

Chapter One - A Philosophy of Compassion:

The foundation for becoming a positive change warrior

W. David Hoisington, Ph.D. *First Posted* December 8, 2009 *Last Update:* Oct. 12, 2011

Please note that this is just a draft and is being updated. It is provided in its early form for your enjoyment and enlightenment.

The primary goal of this compassion handbook is to provide the tools needed for a person to learn about the compassion space, to begin the journey toward strong compassion, and then move even further on to developing radiant compassion (note: in the book “The Ultimate Relationship” http://www.sacredhealingnow.com/Ultime_Relationship.html radiant compassion is described in more detail). This journey includes developing a strong voice for compassion, the language needed to speak with wisdom and conviction about compassion as a way of living. This is the foundation for becoming a warrior for positive change. A philosophy of compassion is also an argument to help support the dialog about compassion and its necessity as part of our social fabric. Often it is the aggressive or cynical voice that seems to be heard first. But it is possible to develop a strong voice for compassion based on a philosophy of compassion. A strong compassion philosophy helps the voice of compassion to be heard above the mob ranting and supports one’s role as a warrior for positive change. A philosophy of compassion is a way of life, a way of deciding how to react to life and what steps to take when solving personal life issues while simultaneously taking steps toward positive change. A philosophy of compassion is also the intent behind our discourse when speaking of change. Building a reasonable philosophical argument in support of compassion is not the same as scientifically proving compassion and the nature of a relational compassion space. It may be impossible to actually prove that a compassion space exists as defined. What can be presented is a set of observations and assumptions about compassion and then a philosophy based on those observations and assumptions. All of the observations to support a philosophy of compassion cannot fit within the framework of this condensed document. Internet links, and book titles on those links, are provided for more support.

Assumptions

Any philosophy is built upon assumptions, or concepts that are considered as truths and are generally linked to both observation and common sense. These are generally ideas that can be rationally supported but have not yet been proven using the scientific method. Building a philosophy of compassion rests upon an understanding of these basic assumptions.

Assumption 1 – Compassion is defined as empathy plus wisdom.

Before describing a philosophy of compassion we need to come to some agreement about its definition. Compassion is the desire and the willingness to help relieve the suffering of living beings (including

yourself). To do that one must hear that suffering through empathy and then act wisely to reduce that suffering. If you do not have even simple forms of empathy then it will be hard to hear the suffering accurately. If you do not act on what you hear then there is no way to know that compassion exists. If you do not act with wisdom then your action may not result in the relief of suffering. Compassion then is simply defined as empathy plus wisdom. This definition serves as the foundational assumption for developing a philosophy of compassion.

The term compassion should be distinguished from benevolence where the later is the desire to do “good for others” accompanied by willingness. Compassion contains within it benevolence but benevolence doesn’t necessarily contain compassion. The term compassion should also be distinguished from the term altruism, although the overlap is so close to make this distinction difficult. Altruism can be thought of as a sacrifice done, without conscious self interest, in an attempt to reduce suffering. Compassion may contain altruism but it is not necessary. Altruism may contain elements of compassion, but it is often the situation that helps to define altruism – like making a sacrifice to help rescue the Jews during the Holocaust. It is the situation which often defines the sacrifice. One could argue that altruism does not exist and that we are all selfish in our motives, but such an argument does not hold up to logic or commonsense. If we are always selfish then we should wish people to be “good to us”, that is to show us compassion. Therein lies the conundrum. Compassion should also be distinguished from the common use of the term love, with love including relational attachment or bond. But this is a topic worthy of a more lengthy discussion than can be provided here. Finally, compassion should be considered more than a state of mind. Preliminary research on how people define compassion (http://compassionspace.com/Compassion_Survey_Results.html) indicates that it is often thought of in relational terms that involve sensing and actions.

Assumption 2 – Compassion is relational.

Assumption 1, by definition, assumes a relationship. In order to know the suffering of another being one needs to stand in relationship with that being and come to some understanding of their suffering. Compassion is not an abstract extrapolation of what one assumes to be the nature of that person’s suffering but rather the shared experience of suffering within a **compassion space**. The application of wisdom to discover well being (relief of suffering) is the same. We apply this wisdom within a relationship of compassion, a compassion space, rather than applying some blanket of dogma to all beings. The preliminary results from our first compassion survey indicate that people define compassion, and compassionate people, in relational terms. No one says, “Oh that guy is compassionate because he sat around and thought about it a lot”. Compassion is seen by others in terms of actions that occur between living beings.

An understanding of this relational aspect of compassion is tied to the “relationship stance” that one takes. The term relationship stance simply means how we stand inside a relationship with a living being, including ourselves. Our relationship stance is affected by our history with relationships, how we relate to other living beings, and our practice within the compassion space. Compassion development

happens through our relationships with living beings. All of our relationships contain the possibility for entering the compassion space but not all relationships are ready for the experience of sharing the compassion space.

The compassion space is that relational space held by one person for the express purpose of promoting a relief of suffering in another with an accompanying shift toward well being. It is the space between, the relationship of three interacting aspects – 1) the person seeking help, 2) the person providing help, and 3) the nature of compassion. Discussion on the space between can be found in the book “The Mystic Relationship” (link <http://www.sacredhealingnow.com/MysticRelationship.html>).

Assumption 3 – Compassion is instinctually linked to our survival.

The possibility of compassion exists because compassion is part of human nature. It also exists because beings exist within relationships. We are not the strongest species and we are born quite helpless. At birth we need protection and nurturing. As we grow we need to work within relationships in order to survive, to access food, shelter, and reproduction. Compassion helps these relationships function with greater harmony and thus contributes to our survival. Those small tribal groups which contained elements of compassion for each other were more likely to survive over those where there was internal strife and neglect of other’s needs.

It is difficult to prove that compassion is a part of human nature. There is some evidence from twin studies, primate studies, and infant research. But the most compelling argument is one of common sense. If we were to be solely aggressive and competitive then who would share with others in the collective? Who would care for others in the collective?

Imagine this ancient tribal scene:

A small clan is huddled around a fire in a cave. Night has fallen and one of the younger males leaves the cave to attend to bodily functions. He is gone but a few minutes when screams are heard. The members of the clan do not react because they are engaged in their own needs. Some are eating, some are making items for protection, and some are engaged in reproductive activities. Soon the screaming stops but the young male does not return.

It should be obvious that we, as a social species, could not have survived if such egocentric living were the basis of our interactions. Instead what seems to be built into our genetic heritage is an instinctual response to the pain of others, particularly those of the same clan. Anthropologic evidence was discovered that supports the idea of a genetic compassion heritage. A skull of Homo Erectus, our ancient ancestor, was found with no teeth and it is estimated that he lived for at least 2 years with no teeth. It is highly likely that he was provided with food by others in the clan. This behavior of showing compassion for others dates back millions of years and is probably hard wired into us.

