

Compassioning Estrangement

All beings suffer and share the need for care and the end of suffering. Compassion understands and relieves suffering and then works to end suffering. Giving our full attention to one who suffers communicates to them our respect and total acceptance of their being. By caring for their suffering and wellbeing, we deeply connect with them.

Western culture believes that we bring suffering upon ourselves by our weaknesses and failures. The compassionate recognize that we all suffer at different times within our lives. The compassionate opens to the shared suffering of living beings and offers a caring response, not as a charity of the strong helping the weak, but from the personal knowing of suffering and what we needed from others when we suffered.

The compassionate perceive suffering as a warning of an imbalance. Relieving the immediate suffering of an individual does not address the problem that caused the suffering. Not only does a compassionate person want to comfort those who suffer, but they want others not to suffer. Only when we heal the source of suffering will the suffering end.

Every action arises from a complex multitude of tendencies and causal conditions: patterns within a relationship, time pressures, position in hierarchy, cultural expectations, traumas, and so much more. Further, harms have a causal history distributed over time and generations that leads to suffering.

A single causal condition does not make things happen but rather it tends to cause and interact with other causal conditions to make things happen. The outcomes of interacting causal conditions have an extreme sensitivity to changes of the interacting causal variables. Just one small additional or absence of a causal factor, or a change in the strength of a causal factor, can make a large difference in the outcome.

Pathers can reach a state where we respond to any harmful situation with compassion based on understanding the conditions which caused the suffering. When we come to see the world as interconnected rather than as a collection of isolated objects, we have the power to change those conditions over which we have some influence to change by increasing harmonious conditions and decreasing disharmonious conditions.

Not knowing how to respond to suffering comes from ignorance, the not seeing the interconnections among the causal conditions, conditions which include us and the sacred. We do not observe suffering; we participate in it.

Compassion does not seek vengeance or payback for being harmed. Others may harm a compassionate person, but the compassionate do not suffer personally. Instead, they seek to relieve the suffering of those who harm them and to transform the causal conditions for the other's suffering in ways aligned with the sacred values and guidance.¹

¹ **Sacred Values of the Earth Interbeing (work in progress)**: respect and joy for the sacred unity and equality of life on Earth, patiently bearing the burdens of life on the sacred path, surrendering and yielding to the sacred to know how to compassionately respond to experience in ways that further life on Earth, humbleness, lovingly nurturing and caring for the

Compassionate people do not expect others to reward them for their compassion no more than they would expect a reward for breathing. They see their caring response for the other as the ordinary way of living with others. Being compassionate does not depend upon the other doing the same for us or even for their gratitude. The compassionate just do it.

Compassion depends upon a heightened stable attention. By having a calm attention, we experience the process of suffering within ourselves and others. The energy of a heightened attention supports a compassionate presence that allows us to tame our emotional reactions. We compassionately choose not to react in anger but to respond in caring ways. In so doing, we transform our experience of the world.

The compassionate do not consider they have greater value than other beings. They remain humble, like the Earth, which nourishes all and bears the burdens of life placed upon it. By caring for the life inhabiting their shared place, the compassionate come to know all other beings as their relatives and have affection for them. Once compassion has become an established way of our lives, compassioning has transformed us and we open to interbeing.

The compassionate cannot ignore suffering. Although we cannot reform Western culture to stop its harming, we can reduce and stop how we individually cause others to suffer. By responding compassionately to the needs of others, we affirm our interdependence with all life and the Earth, our mutual neediness, and our solidarity with those in need of care. In so doing, we give rise to a new culture of mutuality. The unnoticed caring of others and other beings surround us all.

We will always experience problems and obstructions that thwart us. Everyone suffers such hardships, yet we can view difficulties as life lessons, problem that we must overcome to deepen our sacred being. Compassion teaches us what we need to know and do.

Estrangement occurs within families when members need to push away from each other to give themselves space to grow and become. While family members have much in common, we all have unique differences. When parents value some differences more than others, families become unequal and divided into the camps of better than or less than. This opens to comparison, judgement, and hierarchy. Within the Earth Interbeing, life celebrates differences as diversity strengthens community. Viewing each other through our strengths rather than our faults unleashes the power of a family mutually interacting in ways that further the family.

The compassionate look into their hearts to fathom how they have contributed to inequality within their family to overcome estrangement and to make amends for how they have contributed to the suffering. Overcoming divisiveness within families opens to opportunities for families to grow together with the insights, mastery, and confidence they gain from compassionately responding to estrangement. A family with even modest levels of interconnectivity can overcome the suffering

Earth Interbeing, giving back for what we receive or take with gratitude, beneficial and affectionate interactions, and self-discipline to remove the ways we harm life on Earth.

caused by superficial tensions over differences. We should not allow estrangement within a family to persist as it represents more of a challenge than disaster.

Compassion requires humility, a willingness to care for others, and knowing the equality of all. We do not withdraw from discomfort to overcome what keeps us apart. Acting upon our compassionate understanding of another's suffering overcomes estrangement. What we perceive as differences complete the family, the interbeing family. Others may view the compassionate as weak or deficient. Yet when we adhere to the sacred values that further life on Earth, our compassioning will have a good end.

Compassion provides a reliable roadmap to know how to respond to a wrong inflicted upon us or others. The more we can view the other as our beloved, the greater the lengths we will go to alleviate their suffering and remove the causes of their suffering. We feel a personal responsibility for the beloved's welfare.

A compassionate person opens to possibilities and vulnerabilities. We know the sacred even within what causes suffering. The sacred may appear horribly transfigured and distorted, but we still hear the sacred calling upon us to care for all life and the Earth, to further life on Earth. We know the suffering caused by our faults and ignorance as the place for us to begin learning how to compassionately suffer with others. We know the possibilities of centering our lives upon furthering life on Earth.

Unconditional compassion goes against nothing and fulfills everything. We come to know compassion as the force that flows through the sacred Earth Interbeing and unites all.

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