

## Developing Compassion – The Second Step of Possibility Awareness

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The first step in the process of developing compassion is to fully accept that it is possible to do so. This acceptance of compassion possibility is linked to our understanding of compassion which, hopefully, is constantly expanding. Since our understanding of compassion is potentially always expanding then our definition of compassion possibility can also change throughout life. The second step of personal compassion development is becoming more aware of compassion possibility.

Once you say to yourself, “Yes I think it is possible to develop more compassion”, then what thoughts follow? How do you paint the picture in your own mind of what it means to be looking for the possibility of compassion development? What are you doing when you are looking for this possibility? The answers to these questions are personal to you and your journey on the path of compassion development. The answers also require some awareness development. If you accept the possibility that compassion can be developed then the next step is to become aware of your own looking for that possibility. Let us call this **possibility awareness** – being attentive to the awareness of looking for the possibility of compassion each moment of our lives.

At each moment in life there is the possibility that compassion can occur – for ourselves and for others. At each moment there is the possibility that we can either demonstrate compassion or receive compassion. The first step in developing compassion was to accept the possibility that this could happen. The second step is simply to look for that possibility, to become aware of its existence in your life at each moment. Possibility awareness means having an acute awareness of the nature of compassion possibility at any moment in your life. At each moment in life we stand in relationship to that moment with our view of the possibilities existing within that moment.

Whenever you look at something you do so from a place, or from a viewpoint. When you look out the window you are looking at things from the viewpoint of that window. You could walk outside and then have a different viewpoint. You could be in an airplane above your window and that would again be a different viewpoint. You could sit inside, away from the window, and talk to friends about what they see is outside the window. That would be another viewpoint. When we have *possibility awareness* for developing compassion it is the same. We start with a viewpoint.

The viewpoint for the possibility of compassion development is composed of the intertwining of our definition of compassion and the process of defining possibility. If you believe that it is possible to develop compassion, then you must have a definition of compassion, some place to start from. When you think of the word “compassion” you also have some other thoughts and ideas that are associated

with the term. This helps you to define compassion. This is your starting place and one part of your possibility awareness viewpoint. The second part of the viewpoint is that you have some idea of what “possibility” means. When you say to yourself that you believe it is possible to develop compassion this means that you have some concept of what “more compassion” might be. In addition, you have some concept of the things you might do to move toward “more compassion”. This is the process of defining compassion possibility. You may not have it clearly formulated, but with a little attention you may see that the foundations for your possibility awareness are there and you can build upon them. This foundation is built through understanding our own definitions of compassion and our awareness of compassion possibility, as well as how they intertwine with each other.

When you imagine “more compassion” for yourself this is linked both to how you define compassion and to how you define possibility. Also these two, compassion definition and possibility awareness, are linked together. Your definition of compassion is the starting point for your possibility and, as you expand possibility, it changes your definition. In addition, these two are not static, but rather change as you develop your understanding of compassion. What happens is that as you develop compassion you get a new viewpoint, and then with this new view, both your definition and possibility look different than they did earlier. If you can be attentive to how these things combine at any given moment to shape compassion possibility at that moment, then you have a basic understanding of possibility awareness.

An important part of possibility awareness is your understanding that compassion development is not a static process. It is not static over a life time and often not within a given relational moment. If you can become aware of how our compassion exists in the moment, and how the possibility of “more compassion” also exists, then you are taking the first steps of possibility awareness. It is easy to miss - not pay attention to - how fluid our compassion possibility awareness is from moment to moment. But it is simply by looking for this, with sensitivity, that you begin the second step in personal compassion development.

Compassion is a relational phenomenon, it occurs in the context of a relationship within the moment. Relationship dynamics are never static and always contain the possibility of compassion, but can also contain the absence of possibility awareness. Looking for the flow of relationship dynamics that lead to compassion possibility at every moment is the pure nature of compassion possibility awareness. It is maintaining an awareness that is ever-mindful of the changing, fluid, nature of compassion possibility within a relationship event.