Another example: Imagine you are walking (on a street or in a store) and you see a parent hit a child in the face. What is your immediate response? Imagine that you get a phone call from school and

they tell you that your child has been beaten by another child. What is your first response? Most people have an immediate gut response. This is followed by another response of wanting to do something. Compassion, at its basic level, is about that gut response and its call to reducing the suffering of those within our clan. This in turn helps to promote our survival. At this level it is a part of our nature, but this is not the same as saying that we all have the same level of compassion awareness or that we all practice compassion the same in all relationships.

Assumption 4 – Compassion follows a normal distribution in society.

When I give presentations on compassion I often ask the audience, “Have you met someone who has shown a high degree of compassion?” About half the audience will raise their hands in the affirmative. I also ask, “Have you met someone who seems to have almost no compassion?” To this there is almost a unanimous flurry of raised hands. The common sense conclusion is that some people demonstrate more compassion than others. If compassion could be measured reliably than there would likely be a mean value of compassion representing the majority of society. Above that mean would be people demonstrating more compassion and below that mean would be people demonstrating less compassion. These differences in compassion may be attributed to differences in biological make-up, environment, training (including barrier removal) and belief. This is something we observe in society – some people seem to have more compassion than others.

There is a survey being run that speaks to how people understand compassion. The hypothesis being examined is that there will be a range of descriptions (see the web page for the survey and the results http://compassionspace.com/Compassion_Survey_Research.html). Chapter two in this handbook will address this survey, but preliminary results suggest that the hypothesis is valid.

The hypothesis follows the common sense observation that compassion is distributed throughout society in what is called a normal distribution. This simply means that the majority of people will have average compassion (which has yet to be defined). There will also be people with a low amount of compassion and a scattered few with what seems like an absence of compassion. Yet there will also be people with higher degrees of compassion and a scattered few with what seems to be very brilliant and amazingly strong compassion. These few can be known as the heroes of compassion and they serve as role models.

Assumption 5 – Compassion can be developed.

The previous assumptions provide a basic definition of compassion stating that it is relational, that it is part of human nature and that there is a broad distribution compassion understanding within our population. From these assumptions it can be assumed that there are various levels of compassion (or compassion phenomena) ranging from instinctual to a radiant, sacred, compassion. This idea is

discussed in more detail within the paper called "Theory of Compassion Development" (see the link).
http://compassionspace.com/Papers_on_Basic_Compassion.html

Given that there are various expressions of compassion, which appear as different phenomenon suggesting levels of compassion development, then it is reasonable to assume that some people may be able to move from a lower level to a higher one. Our survey indicates that people believe compassion improvement is possible (http://compassionspace.com/Compassion_Survey_Results.html). Work I have done on teaching compassion has shown some qualitative indications that improvement is possible (see the difference in the definitions given by students versus "experienced" persons at the following link: http://compassionspace.com/Brief_Description_of_the_Compassion_Space.html). Given the proper conditions, people can show an improvement in their understanding and practice of compassion. Saying that it is possible for a person to improve their compassion is not the same as saying that a person can achieve the maximum level of compassion development. Instead the assumption is simply stating that a person can show some amount of improvement and that the possibility of improvement is available to all (but not all will be ready).

The first step on the path of improvement is to understand how you understand compassion (and thus the reason for the website CompassionSpace.com). There is an interwoven relationship between the level at which one can practice compassion and one's definition of compassion. Compassion is a relational experience that has specific phenomenon characteristics that change with the level of practice. As one experiences the various phenomena associated with developing compassion their definition of compassion changes. As one develops compassion one understands new aspects of the relational phenomena and this changes how one understands compassion. Coming to know these new relational phenomena then changes how compassion is practiced because the practice is now based on knowing that new compassion phenomenon. Knowing the new phenomenon becomes the basis for a new compassion understanding and practice. These were phenomena that were previously absent from the person's understanding of compassion. The addition of new phenomena shapes how one understands compassion and their understanding shapes how they practice compassion. The compassion developmental level which a person attains shapes their understanding and practice and this is an important part of defining the nature of compassion. Teaching about compassion, both in the classroom and in the apprentice relationship, is tied to learning about the range of phenomena associated with compassion.

Because compassion is both relational and developmental it is an experience that needs to be lived fully to understand its meaning and application. It is true that one can read material about compassion (like the material here) and that information can open the door to possibilities, but one has to walk through that door and live the experience. One can expand their compassion through practice, and also through exposure to more advanced compassion experiences. One's openness to this process is called **compassion readiness**.

Compassion readiness is not the same as compassion possibility. Every relational moment has compassion possibility but not everyone is ready to experience compassion in that moment. This is probably one of the most frequent questions I get asked, "Do you think you can teach compassion?"

Often hidden under such a question is the myth that a person's ability to express compassion is an unchangeable trait. This myth is often a belief resistant to change even in the face of persuasive argument. Since I teach people to develop their compassion I can say that it is possible for people to improve how they understand and practice compassion. This is not the same as saying I am the teacher for everyone or that everyone is ready to learn. It is simply saying that some people can learn to improve their compassion when they are ready.

Compassion readiness is the state of being where one is ready to enter into the compassion space and discover the experience of compassion in that moment. Compassion possibility states that the compassion space is always possible. Even though the possibility always exists if one is not ready then there will be no shared compassion space. The focus of compassion training is often on showing the possibility and expanding the readiness. This is the main emphasis of developing compassion through education.

Assumption 6 – The compassion space directly influences well being.

Compassion, by definition, is linked to the relief of suffering. This being true means that compassion is also linked to well being. There is a connection between the success of help offered to another and the compassionate intent that accompanies that offer. The compassion space is a relational phenomenon which shares the suffering while simultaneously maintaining the intent to promote well being. It is the "taking in" of suffering and the "breathing out" of well being. The way one practices holding this compassion space for another changes as one develops a rich understanding of compassion. As compassion awareness is developed so also is the ability to hold the compassion space and thus the ability to affect positive change in others and in self.

The compassion space is a relational phenomenon that can directly affect the well being of another. This can happen at all levels of compassion development provided that the intent to promote well being is maintained without an agenda. It is like opening the door to a room of light and letting that light fill the dark room of suffering. Nothing needs to be done except to open the door. There is no force one needs to apply to make something happen. There is nothing that needs to be said and nothing that needs to be done. The quiet mind attentive to the wellbeing in that moment, side-by-side with the suffering, and this is all that is needed. This is what is meant by removing the agenda. Removing the agenda does not mean we remove our responsibilities to the moment. If there are actions that we are responsible for then we do those actions.

Bedside manner is something that may be linked to the compassion space. The placebo effect may also be linked to the compassion space. Prayer for the well being of another, or holding the space sacred, might also be a part of the process. There is much left to explore regarding the various processes incorporated into offering the compassion space, but what has begun with this research is a preliminary exploration into describing the features of the compassion space. Describing how we know and walk into the compassion space is the starting point for both teaching compassion and practicing it.

