that the next step is to acknowledge dissatisfaction with the now. It is very similar to the first step of Alcoholics Anonymous, which says, that our lives had become unmanageable. He looks at the reverse side of the dissatisfied life, that is, the benefits of the compassionate life to us. He states, These days I hardly find myself being irritated at all. Personally, I agree with him on the lack of irritation that can come with using compassion. The Dalai Lama states that we are social animals more like deer than the tiger. He underlines many times our interdependence and its key to our happiness. The Dalai Lama states, I believe that our lifes purpose is to be happy. He points out the scientific data that a doctors desire to give care the placebo is in itself curative, as the mothers desire to care for the child is necessary for the childs development. Compassion is good for the physical as well as the mental health. Hate hurts the hater, whereas compassion is good for the giver.

Once we know what compassion is, have a strong motivation for it, we can patiently use the tool of meditation to draw closer. The Tibetan word gom means to meditate or to familiarize on a chosen object so that our knowledge will grow. We can do this while driving, walking, reading, or sitting. For those who do not meditate formally, think rather

of focusing your attention others might call it prayer, or being in quiet thought by oneself. You clear your thoughts of the responsibility of day to day life, and focus on your spiritual inner life.

The main thrust in the beginning of meditation is to lessen the power of negative emotions, such as anger, attachment, jealousy and pride. The third of Buddhas Eight Verses on the Training for the Mind says

May I examine my mind in all actions

As soon as a negative state occurs,

Since it endangers myself and others,

May I firmly face and avert it.

This means one should cultivate mindfulness right from the beginning and stamp out negative thoughts as soon as they arise. The Dalai Lama feels that negative thoughts eclipse the best part of the brain rationality.

For those who find meditation and compassion very difficult, there are several other ways of stamping out negative thoughts as soon as they arise: (1) forgiving and remembering, (2) detach with love, and (3) let go and let God.

When I was younger I thought that to forgive and forget was a weak strategy letting others off the hook. I then learned that forgiving allowed me to quit the painful resenting of people and made me stronger. On the other hand, I had to remember, that is, not forget so that they did not hurt me again the same way. I practice forgiving in small ways everyday while driving each person who cuts me off gives me frequent practice. The other day a man ran a stop sign, and almost hit the car. I forgave him, but my wife said, I dont.

Second, Al-Anon teaches detach with love. You love the person, but sometimes you must detach from what they are doing or saying for your own sanity. For example, if they are using derogatory language, you just let it go.

A third way of stamping out negative thoughts is Alcoholics Anonymous Let Go and Let God. By that they mean let go of the outcome, let go of the punishment, let some Higher Power nature, history, consequences deal with the person, not you. Let go of anger, attachment, jealousy, pride, etc.

Back to our work on compassion, according to the Dalai Lama after we have acknowledged that life could be better, we must conceive of the possibility of a human being who could attain total freedom from the negative aspects of the mind that would be the Buddha. It is like going to an AA meeting and seeing alcoholics who have gained

sobriety and serenity, laughing at the meeting, so that we know that it can be done. Otherwise we might say, I don't believe anybody can do it it's too hard.

The Dalai Lama considers the real enemy is within. Indeed, the fifth of the Eight Verses for the Training of the Mind says

Whenever others out of jealousy

Revil and treat me in other unjust ways,

May I accept this defeat myself

And offer the victory to others.

To expand on this verse we listen to the Dalai Lama: So if we truly wish to learn, we should consider our enemies our own best teachers! Biographies of his life show that he lives this way of life toward the Chinese, who invaded his country and drove him into exile. He shows a calm peacefulness toward the Chinese. This is similar to the Christian Love thine enemies, but carries it even further to as the fourth verse says, Consider them precious. Here is a real test of our abilities to deal with negative emotions at once and have patience and compassion.

This path is walked calmly, patiently, with daily training over time with the goal of total elimination of the negative emotions from the mind. The Dalai Lama says that Most of the problems and suffering we experience, which is essentially our own making, are ultimately created by these negative emotions.

The next step in the path is to avoid the ten non-virtuous qualities. The qualities we commit with our bodies are killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Then there are the acts of speech: lying, divisive, offensive, and senseless speech. Non-virtuous acts of the mind are covetousness, malice, and stubbornly clinging to a wrong view. These ethics are similar to the Ten Commandments of the Jewish and Christian faiths.

Having limited our negative emotions using meditation and eliminating our non-virtuous qualities, we can move forward from the method aspects to the wisdom aspects of our path. Through understanding, analysis, and critical perception we deepen our understanding of impermanence and the suffering nature of existence.

