

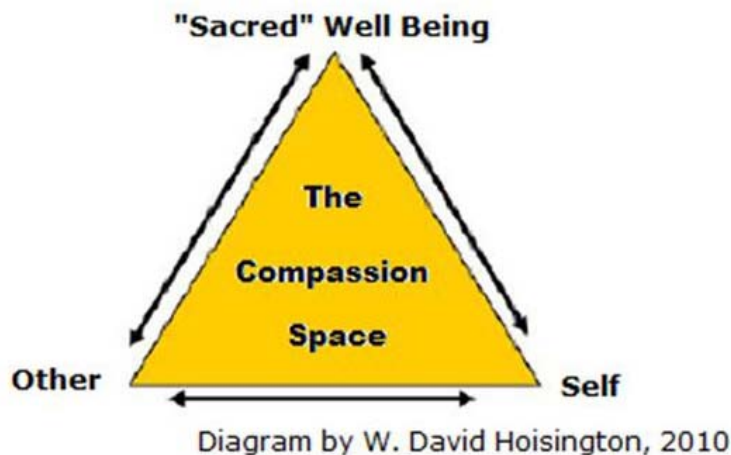
## Step 4: Becoming a Warrior for Compassion

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In addition to providing a better understanding of how we define and practice compassion, I am also interested in how to teach compassion and how we can “pass it on”. Throughout history the healing traditions have been passed along through an apprenticeship relationship. The shaman in the tribe was called and recognized by the community for this calling. The apprentice is also called and also recognized. In seeking to become a “warrior guide” within the compassion space it is recommended that you do so within an apprentice relationship that fits your specific needs in today’s society. Your development of compassion can greatly flourish in the right apprentice relationship.

Previously three steps for fostering compassion development have been described: 1) Accepting the possibility that both people can enter into the compassion space, 2) staying aware of the moment experienced within the compassion space and 3) maintaining an attitude of presence that is conducive to promoting the compassion space. It is assumed here that these three steps have been successfully taken before the helper (one with the ability to help people find relief from suffering) and the person seeking help (relief from suffering) decide to go further into exploring the compassion space. It is also assumed that the two have an agreement, a mutual contract, to explore the compassion space. One can visualize these first steps as the foundation and walls for the house which holds the compassion space. The helper, who will now be called the guide, and the person seeking help who will now be called the seeker, are both standing outside the house and are about to enter and explore what is inside. The guide and the seeker are only able to stand outside the house because it is seen as possible, it is brought into conscious awareness, and it is maintained through a specific attitude of presence. The house can easily fade into the mist of illusion should any of these preconditions fail to be present.



The house that is about to be entered is represented in the diagram above. In this diagram the compassion space sits between self (the guide), other (the seeker) and the nature of well being, including “sacred” characteristics. There are interactions between the various elements and these interactions are represented by the two-way arrows. Learning how to sit within the compassion space with someone is learning how to help someone to find relief from suffering. You act as a guide for the other person to discover well being in a way that fits their understanding of the process.

The term warrior guide refers to the need for strong compassion. Once the guide decides to begin this journey with the seeker it is almost certain that the guide will face not just the need for gentle and soothing compassion but also the need for strong compassion. It is a journey where the causes of suffering, whatever they may be, are met face-to-face. They are brought into conscious awareness and then within the proper attitude of presence they are held up to the sacred nature of well being. Sometimes this is done like a soft gentle breeze, and sometimes it is done like a bolt of lightning from the hand of a strong warrior without intent of harm and only with the intent of moving toward well being.

It is impossible to write a set of guidelines that will be applicable to every type of person one might meet, or every situation met, when entering the compassion space. It is a very individual experience and the guide must know that and be dedicated to that proposition first before thinking about any guidelines. Before reading further look within your own belief system and see if you honestly believe that each person is unique and that each encounter within the compassion space will have its own unique features. If you maintain this openness to the unique nature of the moment then the guidelines presented here will not direct what happens, but rather help you to be ready for what might happen.

Through each of these guidelines it is important to “check in”. The process of “checking in” is one where the guide seeks to get a verbal statement from the seeker about their experience. Extreme care is taken not to “lead the conversation”. The guide makes every attempt to use open ended questions that are vague and leave plenty of room for the seeker to fill in with a description of the experience occurring at that moment. This could be “How are you feeling now?”, “What are you experiencing right now?”, or “Did you just experience something?” Remember you are a guide and you want to know what the seeker is experiencing so that you can be skilled as a guide, and so that you do not confuse your experiences with what she/he is experiencing. Checking in should be done during all of the guidelines discussed here and in other writings.