The entire website www.CompassionSpace.com is dedicated to describing various aspects of the compassion space with the major features shown on the following webpage:

<http://compassionspace.com/HelpingRelationshipTree.html>

The information on the website not only looks at various aspects of the compassion space phenomenon but also presents these aspects using a wide diversity of media and multicultural contexts. This is done because people hear with different ears, see with different eyes. The compassion space is a relational phenomenon with a great range in its expression. The compassion space is also something which is often erroneously thought of as being constant without the great range of expression. Because it is thought of as a constant it is also thought that no discourse is needed. This is a myth (the myths are described in the introduction to this handbook) that has often led to silence, a deafening of compassion's voice.

Assumption 7 – Compassion flourishes with support.

The continual focus of media on the negative aspects of society has led to social dialog that often does the same. Drowned out are the voices of compassion. Yet if we are to move forward toward a healthy and productive society we need the voice of compassion, if just to act as balance for the pervasive cynicism. Direct experience, discourse, training, and environments of support are needed to help us move toward a culture of compassion and away from the punitive, angry and complaining discourse. We also need to speak out so that we can know that there are other compassionate beings in the world.

There is a process of “passing it on” where compassion flourishes under conditions of support. Support groups are the basis of the AA model for addiction recovery. Support groups have been shown to aid in the recovery from cancer surgery. The idea that one person can help another to move through suffering and experience well being is behind the Christian concept of “witnessing”. It is also behind the more general concept that teaching others to discover a deeper compassion is aided by apprenticeship with a “master”. This practice has a long lived tradition. It is the practice of “passing it on”. In my work with teaching compassion I have found such an apprenticeship, usually 2 years, to be necessary for a person to grasp the range of phenomena associated with advanced levels of compassion.

There are barriers to overcome when seeking to develop compassion and then pass it on. These are barriers that exist throughout society, and also are internal to ourselves. We can get caught up in the world and pass on the anxiety, anger and sense of entitlement that seems to ravage our society like an unending storm. But such a way of life has many unhealthy consequences both individually and collectively. In terms of compassion development, the worst of these consequences is the resistance to expanding compassion readiness (<http://compassionspace.com/HelpingRelationshipTree.html> provides a link to resistance in the discussion of “Habitual Relationships”). If you are seeking to develop stronger compassion, or seeking to pass it on, then you have probably encountered this resistance. In

facing the resistance it is healthy to have support – whether that resistance is within us or between us and the compassion space we hold for another.

If you have been in a group setting, a work place, a family, a classroom, a team sport, then you know that the mood of the group can affect the mood of the individuals. It is often the negative moods that seem to be remembered, but it is possible for compassion to be just as contagious. Emotion contagion is a part of the process of passing it on and something to be given respect when seeking to create an environment where compassion can flourish. We can change the environment to one that contains discourse focused on compassion. We simply need to decide that it is in our best interest to do so and then have the courage to act in that direction. The information on www.CompassionSpace.com is designed to help people develop a stronger voice and to speak out with that voice.

This first, and most important, aspect of passing it on is to understand that compassion is a relational phenomenon. This means that a large portion of how we come to understand compassion is within a relationship and through direct experience. It is through personal relationships that we come to believe in our own view of compassion. It is through personal relationships that we can have the direct experience of well being which accompanies developed compassion. When we act as a witness to the transformative power of compassion we do so within a personal relationship. We pass on compassion as a direct experience of moving from suffering toward well being and this is done within a relationship. It is this powerful influence of shifting from suffering to well being within a relationship of compassion that should become the focus of society.

The relationship of compassion is different than other relationships. It has its own unique characteristics, yet it also has some relationship characteristics that are familiar. This familiarity can lead to misinterpretation and the uniqueness can lead to fear. This directly changes compassion readiness. One of the main reasons why an environment of support is needed is because most people do not know the features of the compassion space and the importance of passing it on. Because they do not know it they can only evaluate compassion experiences based on their current relationship stance. An environment that supports compassion can help a person to see past the boundaries of their current relationship stance, past the confusion, past the misinterpretation. A compassion support environment is composed of many different people who know about the compassion space and can help people across cultures become open to the possibility and to expand their compassion readiness.

When there is no support for sharing the compassion space what often happens is that the process becomes labeled as something it is not. This then leads to confusion, a negation of the possibility and the breakdown of compassion readiness. Compassion needs support in order to break through the confusion, to expand compassion readiness and to broaden the network of helpers who can hold the compassion space. This support is currently not present in our society and compassionate people often have to struggle to have their voices heard. The steps that need to be taken to move toward a science of compassion are briefly outlined on the webpage: http://compassionspace.com/Science_of_Compassion.html

All of the information on the CompassionSpace.com website can be used to help build a strong voice for compassion. That is the main goal of the website and this handbook. The information is provided to help people speak about compassion with strength and conviction. Additional chapters within this handbook will provide more detailed information to help with moving toward a culture of compassion.

Behind the Assumptions

Beneath each of the above seven assumptions about compassion are philosophical concepts about mind, reality, knowledge and justice. Living a life based on a philosophy of compassion needs to have a consistent foundation of philosophical constructs underneath. But because compassion is understood at various levels, the philosophy underneath will also be understood at increasing complexity the more one expands their understanding and practice of compassion. Since this handbook is meant to serve as a bridge between introductory ideas and the more complex ideas associated with radiant compassion, the information will be presented with the aim of expanding general awareness without getting overburdened by academic jargon.

Empathy is possible

Given the assumption that compassion can be defined as empathy plus wisdom it is assumed that empathy is possible. But such an assumption is not easily held in a post modern society where the perception of reality is often believed to be subjective. To say that empathy is possible is an idea that contains within it the idea that a feeling experience, whether it is suffering or well being, can be shared. Within a moment two beings can share a feeling experience. This is a contentious idea in the face of subjective reality where reality perception is believed to be altered by the filters of an individual mind. How can an experience be shared with accuracy if every mind interprets its own reality?

The definition of empathy and its role in promoting well being is explored in the book “The Healing Relationship” <http://www.sacredhealingnow.com/HealingRelationship.html> . In that book empathy is defined as having the following characteristics: reception, reflection, mutuality, intent to promote well being and development. These five characteristics are part of the empathy experience and they are understood in different ways depending on the depth of the person’s empathy development. The features of advanced empathy along a proposed developmental sequence of phenomena are also described. This is something that is tied to healing practices both across cultures and time. Advanced levels of empathy are difficult to understand without personal experience, but basic empathy is a fairly common experience.

At the beginning levels empathy is often understood as a process of cognitive role playing. We hear the other person’s story and the emotional content of that story triggers within us memories and the associated feelings, then we “role play” through what we hear in the story by imagining what it might be like for us. The closer the match between the person’s story and our own story the more accurate the empathy is likely to be. But this explanation of empathy is limited because it relies on subjective interpretation, on using our imagination to match our story to theirs. It is more a definition of

sympathy than of empathy. It is still a very useful educational tool in teaching the early stages of empathy development but it fails to touch upon the direct shared experience aspect of accurate empathy – assuming that such an idea falls within your realm of philosophy.

