
The Bridge of Compassion

In the previous chapter we discussed the connection between our sitting practice of meditation and our day-to-day experience. On the one hand, there is your familiar everyday life. You know it quite well. You can see it clearly, filled with all the things that you have to handle in your life. On the other hand, you have your comfortable or uncomfortable meditation. Meditation could give you an inkling of self-indulgence, of feeling self-satisfied. To remedy that, mindfulness also extends to the domestic situations of life, the kitchen-sink problems that we face constantly. Practically speaking, however, how do we link our meditation with the everyday challenges that we face all the time? How do we build a bridge between the sitting practice of meditation and meditation in action, or the post-meditation practice of mindfulness in everyday life?

In order to communicate from one side of the bridge to the other side, a sympathetic attitude is required, an attitude of charity, in the original sense of that word. The word *charity* is derived from Latin and Sanskrit words for warmth and love.

That is the real meaning of compassion: fundamental warmth. That, too, is the link between meditation practice and everyday life.

The practice of meditation is about trusting yourself. As the practice becomes a more prominent feature of your daily life, you not only learn to trust yourself but you might begin to actually love yourself, or to have a compassionate attitude toward yourself. As much basic space as you discover in your practice, there is that much *warmth* in the space as well. There's a delightful feeling of positive things happening in you, constantly. Your meditation is no longer mechanical or a drag, but it is a delightful thing to do. Meditation is making friends with yourself.

Having made friends with yourself in the practice of meditation, you can't just contain that warmth within yourself. You have to have an outlet for it. That outlet is communication with the world outside, with the other side of the bridge. Compassion acts as the bridge. Otherwise, it is possible that your practice of meditation might become self-satisfying. It might even become aggressive: "Don't touch me. I know what I'm doing. Just let me meditate!" You might become like an arrogant professor who thinks that she knows everything. If you ask her a question that she thinks is stupid, she will get angry at you rather than trying to answer your question. So if you exclusively practice meditation with no element of compassion in it, that kind of self-contained, self-satisfying practice could contain aggression.

Compassion is not logical. It's basically spacious and generous. A compassionate person might not be sure whether he is being compassionate to you or whether you are being compassionate to him, because compassion creates a total environment of generosity. Generosity is implied; it just happens, rather than *you* making it happen. It's just there, without direction, without me, without "for them." It's full of joy, a spontaneously existing grin of joy, constant joy.

This joy also contains wealth and richness. Compassion could be said to be the ultimate attitude of richness. It is anti-poverty, the ultimate war on want. It contains all sorts of heroic, juicy, positive, visionary, expansive, bigger-scale thinking. It is a much bigger way of relating to yourself and to your world, your projections.

The attitude of compassion is a larger way of thinking, thinking on a larger scale. The attitude is one of being born rich rather than becoming rich. It is a world of plenty.

Without compassion, meditation cannot be transferred into action at all. We have a tendency, which almost feels automatic, to freeze up, to keep things frozen within ourselves. We preserve things in ourselves because we are afraid of losing them, afraid of losing our wealth. When we begin to experience fundamental warmth in our practice of meditation, that generous attitude and experience invite us to relate more openly with people. We begin to thaw out. People are no longer regarded as a drain on our energy at all. People recharge our energy. They make us feel wealthy, rich, plentiful.

When you have to perform difficult tasks in your life, which may involve dealing with difficult people, you no longer feel that you are running out of resources. Each time a difficult task is presented to you, it's a delightful chance to demonstrate your richness, your wealth. With that attitude, you no longer draw into yourself or pull away. Rather, you become generous and available. Meditation in action, which we can also call mindfulness in action, comes from this mentality of richness. From this point of view, there is no poverty.

Something is lacking in meditation if there is no compassion in it. Then meditation becomes isolated and unrelated. You feel orphaned with no father or mother to take care of you. You feel abandoned, and you cut yourself off from the world, because you don't like the rest of the world.

So we need the bridge of compassion, to connect our med-

itation practice with everyday life. The cultivation of compassion begins with experiencing a cooling off of passion and aggression in the sitting practice of meditation. Passion implies urgency: you want to acquire something right now to satisfy your desire. When there's less desire, there's also less aggression and speed. The moment you start to relate to simplicity in the practice of meditation, you don't have to rush anymore. You're self-contained in that sense. Because you're not in a hurry, you can afford to relax. Then you can get to know yourself, and eventually you begin to love yourself. That is the source of warmth and compassion. It's quite simple, from that point of view.

Everything that arises in your meditation practice, all the thoughts and emotions, lend an earthy quality to meditation practice. Meditation practice is realistic—it takes place in the real world, rather than on some ethereal plane. This earthiness in your practice is also embryonic compassion, because compassionate warmth is grounded. It's not in a hurry. It is not being hasty but instead relating to each situation in life as it is. There was a famous Native American leader in the nineteenth century, Sitting Bull, whose name is a vivid example of the earthiness of compassion. That name implies something solid, organic, and definite. It exemplifies definitely being there, resting.

Action without compassion is like planting a dead tree. It will never grow. But any action that contains compassion is planting a living tree that grows endlessly and never dies. Or even if the tree dies, it always leaves a seed behind, which will grow into another tree. That organic quality of compassion goes on and on and on.

You don't have to nurse compassion. It is like making yogurt. You add the culture to milk, and then you keep the milk warm until it becomes yogurt. Sometimes you try to speed the yogurt along by increasing the temperature of the milk. But that usually doesn't make good yogurt at all. If you had left it at

the right temperature and just abandoned it for a while, it would have made good yogurt.

Similarly, you needn't constantly micromanage your life. Disowning is necessary at a certain point. You don't have to constantly meddle in situations that don't require further maintenance. Part of compassion is trust. If something positive is happening, you don't have to check up on it all the time. The more you check up, the more possibilities there are of interrupting the growth. It requires fearlessness to let things be. In a sense, it's a form of positive thinking. It's the true mentality of wealth and richness.

Fear comes from panic and the bewilderment of uncertainty, which is related to lack of trust in oneself. You feel inadequate to deal with the mysterious situations that constantly seem to be threatening you. If you have a compassionate relationship with yourself, you trust yourself and you know what you are doing, at least fundamentally. Your projections, which are just a mirror reflection of yourself, become methodical or predictable, so you know how to relate to a situation and also how to leave it alone. Then there is no more fear.

There's a distinction between emotional compassion and direct compassion. Ultimately, you don't have to *feel* compassion. You just *be* compassion. If you are open to situations, compassion just happens, because you are not wrapped up in self-indulgency at that point. You don't have to maintain compassion, but you acknowledge it. That is the mentality of richness: acknowledging that the bridge of compassion is there and available. You don't have to do more than that.

Meditation without concepts, without sidetracks of any kind, is our practice. Within that basic practice there should be a friendly attitude toward oneself as well as a sense of radiating that friendliness. This friendliness can permeate our environment, which includes our living situation and all the people in our lives.

Compassion also contains wisdom, which is a primordial intelligence. We could say that it is discovering unoriginated, or primordial, trust in ourselves. We don't have to logically work out that trust. It is there already. In some sense, it has no beginning. It is a kind of wisdom eye that we innately possess.