Checking in should also include permission to proceed. At any point in the process the seeker should feel totally free to end it, as should the guide. It is a mutual journey and BOTH need to enter into an agreement that they are going to explore the compassion space together. This agreement can be terminated at any point, and it needs to be clearly stated that this is part of the process. Sometimes the guide will know that the journey needs to stop and often, at that moment, the seeker is not aware that this is so. The guide needs to develop a sensitivity to the difference between eagerness to proceed and proceeding when it contributes to well being. Sometimes people have “stuff” present in the moment that needs to be examined for its contribution to suffering before moving forward.

The guidelines presented here almost always occur in this same order. Yet it was pointed out to me in one of my research projects that the step like linearity is more function of how I conceptualize the process than of the process itself. Some people do not experience such linearity. In addition, not everyone will be able to be guided through the entire process. Some seekers won't make it past guidelines one and two. But we learn to sit with people, holding a space of compassion for them, even when they are struggling, even when they are in despair and cannot see a way out, even when they are angry or lack trust. We sit and hold the space because we deeply believe that the possibility for relief of suffering always exists. This doesn't mean that we put ourselves at risk for harm or act in a way that enables others to be harmed. It is the warrior guide who learns both the softness and the power of compassion.

It is worth restating here that there is a relationship between your understanding of compassion and your practice of it while using the guidelines. Explore the information about compassion that is provided on [www.CompassionSpace.com](http://www.CompassionSpace.com) to help expand your understanding. Seek time to sit with teachers of compassion. The guidelines will become richer and deeper in application as your understanding of compassion becomes richer and deeper. Then as your practice becomes richer so will it affect how you define and understand compassion. The description of the guidelines below is provided for an "average" level of compassion development. Advanced phenomena are not described here (but are described elsewhere) and should be explored within the apprentice relationship.

#### Guideline 1: Speak of the sacredness and that the journey will be focused on relief of suffering

How you describe the sacred nature of helping another out of suffering is an individual process. In its most universal form sacredness means to give respect and honor to the process. It means to hold the possibility of well being for others with some level of reverence. This may include some concept of the Divine or "universal energy". It is the intent of deep respect that is important.

Often I will say, "This is a sacred journey we are about to take. It is to be given deep respect." This simple phrase seems to be understood by almost all that arrive as seekers. It is good to say it out loud prior to actually taking the cathartic journey.

#### Guideline 2: Move toward calm and centeredness

There is a link between meditation and compassion. That link is in using some form of meditative practice (there are many) to move yourself, as guide, to a place of calm and centeredness. There is a reason for this. You need to be in such a state in order to hear the nature of the suffering that exists. You also need to be there with a combination of gentleness and power in order to sit with the suffering. A regular meditative practice helps this occur.

Think of yourself as standing in a small pond. It is stormy and waves are splashing all about you. This is you and your busy mind. Would you know if someone else jumped into the water with you? Could you feel the effects of this person on the water with all the stormy waves crashing on to your body?

Now imagine that it is a very calm day. The surface of the pond is flat and still, even the landing of a fly creates ripples that make it to your body. Someone else jumps into the pond and you know they are there. If they move about you know that they have moved. This is the quiet mind and it is what is needed to help improve both empathy and wisdom. The quiet mind improves empathy because the guide is better able to sense the seeker, like the still pond. The quiet mind improves wisdom because the guide is better able to match the understanding of suffering, the shared experience of it “in the pond”, to a personalized path away from that suffering.

There is another reason why a calm presence is helpful – it helps the seeker also become calm. Often the seeker on this journey has to face the experiences connected to suffering. This can be quite frightening and sometimes overwhelming. The more the seeker can learn to become calm the easier it will be to take the journey around the boulders of suffering and on to a cathartic experience. When the guide radiates calmness than it is often easier for the seeker to become calm. It is also helpful, sometimes, to actually practice a guided meditation exercise with the seeker in order to promote a deeper sense of calmness.

Compassion is defined as empathy plus wisdom. Empathy is defined as having the intent to promote well being and when holding that intent it is done within a state of calmness. There is also mutuality in empathy (see “The Healing Relationship” for more of a discussion). This experience of mutual intent to promote well being is experienced within the framework of calmness and peace. Sometimes this calm experience transcends what we normally experience as “calmness”.