Empathy as a shared experience has the unique feature of mutuality, meaning that BOTH participants know that a connection is occurring and that the experience is being shared by BOTH at that moment. This is a knowing that is attributed to empathy accuracy and it is stated as confirmation of more developed empathy than what is known through sympathy alone. As empathy develops further the details of the shared moment become more and more clear. At advanced levels of empathy each of its five characteristics increases in clarity. It is difficult to understand this shared experience without having personally encountered it, but it can be described and has been described across cultures and time in connection with skilled healers ("The Healing Relationship").

Can we sense the feelings of another and enter a shared experience? It is easy to say no and to eliminate the possibility of accurate empathy, particularly if you are a believer in a subjective reality. Yet the definition of empathy and its abundant usage in the helping professions suggests that there is something more to the phenomena than simply subjective interpretation. Empathy is an experience in the moment where one person is sitting within the experience of another and doing so with the intent to promote well being AND the other person has a sense that this is happening. This does not mean that this empathic moment is perfect, but rather conveys what needs to be conveyed to help decrease suffering. It is also not perfect because there is a difference between the available potential and the abilities of the people involved. But the possibility that empathy exists does not rest on a definition of perfection. Instead it rests on the idea that at any given moment it is possible for one person to accurately experience something directly that another person is experiencing in the moment. If our loved one is in pain is it possible we can feel that pain approximately as they do? Can this happen between couples in love? Can it happen between identical twins? Can it happen between a parent and their child? Remember we are not talking about perfection but rather a moment of shared expression that is aimed at reducing suffering. Is it possible that a brief moment of shared feelings and experiences can occur?

If your answer to this is no then it will be difficult to comprehend advanced levels of compassion, which is one of the goals of this handbook. Compassion and empathy are intricately linked. Compassion is listening to suffering and taking wise action to relieve it. The more accurately that we are in hearing that suffering the more likely we are to make a wise decision regarding what action to take. Using empathy to connect to the experience of another also helps us to see that one person's specific path from suffering toward well being. In that shared moment there is just one path. But if you do not believe that empathy exists then it is not likely you can believe in advanced levels of compassion.

Advanced empathy as a possibility means that developed compassion is also a possibility. When we say that advanced empathy is a possibility we are also saying that it is possible to have a shared experience that has accuracy and is not just a guess based on subjective interpretation. When we say that advanced empathy is possible we are saying that there is a way of communication between beings that is a direct exchange of information. Advanced empathy as a possibility, combined with

wisdom, means that there is a compassionate relationship that beings can share (the compassion space) within which there can be the direct experience of shifting from suffering into well being.

Reality as relationship

Compassion is referred to as a relational phenomenon. Not stated, but contained within compassion is the idea that certain aspects of knowing reality are understood through a relationship. This assumes that there is something to be known and also that there is someone that is doing the knowing. In addition it assumes that there is a process of knowing that connects the two within a relationship. There is an assumption here that we can experience this relational way of knowing which assumes that there is something inherent to us that allows us to do this. We are relational beings and we know reality through this relationship with reality.

So much of who we are and how we come to know is tied to how we form relationships. This is not limited to our relationships with loved ones and friends. This idea that we are relational beings extends to all living beings, to objects and to ideas. Empathy and compassion are expressions of relationship. There are many ways to stand in relationship to the world and the way that we stand in relationship shapes our experience at that moment. Take the following example:

A man gets yelled at while at work and is threatened with being fired. As he drives home his anger at the incident increases. When he enters his home the smallest things set off his anger and it spills out on his wife and children. The next day the children go to school and the smallest thing sets off their anger and they “bully” a classmate. The classmate goes home, tired of all the mistreatment, and commits suicide. The suicide affects the family and the community.

Here is a quick example of the relational ripple effect. It is stated here using negative experiences because our culture has grown so familiar with the media portrayal of such. But the relational ripple need not be portrayed as such. Compassion is a relational phenomenon that can cause positive ripples in the same way. Here is another story:

A woman comes for help after years struggling with depression. She has tried to commit suicide several times and describes her dark suffering as being so deep it is impossible for anyone to understand it. A helper comes and holds the compassion space for her and sits with her in that dark suffering. She knows this, states the mutuality of the shared experience, and also recognizes that there is a path toward well being. This is transformational for her. She develops a new way of relating to the world. She gets married and is no longer threatened by the shadows. She no longer sends out the ripples of suffering. She has a family with loving relationships. They grow and pass on the idea of loving relationships. In turn these relationships affect her. The ripples of compassion radiate out from her and her family.

The interconnectedness of things in our world is scientifically supported (quantum theory, systems theory), but what most people ask is “so what does that mean to me?”. When people experience the

compassion space the most frequent comment I hear is that it changes how they view the idea of relationship (this is discussed in “The Healing Relationship”). The most common form this takes is in how we relate to other people. When we start to practice compassion as a way of life it changes how we act toward others and how they act toward us in return. Then, with practice, it can change how we think about others and then how we feel. Gradually compassion can move from doing and thinking to a way of being. It can shape how we come to know reality as we discover that all that we know is constructed out of relationships. Everything that exists does so within a relationship. Reality is relationship.

Consider the experience of color, like a bright orange - it happens because of relationships between the object and light. It is orange because of light and its relationship to the orange. There is a relationship that creates the color. Color exists because of a relationship. The color orange is a relationship. It exists as a relationship in that moment.

Compassion is about being “in the moment” and letting yourself experience your relationship to that moment. Because compassion is based on the premise that it is possible to develop an open relationship where there is a shared experience, it also speaks to the perception of reality. Compassion is based on the idea that we can experience the reality of the moment with openness, as a shared accurate experience. We can sit and share suffering and help someone also to experience well being. Both the suffering and the well being are present in the moment waiting for both people to experience them together. We come to know the reality of the moment as we share and we pass this on through direct relational experience. Within the reality of the moment is the possibility of compassion, and it comes into our awareness when we focus our intent properly. This is a way of knowing that is more easily understood through the practice of compassion with people, but it can be applied to knowing the nature of reality in any moment. The reality that exists does so a relationship to the moment waiting for us to experience it.

Can we adopt this relational way of seeing the world? There is no between choice. We either see things as relational or we don't. This is a simple choice and when we become aware we can see ourselves facing it every day. It is a choice of action, a choice of thought and a choice of feeling. Ultimately it is a choice of being and becoming. Every day there are moments that present the possibility for seeing how we sit in relationship to the moment. Are we ready to capitalize on those moments? Given that reality is about relationships, then our perception of reality can be improved through relationships, through compassion. Our perception of reality is linked to our development of compassion because developing compassion is about developing relational awareness.