As we become liberated from the suffering, we see that it can only be truly done if we wish to free others. This is because, as the Dalai Lama says, The world is inextricably interconnected. The Dalai Lama said we need to recognize how our fortune is really dependent upon the cooperation and contribution of others. Caring for others is the same principle as why Alcoholics Anonymous never worked until Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob added the twelfth step of saving others once they had been saved.

Because of the interdependent web of life, it would appear that compassion is the lynchpin to our remembering the path out of suffering. This is just as the recovering alcoholic must turn back to the intense suffering of the newcomer to help him through the first steps of AA. Going back through the old pain and suffering with the newcomer reminds all of us why we are working so hard on our daily calm, patient meditation to decrease the negative emotions even for those of us far from the original intensity of the suffering..

Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said, A man may perform astonishing feats and comprehend a vast amount of knowledge, and yet have no understanding of himself. But suffering directs a man to look within. If he succeeds, then there, within himself, is the beginning of his learning.

The next step toward compassion is to put empathy closeness to others concern for others in our meditation. Following that we focus on our own suffering, and then expand that recognition to the suffering of others. We focus our thoughts on one person at a time, and then extend the scope to more and more people.

Let us review our thoughts. Compassion is a centerpiece of our mission statement. We wish to learn from a great teacher the Dalai Lama on a topic that he loves compassion. In order to gain true compassion we must work on our own enlightenment first, and then focus on others. We must acknowledge dissatisfaction with the now and see the benefits of compassion. We need to be aware that the Buddha a human being was able to accomplish liberation and compassion by using meditation to lessen the power of negative emotions such as anger, attachment, jealousy and pride. He did this calmly, patiently, daily over time. We need to avoid the ten non-virtuous qualities Buddhist Ten Commandments.

Next we recognize the critical importance of compassion to furthering our enlightenment. Our fortune is really dependent upon the cooperation and contribution of others. As with the twelfth step of AA, compassion is the lynchpin of true enlightenment. As we tune in to the intense suffering of others, we remember why we must work so hard every day to further decrease negative emotions no matter how far we get from the original suffering.

Once we are on the path from our suffering we can truly focus on compassion. We focus on our suffering past and present and then expand that recognition to the suffering of others. We focus our thoughts on one specific person and then extend the scope to more people. Compassion yields a great feeling of warmth, caring and connection. For those with difficulty with meditation, there is forgiveness and remembering, detach with love, and let go and let God.

Opening Words

We come to this place of high purpose, a sanctuary which touches all other sanctuaries of our past: a past both personal and collective, whose faith and tradition we hold continually before us. Here we would deepen our knowledge of ourselves, widen the

horizon of our minds, touch one another with care, and with love, and place ourselves before the mystery of life.

We come into this place of ever-new beginnings with a hope in our hearts for renewal, with a hope living in the very wood and stone of this room which offers to enter us as we enter this place. Here we would deepen our commitment together, widen the compassion of our hearts, touch one another with warmth and with hope, and place ourselves before the mystery which gives birth to it all.

Let us enter this time in this place together with a moment of silence.

Daniel Budd - UUA Worship Web, 1997 UUMA Worship Materials Collection

Meditation

Each Breath by Leaf Seligman - UUA Worship Web, Original

We pause in the stillness to rest for a moment to quiet ourselves so that we can feel what stirs within us. Each breath draws us closer to the pulse of life, and with each exhalation we make room for something new. May we find in this gathering the comfort of those who care. May we encounter patience along our growing edges and compassion in our most tender spots. Here may we find the inspiration and encouragement we need to face our challenges and nurture ourselves. And in the presence of suffering across the globe may we redouble our efforts to practice kindness where we are, with the hope that the light of our actions travels like the light of far away stars. May our gestures of compassion and generosity seed possibility. May we walk humbly with one another, choosing reconciliation over resentment as we try to live right-sized. When life presses in and shifts us off balance, when pain assails us, when frustration mounts, may the rhythm of our breath steady us and bring us back to a place of gratitude.

Closing Words *Philip Randall Giles*

Now may our wisdom show itself

In compassion and understanding,

And the fruits of the spirit

Be apparent in our lives.

Unison Reading *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Let us be at peace with our bodies and minds. Let us return to ourselves and become holy ourselves.

Let us be aware of the source of being, common to us all and to all living things.

Evoking the presence of the Great Compassion, let us fill our hearts with our own compassion towards ourselves and towards all living beings.

Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering to each other.

With humility, with awareness of the existence of life and of the sufferings that are going on around us, let us practice the establishment of peace in our hearts and on earth. Amen.