The final reason why the quiet mind is helpful is to be able to sense resistance to the process of moving from suffering into well being. It is important to note that when seeking the quiet mind resistance is almost always encountered.

### Guideline 3: Listen for the flow and the resistance

I have written that the helping relationship is composed of basically 3 types of experiences (go to the link [http://compassionspace.com/Helping\\_Relationship\\_Tree\\_and\\_C.html](http://compassionspace.com/Helping_Relationship_Tree_and_C.html)). One – the healing experience where there is a cathartic shift from suffering into well being. This has been the main focus of my writing. Two – the support experience where the guide provides support for people trying to put into action wisdom they know about moving from suffering into well being. I have written some material about this (“The Support Relationship”). Then there is the third – resistance, for which I have written very little.

Based on the Theory of Compassion Development, resistance to entering the compassion space is a part of compassion readiness and to some degree a part of all of us because we are all in the process of

developing compassion, or at least its possibility. The guide will experience resistance when offering the compassion space to the seeker, sometimes not only the resistance of the seeker but also the resistance inside the guide. I do believe that most people are aware of these boulders of resistance. Thus the actual description of these boulders has been put aside because people have banged their heads on them enough to know what they are. What people seem to lack is the experiential connection between the resistance and the actual cathartic journey from suffering into well being. They seem to lack the experience of walking around the boulder, or knowledge of the “flow” which can bring a sense of well being.

The guide needs to have the knowledge of both the flow and the resistance, not only personally but also acquired during the process of helping others while in an apprentice relationship. Coming to understand the flow-resistance dynamics takes considerable time and patience and should be done with the help of others who have been through some of the training. The main point is to remain open, with a quiet mind, to hearing the moment.

**Important:** The above three guidelines can be done in silence, internally, to create an atmosphere that is conducive to well being, to help hold the compassion space while other activities are being done. This could include medical care, daily living support, disaster services, feeding the hungry, care for the destitute or any compassionate action. It can include daily conversation where you are simply sharing space with another person. These first three guidelines of practicing the compassion space can be done every day. It can become a way of being. You may also need to add guideline 8 into your daily practice depending on how intense your experiences are within the compassion space.

It is also important to know that there is no time restriction other than that which is constructed by the dynamics of the relationship. What this means is that the shift from suffering, past the boulders, can occur in just a few minutes or it may take an hour, a day, a month, a year or longer. The movement toward relief from suffering doesn't have a time frame in the conventional sense.

#### Guideline 4: Present the resistance and move (and repeat)

During the journey toward well being the guide and the seeker will experience boulders of resistance. It is good to pause, look at them, come to a mutually agreed description of them and then also agree to move forward (walk around the boulder, do not fight with it) in a state of calmness. If movement forward is to happen there will be a sense of “flow”, as if the guide and the seeker are being pulled forward toward an experience of well being and around the factors contributing to suffering. This back and forth between flow and resistance will continue until the cathartic shift into well being occurs or the journey with the guide ends for that moment.

The responsibility of the guide is to sit in the present moment with the seeker while also holding the door open to the possibility that well being can be experienced. In addition the guide must keep an eye on self generated feelings and thoughts seeing that they do not interfere with the path the seeker needs to take. It is a gentle balance of sitting between self, other and the nature of well being. You need to always be aware that your personal “boulder” perceptions can color what happens. Remember the compassion space triangle. You are at one corner not only because you are the facilitator but also because you need to be ever conscious of your own “stuff”. This is another reason why an apprentice program is the best way to teach strong compassion.

#### Guideline 5: Describe the shift away from suffering

After walking around a series of boulders, with an eye to the well being horizon, at some point there may be a shift away from suffering and toward well being. This shift is accompanied by the experience of actually feeling better, but it also has two additional features – clarity and insight. The shift is also experienced by both the guide and the seeker and this is its other unique feature – mutuality. When all of these features are part of the moment then it is likely that a cathartic shift has occurred.

It is important for the seeker to describe this shift. It is also important that the guide DOES NOT describe the shift, but rather asks very open ended questions, such as: “Did you feel something?”, “How are you doing right now?”, or “What are you experiencing at this moment?” Then the guide seeks clarification and obtains as detailed a picture as is possible for what is happening as it is perceived by the seeker. A note of caution – trying to use words to describe the phenomena can, and often does, interfere with the existence of the well being phenomena for some people. This makes it more difficult to describe. In addition, people are quite individual in the words they use to describe their experiences with the cathartic shift. How the seeker attempts to describe the shift is an important precursor to exploring meaning.