Developed compassion is tied to genetics and proclivity

The idea that nurturing and caring for members of our clan has been important to our survival is built upon the premise that such compassionate attributes were preserved in our genetic code. They were preserved because those groups of people (our ancient ancestors) who practiced compassionate

actions were more likely to survive than those who did not. Thus the genetic lineage was passed on to you and me. But you may not believe in this.

The data supporting the science of genetic traits being passed on from one generation to another is extensive and far exceeds the scope of this writing. Common sense experiences can be of some assistance. As the offspring of your mother and father don't you have some feature similar to one (or both) of them? Pedigreed animals like show dogs and thoroughbred horses are specifically "bred" for unique traits. This is using genetics to get specific results. The same is done with flowers and edible plants. Is it not possible that genetics plays a role in the traits we see within the human population? Can it be that genetics plays some role in the degree of compassion one person can attain?

There is research out of UC Berkeley on this pivotal idea that compassion is instinctual. [Dacher Keltner](#) published results in a book entitled [The Compassionate Instinct: The Science of Human Goodness](#). There is quite a bit of information to support this idea. This is not to say that everyone has the same potential for developing compassion to advanced level, or that everyone would develop compassion in the same way.

The level of compassion that someone can attain can be called their proclivity. This is distinguished from the term predestination. A man who is born with the genes that result in being very tall has the proclivity to become skilled at basketball, but he is not predestined to do so. There are some people who may be born with the proclivity to develop compassion to the highest degree. These people can be called heroes of compassion.

There are heroes of compassion

It seems that we can readily accept the idea that there are "evil" people with very little compassion. But the converse seems more difficult to accept. It seems that it is difficult to accept the idea that there might be people in society with highly developed compassion. Why this is difficult to accept, and even more difficult to think of actually meeting such a person, poses some interesting questions. What would that look like if we encountered such a person? How would we feel during such a meeting? Then, think about your answers to these questions and what that says about your own views on life and relationships. Personally, I have encountered a misunderstanding about radiant compassion from many people, even professionals in the helping community. This is not uncommon in the lives of the heroes of compassion.

If one agrees that there have been heroes of compassion, and that there may still be such heroes walking among us, then it seems sensible to ask "How is that possible?" This could be followed by, "Is that possible for me?" In this compassion handbook the idea that one can develop compassion is a fundamental premise. The heroes of compassion are role models. They show us possibilities. They also show us that developed compassion is a witnessed phenomenon with observable consequences. It is not just something we do in meditation. It is something we can become and radiate as a way of being. When we do this it then can act like a stone thrown into a pond, and the ripple always have effects.

The process of becoming a hero of compassion likely contains several elements: natural proclivity, support, opportunity, resilience, persistence and calling. The opportunity to practice and learn about compassion is part of developing it, as is being called (this is discussed in both “The Healing Relationship and “The Mystic Relationship”). But not everyone lives the philosophy of compassion and there can be great obstacles. In facing these obstacles one needs both resilience and persistence. The myths of compassion (see the introduction to the handbook) are often thrown out at people who seek to live a philosophy of compassion. Just because a voice is loud, or is in a position of authority, or is proclaimed by the media, doesn’t make it the right way to act. Overcoming obstacles that are within the fabric of our society is a part of living a philosophy of compassion. Finally, there is the quality of centeredness that is maintained in order to stay healthy with an inner quiet. These are qualities that compassion heroes show us in their role as models for what we can become. They show us the links between compassion, a reduction in suffering and happiness. There were either true and wise role models for this way of life or they were totally wrong, and maybe even “crazy”.

Compassion and wisdom

One half of compassion is empathy, the ability to feel the suffering of another. The other half of compassion is wisdom – the wisdom to act in such a way so that suffering is reduced. Wisdom is more than knowledge. One can also know something, see suffering and do nothing. One can easily know something and act according to OUR knowledge thinking that it will reduce suffering because it is something we have tried before. We just do it, without reflection. Wisdom is the ability to combine knowledge with reasoning, reflection, an assessment of the situation (including yourself, the other and the resources available), and insight (from all sources) and then apply them to the moment in a unique manner with the intent of promoting well being. Compassion without wisdom is merely pity, sympathy, or sometimes empathy with no place to go. The absence of wisdom can lead to care giver burn out. Compassion has, as its natural outcome, a reduction in suffering.

A reduction in suffering leads to well being and happiness

Although the idea that reduction in suffering leads to well being and happiness might seem like common sense it is a statement that needs careful thought. Do all our actions lead to a reduction in suffering, either personally or when we interact with others? Should we always avoid suffering in order to find happiness? Is the idea of a “good life” simply tied to the reduction of suffering? These are all somewhat weighty philosophical questions but they are all linked to the simple question, “How can I live a good life?”

Defining what is a good life can begin with can be called “**Extended Happiness**”. This is a happiness that is bound not only to our concept of self but to our awareness of the relationships intertwined with our existence. A simple example:

You have had a fantastic day - solved new problems, helped people toward well being, received support from others, praise from your superiors, and that nagging pain in your

back seems to have faded. At the end of the day you head home in a state of bliss and happiness you haven't felt in some time. As you approach your home you see an ambulance. Your heart sinks in your chest. Rushing from the car you see them carrying someone from your home. It is your soul mate, your partner, your love.

What has happened to your state of bliss? Is it not tied to the relationship you have with your soul mate? Extended Happiness means that the bliss we attain is ultimately affected by the relationships around us. The more suffering that is around us the harder it is to maintain Extended Happiness. Working on decreasing the suffering within us and around us leads to an increase in Extended Happiness that becomes part of our inner experience. It is the "good life".

It should be clear that pain and suffering are not the same thing. Sometimes we need to experience pain in order to reduce suffering. If I have an infected tooth then I need to go through the pain of getting it removed so that eventually my suffering will be reduced. Sometimes we need to challenge ourselves in ways which seem to cause pain so that we may develop and become stronger in compassion. As we become stronger in compassion we are then able to sit with suffering in a deeper way, a way that has more possibility for promoting well being. We can also learn from sitting in suffering ONLY when we are strong enough to sit while being centered. Pain is sometimes a tool to help us with being centered while sitting in suffering. The pain that is mixed in with the suffering is the messenger and it can be listened to. But it is not the same as suffering. It is possible to have pain and not be suffering. This is what can be found in the compassion space.

It is probably unrealistic, while we are in physical form, to think that we can have a life where there is no pain. Injuries and illness and eventually death are facts. It is also a fact that they will occur to the loved ones intertwined with us. Pain is a part of life, but this does not mean that suffering needs to be. The compassion space is a place where pain can exist while suffering is reduced. This leads to a greater sense of well being. If you have less suffering and a greater sense of well being then you simply feel better – generally about everything. It may be a small, barely noticeable, change in how you feel about life but when suffering is reduced and well being increased that life change is there. Now imagine that this process of change continues, either as an accumulation of small events or as a mixture of small and larger transformative ones. Imagine that bliss can be more of a regular part of life, even when pain is present. Imagine also that this is happening not just for you but for all those you love. Isn't this a definition of "the good life"?