Any relationship event offers the opportunity to explore how you stand in relationship, what is your viewpoint, when looking for the possibility of compassion. While standing in ANY relationship you can look at how you are standing there, your relationship stance, and the impact that has your awareness of compassion possibility. This is part of the definition of possibility awareness. Simultaneously, you can look at how another accepts (or refuses) the possibility of compassion – be fully aware of their compassion readiness. This is also part of the definition of possibility awareness. The possibility of “more compassion” is present in every relational moment but possibility awareness is not always

present. Not believing that the possibility is always present can easily shut down our looking for it. But just as easily possibility awareness can disappear when the ego becomes attached to the process.

The term ego here is used in the common vernacular. Ego is to mean things like “bruised ego” and “inflated ego”. The idea of someone developing “more compassion” can lead to thoughts of either a bruised ego or an inflated ego. Once the idea of someone having “more compassion” is introduced then this is almost automatically followed by the idea that if someone has more then maybe I have “less compassion”. Accepting that you might have “less compassion” when compared to another could lead to feelings of a “bruised ego”, or low self worth. Conversely, if you are a person who is known as having “more compassion” people may think that you have an “inflated ego”. People may think that you have a “God Complex” with grandiose ideations because of your expressions about compassion. People may even think that you are dangerous because you can sense and feel things deeply and that you illuminate the path away from suffering but that in doing so you harm people. But these ideas of bruised ego, inflated ego, and danger to do harm do not come from clear possibility awareness. Rather they come from a clouded illusion painted on to the possibility of compassion development. Possibility awareness can contain a wide view, a narrow view, or relatively no view of the potential for compassion within that moment.

Each moment in life presents to us a range of possibilities, which when brought into awareness, can blow away the clouds of illusion or darken the storm. Each moment holds for us the possibility of seeing our sacred purpose in life or getting lost in confusion. In each moment there is the possibility for compassion creation in connection to that sacred purpose. In the moment is the possibility of making a difference. There is also the possibility of discovering our own increased possibility awareness. Finally there is the possibility that we can become aware of how all of these combine to help us along on our personal journey of compassion development.

Compassion development is a process of increasing both empathy and wisdom. The depth and interwoven effects of possibility awareness expand with increasing empathy and wisdom. This is a beautiful partnership that becomes more alive with each compassionate breath. It is a life-long fluid process with no perfection and strengthened by the humbleness of shared humanity.

Perhaps in our shared humanity we can see we have each walked along the same path. Perhaps we could also share that we each discover the possibility of compassion development from our own viewpoint. Perhaps we could share that we each look from our own viewpoint, into the relational moment where the possibility of compassion development exists, to discover what we can understand about ourselves in connection to that possibility. Perhaps we could realize that are many of us trying to understand the possibility of compassion development and the hopes for a more compassionate world. We all struggle with possibility awareness as we gaze into these hopes. We face times when compassion is difficult and times when it is easier. This speaks to where we are in our own process of developing compassion. We are all the same in this regard. This is a part of our common humanity. “Less” and “more” need not be connected to the ego, but rather connected to what we have to share about our journey of compassion development. Perhaps we can reach out and learn from each other,

because we are all discovering in ourselves something about holding possibility awareness within the moment.

When we speak about holding possibility awareness within the moment, we are talking about a mindful attention to the moment that is seeking to experience the possibility of compassion within that moment without having it as a goal for that moment. This is often not an easy process, but it is very important for the personal development of compassion. It is not easy because our minds are easily filled with many other distractions such as; drifting off, busy thoughts racing by, thinking of what needs to get done later, what should I say next, what can I get from this, this reminds me of, and a range of emotions (fear, anger, attachment, lust). These all can enter into our awareness of the relational moment and thus cloud our view of possibility awareness. When we are being mindful to possibility awareness this means that the mind is quiet enough to hear that possibility. Seeking compassion possibility without having it as a goal means that we are open to hearing whatever possibility will unfold. It means we have no agenda other than to sit, open and ready, fully aware, waiting patiently with sacredness, to hear (experience) the compassion that is possible for that moment. This is the nature of possibility awareness and its link to personal compassion development.