

## **A Brief Discussion on the Nature of Compassion**

Compiled from two emails by Laurence R Cohen-Silvia Rayces, August 2011

Compassion comes in dimensions. We always can recognize a moment where compassion opens us to its existence. The question of dimension determines where we take that intuitive and inherent impulse. In our first breath, and perhaps before, we breathe in the essence of compassion—on the needing side. In true Rogerian fashion, we enter with a desperate need not only for physical care but for unconditional positive regard: loving care. In that sense, we can see that compassion and unconditional positive regard exist intertwined. If I feel compassion, I do so unconditionally because of my regard for the other as a Thou. When we feel that same regard as babies, that necessary compassion for survival, we can begin to explore our own ability to express that compassion toward others. If we don't learn it from our caretakers, we may need to relearn when we become aware enough to do so, but the natural impulse remains

We see another being displaying signs of suffering. We see it in its single dimension, like a line. At that point, we can dismiss it in one way or another as not worth our real attention, or it can move us enough to enter further, into another dimension, like length and breadth. This dimension begins to bring some meaning of the suffering to us, and we feel to some degree moved by its two dimensionality. Instead of simply a display we see, we begin to feel the nature of the suffering. If we allow ourselves more openness and recognize our living connection to this now more tangible suffering, we can experience the three dimensionality of the suffering we observe; it has length, breadth, and depth.

In the material world, we can go no farther into any object. Compassion can lead us into at least one more dimension, a fourth dimension of the emotional and psychological quality of the suffering we observe. We no longer observe; we participate. There may even exist another dimension which I feel uncomfortable giving a number. It would come in the spiritual nature of the suffering we have observed, felt, and now participate in. This takes us into the realm of awareness that defies language. In the spiritual connection we can feel as if this experience of suffering has happened to us in some very real way although we can never actually experience what the other experiences. Our separation from each other forbids that level of intimacy, but we do achieve a kind of intimacy when we enter into the spiritual dimension of compassion. We know the dimensionality we observed as we know something we feel as an integral part of ourselves.

Each of these dimensions of compassion can call for our action. No compassionate intuition or impulse finds fruition without action, an action that serves the need of the sufferer rather than our idea about the need of the sufferer.

Compassion may also call on us to feel and show joy for another's joy however we might feel about that which causes the joy. Our compassion need not limit itself to suffering. It can extend itself to encompass all emotional states of others and ourselves.

Compassion also provides us another opportunity. When I feel compassion fully, I enter into the experience of another. In doing so, I enter into a world different from my own which I could

never understand or experience on my own. Our compassion works as the best kind of artistic expression which involves us in and exposes us to another vision and experience of the universe.

Our openness to compassion from others forms part of the overall experience of compassion. We forget that from time to time, especially when we feel defensive in our sorrow or suffering and respond thusly to compassion: "I don't need your pity."

As we move toward individuation generally, we become more and more capable of compassion and acting on it.