Direct experience of the compassion space can be transformative

The idea of "passing it on" is, at its basic level, linked to the idea that the compassion space is a relational phenomenon with healing and transformative characteristics. These characteristics are described in the book "The Healing Relationship" (see the link given below).

<http://www.sacredhealingnow.com/HealingRelationship.html>

The idea that the compassion space can be transformative is an important part of the significance in the process of “passing it on”. This is not merely a lecture, or quotes from some doctrine, or the practice of some ritual. This is the direct experience of shifting from suffering into well being and that shift can, and often is, transformative. It is an experience that shows directly the nature of Extended Happiness.

When speaking of transformative phenomena it is difficult to do so without moving into the realm of the mystical and out of the tangible world of science. Three of the books on advanced compassion relationships (“The Healing Relationship”, “The Mystic Relationship” and “The Ultimate Relationship”) all attempt to describe characteristics of this transformative experience. In addition there is a book of parables and poetry <http://compassionspace.com/Journey.html>. These each provide different views, different ways of describing, in an attempt to communicate to a broad audience.

Compassion and Being

Compassion speaks to the idea of a relationship between beings that helps to define each person’s understanding of what it means to be in relationship. Whether we have experienced compassion or its absence we reflect on those experiences as part of how we define relationship. This is the mental picture we form that is our relationship stance – how we stand in relationship. It starts from the nature of compassion, then moves to our understanding of relationships with others, and finally to our relationship with the idea of self and the world. Compassion is about open awareness to the nature of these relationships and how to “stand in them” in a way that promotes well being.

Our being is never out of relationship. We are in relationships from birth to death, and perhaps beyond. The idea that we are alone is an illusion, much like a hallucination. We are connected to people and events that affect us every day, even if it seems like we are physically alone. Every day, although we may not realize it, our actions are connected to others. Our being, our existence, is a relationship. Our essence exists in a state of **being there in the relationship** at every moment, even if we don’t realize this.

The nature of our existence is about relationship and the “window” we use to view how and where we stand. We can stand in one spot, look through one window, and see certain aspects of this relationship. Then move, look out a new window, and see a different aspect of relationship. One of the reasons why compassion is defined by people in so many different ways is because of the variations in relationship stance, in the window viewing. It is not because there are changes in the essential nature of compassion that is waiting for us to experience it. The basic essence of compassion remains constant but our awareness changes. This is similar for the nature of being. We have an essence that is our being, it exists in relationship at every moment, and we can come to know more about this through compassion.

This essence of our being is that which is here within the relationship inside the moment. How we see, experience, know, what is here in relationship depends upon our compassion in the moment.

Then as we translate the phenomenon of being here in the relationship moment we use our language, and explanatory systems, to describe the experience (or knowing). These explanatory systems have boundaries defined by person, time, and culture. Often ritual is an explanatory system seeking to describe being here within relationship in a way that can be understood for a given culture at a given time. The use of an explanatory system is something we all do (and as I write this I am doing it). But an explanatory system is not the same as the phenomena of being here in the relationship moment.

The essence of human existence is the phenomena of being here in the relationship and here the term **relational beingness** will be used to describe that essence. Coming to a deeper understanding of this relational beingness can occur through the practice and expanded development of compassion. Compassion is simply the practice of being here in the relationship, of knowing relational beingness, and thus it is a path to a greater understanding of existence. Every moment occurs within a relationship and so every moment presents the opportunity for compassion. Every moment presents the opportunity for us to discover more about the essence of our being, of our existence.

Since the essence of existence is described as relational beingness then the nagging questions of mind, body, soul, mental (ideas, representations), and brain are all also parts of being here in relationship. My earliest writings on the website offer a model of what it meant to help someone (see the "Support Relationship" at www.sacredhealingnow.com). One piece of that model was the support relationship which was formed around three basic ideas people had when they provided support as a part of helping— a model of mind, a model of change, and a model of relationship. The model of mind that I offered back then contained an emphasis in neuroanatomy, but there is also a major theme of feedback loops. These loops were information connections that occurred at many different levels providing information flow in both directions (also called feed-forward and feed-backward). Here I simply call these relationships. There are relationships at all levels of the “mind”, soul, body description. But rather than thinking of these as parts that interact the model offered now looks at these as existing as relationships that are ultimately all connected. It is a monist view with everything linked together through relationships and that it is the understanding of the relational space that is important.

The idea of a soul that can exist separate from the body is something I have personally experienced. But it is my opinion that such contemplations distract us from the present moment which is where being here in relationship is discovered. It is also the aspect of awareness that most people need to cultivate. We are all one within that moment and it is that to which our focus should be directed. Compassion helps us to see that we are all one within the moment and this is particularly clear with radiant compassion. The relationship between you and me is not an “us – them”, but a “we”. It is the same with the mind, body, soul portrait. It is all we. It all exists here in the relationship moment. It is all relational beingness. If you seek to break apart the components (a way of viewing) and to define each one then you also will be stepping outside the oneness of the moment. The nature of our being is that it is one whole existing as being here in the relationship. Subtract all the relationships and you no longer have existence. Break apart the components and view the pieces and you are viewing not the moment of relationship but rather a categorization of it, an explanatory system. We are beings whose essence exists here within the moment of relationship.

Is there something that holds these relationships together? Is there an intelligent design behind these relationships? These questions are better answered under a discussion about compassion and the nature of reality.

Compassion and the Nature of Reality

It is common sense that there is a real world out there and it is hard to argue that there is not. Furthermore, of what practical use is such an argument? We interact with the world under the assumption that it is real and it has tangible components. It is also common sense that we have thoughts, ideas, and intuitions, and that sometimes these are created in our own minds. We rely on the assumption that we can think much in the same way that we rely on the assumption that there is a real world out there. But is that the end of it? Is reality just what is out there and then interpreted through the perceptions of it within my mind? If you have read this far then you know that what is proposed here is that reality exists as relationships and our understanding of compassion is about how we come to understand our relationship stance and our relational beingness.

Our being, or another's being, is a part of both the reality "out there" and of thinking "in here". There is a relationship between our history of experiences with the world and how we define the nature of reality, including our own being. If you pick up and bite into an apple you have a relationship with that experience and it is that apple biting moment of being here in the relationship which defines reality. Thought also occur here in the relationship, obviously in connection to sense experiences but also in relation to a stream of consciousness where abstract thought, and creativity, might occur. The thought is not found in isolation but in the moment of being here in the relationship. Reality is about the connectedness of relationships that exist in the moment. It is both "out there" and "in here" simultaneously. But there is also a reality that exists that has yet to become a part of "in there", that exists only as possibility.

