



UNIQUE SELF EMERGENCE

Why Compassion?

Spiritual teachers and psychologists agree that the root of a deep compassionate nature starts with compassion for oneself. Self-compassion corrects our habit of turning away from ourselves. Turning toward oneself opens us to the well of compassion and love in which we swim. Pema Chodron, Buddhist nun and teacher describes this well of love beautifully . . .

When you begin to touch your heart or let your heart be touched, you discover that it's bottomless, that it doesn't have any resolution, that this heart is huge, vast and limitless. You begin to discover how much warmth and gentleness is there, as well as how much space.

Cultivating compassion means opening to a place of welcome deep within. Here we actually learn to pay attention to ourselves without the usual judging, arguing, obsessing. We learn to notice and acknowledge what is happening inside. Simply noticing softens the heart and allows us to find that well of love underneath the familiar cacophony of our False Self Pattern that heretofore has monopolized our minds, severely limiting our capacity to rest in the spacious ground of all there is.

Turning toward oneself runs counter to the ways in which we've been socialized - to ignore pain, to buck up and keep going, to not over indulge ourselves. The list goes on and on but the reality is when we ignore our own suffering, it doesn't go away. Rather it stays within us, affecting us on all levels. In fact when we resist suffering it actually becomes more acute. When we embrace our suffering, we relax within and we are able to drop into the vast, limitless space Chodron speaks of so beautifully.

Imagine a child having a difficult time. When ignored, the child becomes more agitated. If instead the child is attended to, held and listened to, the little body relaxes. The opening that is created restores equilibrium. When we suffer, we are exactly like an agitated child who needs to be turned to rather than ignored.

Rick Hanson in *Hardwiring Happiness* tells us that practicing compassion creates the condition of trust so that when the hard stuff occurs we are more able to open to it because we know we have a container of care. In our brains we are affecting the release of oxytocin that over time will decrease the negativity bias in the brain. The "tend and

befriend” capacity of our brain creates new neural pathways that diminish the amygdala’s natural fight/flight response. Conversely self-criticism affects the release of cortisol, dumping into our system the adrenaline necessary to mobilize us to face a threat. Sadly, in this case, the threat is coming from us, our own self-critic. Studies show that over time increased levels of cortisol leads to depression as it depletes the neurotransmitters involved in the ability to experience pleasure.

Much like we open easily to others with compassion, we can learn to open to ourselves. Compassion is a powerful, life-giving quality. Each of us suffers and compassion is a natural response to suffering, including our own. Self-compassion isn’t self-pity or selfishness; rather it is an expression of love and acceptance for where we are in this very moment – including our own self-critic. Self-compassion, according to research is a potent way to cultivate a sense of self worth, cushion the impact of difficult conditions and build resilience. The further we are from living compassionately, the further we are from the love that sources our uniqueness.

The Dalai Lama echo’s the findings of research when he says:

*From my own small experience, I find that as soon as some kind of sense of caring or concern increases in my heart, this brings me more inner strength. The result:
I feel less fear, more happiness.*

It's very important to note that when the Dalai Lama speaks of care and concern, he is not talking about selfishness or self pity. He is talking about what truly feeds our deepest need as human persons. He is talking about what strengthens our capacity to love others and ourselves outrageously and fearlessly.