#### Guideline 6: Explore the meaning of this shift

By definition, the cathartic shift has as its features well being, clarity, insight and mutuality. The nature of the insight gained by the seeker will be unique to that moment. Some people will be able to describe the insight and the meaning. Others will need some time for reflection and a follow-up meeting is recommended. But there is one point that can be discussed which is universal to this process and that is the meaning of the cathartic shift itself.

Before discussing the meaning of the cathartic shift the guide and the seeker have completed guideline 5 where some description of the shift was provided. That serves as the stepping stone for the next question, “How did this happen?” followed by “What does this mean to you?” The guide uses the Socratic method for asking questions which help the seeker to explore their own individual meaning making process. The guide does not interfere in this process but instead seeks to illuminate what the seeker knows.

Guideline 7: Agree to a follow-up meeting

Once someone has gone through a cathartic shift it is usually a powerful experience. Most people will spend time processing the event. How they process it is unique to each person and says a lot about their understanding of the compassion space. Some people will take the processing into some dark hallways, even to the possibility of “an evil spell was cast on me”, although such extremes are rare. Most people simply try to make sense out of what happened using the tools that they have available.

Sitting with someone and processing through what happened with them is a delicate process. There is a strong temptation for the guide to expound on their own philosophy and their own history. The guide should refrain from doing this as much as is possible. What is being sought here is how the seeker processed the event. Sometimes it is good to recount the event (remember guideline 5) and then ask “What happened right after you left here?” Ask for feeling and thinking details and not just a sequential description of actions. This is a Socratic process where the guide is helping the seeker to clarify their meaning making process right after the event.

It is always good to check in with the seeker following an event. Whatever means are available, email, phone, follow-up meeting (within a week). This is particularly important if it is the seeker’s first healing event (or the first in a very long time). If you have gone through this meaning making process with the seeker already then there is less urgency.

Guideline 8: Take the time for personal cleansing

It is important to remember that this process is one of mutuality. The guide is taking the journey WITH the seeker, walking side-by-side. The guide will experience feelings “as if” s/he were walking in the other person’s shoes. Since this is about compassion, about moving from suffering into well being, then it is also about sitting with suffering. This sitting with suffering comes in a wide variety of forms but because of the mutuality of the compassion space there is the risk of “contamination”.

Using the word contamination is done purposefully as we can “catch something” through the mutuality of the experience. It is similar to emotional contagion and probably one of the underlying causes of the misnomer “compassion fatigue”. But it is possible to enter the compassion space with the proper attitude and limit the effects of contagion. It is possible to become strong with compassion, in that sense a warrior, and ward off the personal effects of contagion. You learn to see it coming in the moment and then you learn ways to sit with that without the contagion effect. This is another reason for entering an apprentice relationship – to learn how to limit the effects of contagion.

In the event that contagion does occur, and if you enter the compassion space many times with a variety of folks then it will, you should develop some form of cleansing ritual that is suited to your personal disposition and the environment. The simplest form of this is meditative breath combined with a mantra or a prayer. Music or a brief walk in fresh air added to this helps further. But there are a wide

range of things you can do to help with personal cleansing. The point is that it should become a regular practice and not doing so puts you and the people you wish to help at risk.

#### Summary:

When exploring the mystery of such a sacred process as healing within the compassion space it is difficult to provide guidelines without also infusing some cultural bias and personal interpretation. Having read the accounts of healers (see “The Healing Relationship”) I know that they speak about the process using a language and a set of rituals that fit their particular culture. Perhaps these guidelines represent the same.

The guidelines presented hopefully offer some information that will be useful to those wishing to develop, and practice, strong compassion. First, begin with 1) Accepting the possibility that both people can enter into the compassion space, 2) staying aware of the moment experienced within the compassion space and 3) maintaining an attitude of presence that is conducive to promoting the compassion space. Add to this that the two have an agreement, a mutual contract, to explore the compassion space. These are the building blocks for a foundation under strong compassion.

Once the foundation is laid then the process often includes the following eight guidelines: 1) sacredness, 2) calm centeredness, 3) listening to the flow, 4) understanding resistance, 5) cathartic shift, 6) meaning making, 7) follow-up, and 8) self cleansing. A person seeking help may not go through all of these steps or they may go through all of them extremely quickly. Time is not linked to this process in any measurable way. It is also possible to build the foundation and do steps 1-3 as a persistent way of living in the world. This is a part of becoming a strong warrior for compassion.