Because reality is a relationship it is also tied to our window of viewing. Can we agree that there are things that exist that we have not come to know yet? are there things that are just possibility? For example are the undiscovered things under the ocean or in outer space? It seems reasonable to say that there are undiscovered things "out there". There were discoveries reportedly made before I was born and they are reportedly continually being made. It seems likely that they will be made after I am dead. But the argument can then extend to anything that has not yet become part of my experience. Reality cannot consist only of our experiences, if you accept the commonsense notion of a tangible world with a temporal component. Along the same line, are there other people who have thoughts? It seems as if there are and reportedly they were thinking before I was born. Do I have to "know" all of the peoples thoughts in order to make them "real"? So reality cannot consist only of my own thoughts. The window of viewing (or one's way of knowing) used to define reality may cause us to "believe" that something exists because it part of our experience, or doesn't exist because we have no way to connect to our experiences – no way to relate, but the relationship between our knowing reality and the nature of reality's existence is not a static process and it is not limited by our knowing. There are always aspects

of reality that exist beyond what we can know because our knowing is never perfect. Reality waits in possibility at any given moment for us to view it from within our relationship stance. As with our essence, reality is relational beingness waiting for us to know it.

The first observation of the external world is that it is made of matter and energy. But a more probing investigation discovers that atoms are more like the solar system, with the sun being the nucleus and the Earth being the electron. In between there is lots of space. Space is defined more by the objects within that space than by the space itself. Einstein showed that there is actually a relationship between gravity and the space-time continuum. We may think of space and time as linear, but it is actually curved around objects of large mass. Again another example of relationship. Space and time are defined by relationships in the universe.

Change is always happening both "out there" and "in here". Change is part of how we sense time and space. We sense time and space by either our movement or by the movement of some object in reference to us. The hands of the clock, the passing of the day, the changing of the seasons, and getting older are all sensations of time. When we move from one place to another we get a sense of the space involved. Our senses of time and space are relative, meaning that they can change according to the moment. Have you ever been in a serious accident? Have you noticed how time seems to be suspended and how the visualization of space became crystal sharp? In contrary, have you had to wait in some office for an hour watching every minute creep by. Although change in our relative position to things is how we sense time and space it is again a relative view.

All things change. This is consistent with the laws of nature and with our own observations. Our notions of time and space are framed within a notion of change as is our relational beingness. That which is matter and energy form but a small part of the universe as we know it. Much of the universe is space, as is much of matter, and there is still much we do not know. How was it created? By the adherence to natural law and Divine process - hand in hand.

My personal experiences involve shifts in perception that are often associated with the teaching of the mystics. This includes experiences with the Divine. For me this is part of reality. So is the idea on natural law. I see the two meeting in the moment of being here in the relationship. It is a relationship between the "immaterial" and the "material", but I am not comfortable with such a distinction. The concept of Oneness as a feature related to the moment of being here in relationship is more fitting to my philosophy. The relationship with the Divine is omnipresent, always a possibility. In the book the "Mystic Relationship" <http://www.sacredhealingnow.com/MysticRelationship.html> the nature of this sacred relationship is described in more detail. Links between compassion and Oneness are found at <http://www.sacredhealingnow.com/HealingRelationship.html> where there is a focus on a level of Oneness in empathy and its relationship to healing. Given that reality is relationship, how do we gain access to knowing this? This is a question that has been pondered upon for thousands of years before me and it is likely to continue as a one of the great questions.

Compassion and Knowing

How is it that we come to know anything about being and about reality? When someone says, “I know it is going to rain”, exactly what does that mean? If someone says, “I know what I want to be when I grow up”, what are they saying? If you hear the question, “Who was the first president of the United States”, and say “I know the answer”, what is happening? All of these are commonsense uses of the word “know” or the process of knowing, and most people don’t spend too much time thinking about the seemingly automatic process of knowing. Four types of knowing; conscious, tacit, instinctual and spiritual are discussed and then tied to the ideas presented here about being and reality.

Knowing is a conscious recognition of a relationship between what is known (comes into consciousness) and the object or thought that is the focus of the knowing. The statement of knowing it is going to rain is a relationship between the object of rain and its relationship to conscious focus. Saying I know what I want to be when I grow up is a relationship between the goal and my bringing it into conscious focus. The same is true for knowing the president, or knowing in general. This can be called conscious knowing.

There are likely processes (biological and cultural rules) of sense, information, and pattern recognition that happen below what is generally conscious. An example of this is subliminal suggestion where messages are flashed very quickly and not consciously recognized, but when asked related questions the observers demonstrate that they know about the flashes. When people are hypnotized in an effort to help recall an event they sometimes will recall details that were not recognized consciously. We can also be driving along the road for some distance, look up, and not clearly remember how we got there. Yet it is clear that we did know, at some level. All of this knowing (and there are many other examples) can be called tacit knowing, knowing that is linked to the way our brain is structured to know (the rules it follows) even if we are not conscious of it.

Instinctual knowing is tied to our survival and our genetic heritage. These are the relationships between our autonomic nervous system and various drives to survive. These are discussed in more detail in the Model of Change (<http://www.sacredhealingnow.com/Support.html>). In common use instinctual knowing will often include that gut level feeling about something. But it may be that such a feeling is a combination of two or more of the four types of knowing. This idea of a “gut feeling” can also be tied to believing that we know something. To say I believe in God is different than saying I know the sun will rise. I don’t have to believe that the sun will rise. Spiritual knowing is tied to our soul and our awareness of the Divine which is a unique way of knowing tied to belief, and when developed, linked to all forms of knowing. This is discussed in the book “The Mystic Relationship”.

These four ways of knowing are not distinct and separate from each other. They overlap in that each can affect the other and thus knowing can be the result of various combinations of the four. The division into the four categories is an explanatory system where the whole of knowing as a relationship is explained as a set of interwoven relationships. Simply stated knowing is the relationship between the thing/thought, and our awareness of it. This relationship happens on many levels of awareness, some more conscious than others. It is an awareness of that thing/thought in relationship to other things and

thoughts as well as in relationship to the agents of awareness in any given moment. This relationship of knowing happens in the moment, even if we are thinking about the past or the future we are still doing it in the now. All knowing happens in the here and now. Thus knowing is a relationship between awareness and things/thoughts in the here and now. This definition is its link to compassion.

Compassion, and its development, is about our relationship with another person(s) and our awareness of that relationship in the here and now. Compassion is being here in relationship connected to our awareness. As one expands their compassion they also can expand their understanding of how they personally know anything because the practice of compassion is the practice of our awareness of knowing in the here and now.

Knowledge and Wisdom

Knowing can lead to an accumulation of knowledge and hopefully to wisdom. The path is from not knowing, to knowing, to doing and then to being. It is a path from ignorance to expertise. This idea in connection to empathy is presented in the paper “The Theory of Compassion Development” where it is proposed that compassion, like other knowledge domains, contains a developmental progression (link http://compassionspace.com/Papers_on_Basic_Compassion.html). The basic idea that domains of knowledge follow developmental sequences is applied to learning reading, music, sports, as well as compassion – although the actual descriptions of the sequences and the methods for teaching them may differ, even within a given domain.

There is a relationship between human development and knowledge development, as well as the development of wisdom. There are many different theories of human development, and a full discussion of them is beyond the scope here. The theories often describe stages that are completed in a chronological sequence. In addition failure to complete a stage can result in some problem in human functioning. One example is the development of language, which is theorized to have a critical period between the ages of 2 and 4. Missing this critical period may make it very difficult to acquire language skills at the same rate as the person’s peers. There are a wide range of labels given to a diversity of stages across different domains, but the basis of stage theory is that a person needs to complete a certain stage, usually at a certain age, in order to acquire knowledge in a given domain at the same rate as her/her peers.

In the above mentioned paper on the theory of compassion development, stages are proposed for empathy and wisdom development combining to form the domain of compassion. But there is a wrinkle in the strict application of stage theory to the domain of compassion, with compassion it is possible to have an experience that fits into the advanced stages without having developed proficiency in the preceding stages. I often write about compassion as defined by your experience with compassion phenomena, and this can happen in relation to your development but can also transcend your development. Gaining knowledge in a domain, as with compassion, is often a gradual process but it can be punctuated with the occasional transcendent experience and/or that leap of creative insight.

Having knowledge, or knowing something, is not the same as doing what we know. Sometimes we fall into habitual patterns of thought or action that create a resistance to doing or thinking according to what we know. In "The Habitual Relationship" (<http://www.sacredhealingnow.com/Habitual.html>) there is an introduction describing these patterns. It is a commonsense idea. We know that smoking is not good for us yet we smoke out of habit. We know that we don't want to act like our parents, yet sometimes we do it out of habit. It is not impossible to break through our habitual patterns. It is just that they provide resistance to us experiencing the compassion space. It seems, especially with so much information on the technology highways. The constant clicking of finger texting, cell phones on ears, and the speed at which information becomes available may actually be changing how we enter and view the moment. We may be moving toward more knowledge than there is wisdom.

Wisdom is the ability to combine knowledge with reasoning, reflection, an assessment of the situation (including yourself, the other and the resources available), and insight (from all sources) and then apply them to the moment in a unique manner with the intent of promoting well being. Wisdom is more than knowledge and often occurs with greater frequency when we are in a state of oneness with whatever domain we have decided to pursue. It often takes years of time in a given domain to acquire wisdom, but here also there are moments punctuated by transcendent experiences which often contain gems of wisdom. Wisdom is contained within the definition of compassion, and thus practicing compassion is the act of practicing wisdom.

There is also a special instance of knowledge, and that is the knowledge of emptiness or the void. It is the knowledge of unknowing, of sitting in quiet with knowing only unknowing. This is often found through the way of the mystic (<http://www.sacredhealingnow.com/MysticRelationship.html>). When one is seeking a deeper understanding of being here in relationship, sitting with unknowing can help provide some enlightenment. It is also something that is intertwined with deeper levels of the compassion experience. Finding peace with not knowing.

Justice, Compassion and "The Good Society"

The concept of justice is one of those ideas which easily take on personal meanings. Justice for whom? Under what circumstances? Can we separate the idea of justice from our personal views of a certain set of circumstances? This is a contentious point because if the view of justice is only in the mind of the beholder then everyone's views regarding their actions must be correct. That conclusion seems obviously absurd. Michael J. Sandel in his book "Justice: What is the Right Thing to Do" states that justice revolves around three ideas: "maximizing welfare, respecting freedom, and promoting virtue" (p. 6). Living a compassionate life is directly in line with these three ideas.

Justice is wisdom applied to directing actions on behalf of developing the "good society". More simply, it is tied to a decision made to benefit the good of society. In our democracy we have decided that there are constitutional rights, like the right to free speech. Justice has the role of protecting those rights to benefit the good of society. It is noteworthy to extend this definition to a non-democratic society with different ideas about what actions benefit the good of society (almost any dictatorship will

serve as an example, and they are often in the news). Both democratic and non-democratic will stand proudly behind their concepts of justice and what is being done for the good of society. Again, we return to the problem of point-of-view. Does justice have to rely on point of view?

The obvious question then is what makes the human rights policy in America more just (more characteristic of justice) than that of a dictatorship regime. An example would be the conflict (and genocide) in Darfur, Sudan and the government policies of “justice” behind them. There lies behind the difference actions that are taken which do harm to others “in the name of justice”. The Nazi regime had a similar idea of justice. The “good society” for them segregated, Arian. In Sudan the “good society” is also segregated, and thus the rationale for genocide. The American democracy is founded on equal rights for all. Whether we put that into action to benefit the good of society is a matter of justice. Justice is tied to how we define what is a “good society” and then what actions we are taking to move in that direction.

Justice also includes wisdom. This is why an educated society is so important. It is very easy for a society to become corrupt if it has no wisdom to know the difference. Justice cannot occur within a quagmire of ignorance, although some may protest loudly. Deciding what is a just action without wisdom is relying on personal opinion alone. That is the behavior of fools and madmen.

Justice also includes some notion of “free will” as contained within the idea of “directing action”. Since justice is about directing actions toward the goal of a good society then one must have the freedom to do so. If you are gagged and chained in a jail and no one knows your name, then how are you to do anything one could associate with justice? This is not an argument about fatalism, or about determinism, but rather about the simple idea of opportunity. Within the concept of justice is the idea that there is the opportunity that justice can occur. There is the opportunity for not only the judges of the land, but also for the average people who reside there. Justice is not withheld only for the elite. It is available for all who would seek to embrace it. The arguments of both determinism and fatalism fly in the face of justice. Are there people with restricted opportunity? No one could deny that. But there are few with no opportunity.

Perhaps one of the questions about compassion that I am asked most often relates to resolving the sometimes apparent conflict between justice and compassion. Simply, what is the compassionate response when bad things, at the hands of others, happen to good people? This is a question that arises so often, and applies to so many different scenarios, that it deserves a separate section in this compassion handbook.

In the same sense as the above, there are situations in society where we put into place systems that are aimed at reducing suffering, which is a part of compassion. Two such systems are 1) those focused on behaviors and 2) those focused on sickness. Systems focused on behaviors often tend to manage the behavior (like prisons) as opposed to retraining and rehabilitation. Are “faith based initiatives” a step toward more compassionate systems? The entire question of defining a “good society” that has compassion based systems is also worthy of a separate section within this handbook. It is also something that is being examined by others.

The next chapter in this handbook will take the data from our survey on compassion, combine it with the ideas from the basic papers on compassion, and present a new view on how we as a society define compassion. Such clarity of definition is needed if we are to do any meaningful research on the topic of compassion.

Please note that more will be added to this document in the future. It is also important to note that support for, and expansion of, many of the ideas presented above can be found in other writings (which are either named in this document or given as an internet link).