

## LOVE AND COMPASSION

*'One who knows the secret of love  
finds the world full of universal love.'*  
Ramana Maharshi

*'Love is the remedy of our pride and self-conceit,  
the physician of all our infirmities. Only one whose  
garment is rent by love becomes entirely unselfish.'*  
Rumi

### The Nature of Love

For many traditional religions love and compassion are the central tenets of their teaching. Christianity speaks of *agape* or unconditional love, expressed in metaphysical terms as the 'Guardian Angel.' In Buddhism selfless love or the 'Awakened Heart' is embodied in the figure of the Bodhisattva and expressed through the practice of *metta* or loving-kindness and impartial, non-discriminating compassion in everyday life. And Sufism has some-times been called the "creed of love," where love is regarded as the highest stage of spiritual development. The great classical Sufi ibn el-Arabi declared that "no religion is more supreme than the religion of love. Love is the source and essence of all spiritual teachings."

Love defies definition and description. It is certainly not logical or rational, eludes reason and analysis, and is perhaps best understood by experience. Love takes many different forms and expressions (romantic, family, religious, love of country, love of nature). "The different forms of love are like the spectrum that pure light breaks into when it passes through a prism of glass. When the light of unity passes through the prism of the human heart it too breaks down into a spectrum, and human life is coloured by it."

There are many levels, degrees and dimensions of love. The impulse of love can vary greatly in depth and intensity and in the way it is expressed:

Love is not selective, just as the light of the sun is not selective. It does not make one person special. It is not exclusive. Exclusivity is not the love of God but the "love" of the ego. However, the intensity with which true love is felt can vary. There may be one person who reflects your love back to you more clearly and more intensely than others, and if that person feels the same toward you, it can be said that you are in a love relationship with him or her. The bond that connects you with that person is the same bond that connects you with the person sitting next to you on a bus, or with a bird, a tree, a flower. Only the degree of intensity with which it is felt differs. (1)

Ordinary love is focused on the form or appearance of a thing or person, while higher, universal love sees the beauty of the essence, not the form. "Real love, of the essential type, may observe beauty in all forms, but its attention is actually directed upon the essence which is the only love in a final sense. A person does not love in this sense if their love is capable of distraction." The Sufis recognize a continuum of levels or gradations of love:

What is generally called love can be harmful to the lover and the object of the love. If this is the result, the cause cannot be called love by a Sufi, but must be called 'attachment' in which the attached is incapable of any other conduct. Love not only has different intensities, but it also has different levels. If man thinks that love only signifies what he has so far felt, he will veil himself thereby from any experience of real love. If, however, he has actually felt real love, he will not make the mistake of generalizing about it so as to identify it only with physical love or the love of attraction. (2)

Love is central to human happiness and fulfilment, and conscious living entails both the giving and receiving of love. Love in action is embodied as empathy, compassion and selfless service:

Unconditional love is inseparable from authenticity and inner freedom. It is a law unto itself, a love that is totally proactive and appropriately responsive, not merely blindly reactive. Love creates its own wake, has its own direction, moves according to its own rhythm, and makes its own music. True love has no sides, boundaries or corners. It is without circumference and beyond inside and out. The heart of limitless love includes everyone and everything, embracing one and all in its warmth. Genuine love is enough in simply being itself. Love finds its own way and creates its own universe. Love-practice combines selflessness, generosity, empathy, meaningful connection, cherishment and oneness. Love is indubitably found through loving. Buddha taught, "Putting aside all barriers, let your mind be full of love. Let it pervade all the quarters of the world so that the whole wide world, above, below, and around, is pervaded with love." (3)

Gurdjieff once said: "Whoever does not love life does not love God." And, in the words of D.T. Suzuki: "It is love which creates life. Life cannot sustain itself without love." This love of life is all-inclusive, unconditional and already within us, at the heart of our being. Steven Harrison: "What is love? It is not a thing but an energetic connection without opposite. It has nothing to do with getting anything. Loving is the radical abandonment of my construction, my ideas – the total acceptance of life just as it is." The power of love is the most transformative and ennobling force in the universe.

In the natural world virtually all living creatures exhibit love to some degree, e.g. the love of a mother lion or bear for her cubs. Love has a wider, deeper significance when it connects with other elements in life: "Being an infinitely complicated network of interrelationships, life can-

not be itself unless supported by love. Wishing to give life a form, love expresses itself in all modes of being. In every realm of life love grows out of mutual interrelationships.”

Without love one cannot see the infinitely expanding network of relationships which is reality. Love trusts, is always affirmative and all-embracing. Love is life and therefore creative. Everything it touches is enlivened and energized for new growth. When you love an animal, it grows more intelligent; when you love a plant you see into its every need. Love is never blind; it is the reservoir of infinite light. Let us first realize the fact that we thrive only when we are co-operative by being alive to the truth of interrelationship of all things in existence. (4)

The interrelationship of all living forms also applies to human beings. “As love flows out of rightly seeing reality as it is, it is also love that makes us feel that we – each is us individually and all of us collectively – are responsible for whatever things, good or evil, go on in our human community, and we must therefore strive to ameliorate or remove whatever conditions are inimical to the universal advancement of human welfare and wisdom.”

The existence of each individual, whether or not he is conscious of the fact, owes something to an infinitely expanding and all-enwrapping net of loving relationship, which takes up not only every one of us but everything that exists. The world is a great family and we, each one of us, are its members. When this philosophy of the interrelatedness of things is rightly understood, love begins to be realized, because love is to recognize others and to take them into consideration in every way of life. To do to others what you would like them to do to you is the keynote of love and this is what naturally grows out of the realization of mutual relatedness . . . Love is life and life is love. (5)

According to the great Sufi mystic Rumi, love is the motive force of all creation and leads to the direct perception of Truth or God: “Love, whether its immediate object be Divine or human, leads ultimately to the knowledge of God. All earthly beauty is but the reflection of heavenly Beauty.” For Rumi, love is a cosmic feeling, a spirit of oneness with the universe:

Love is the essence of all religion. It has three important characteristics:

- (1) Any form in which love expresses itself is good – not because it is a particular expression but because it is an expression of love. Forms of love are irrelevant to the nature of religious experience.
- (2) Love is different from feelings of pleasure and pain. It is not regulated by any consideration of reward and punishment.
- (3) Love transcends intellect. We do not live in order to think; we think in order to live. Rumi admits the utility of the intellect and does not reject it altogether. But his emphasis is on intuition and direct perception. (6)

## Unconscious Expressions of Love

Although love is our true nature it is covered up by fear, insecurity and a sense of separateness and isolation. Most people equate love with pleasure and happiness, which inevitably leads to suffering when these states are no longer present. According to Gurdjieff, what most people experience as ordinary love is unconscious and based on physical, mental and emotional attraction. It is essentially dualistic: "I love, I don't love."

As we are we cannot love. We love because something in ourselves combines with another's emanations; this starts pleasant associations, perhaps because of chemico-physical emanations from instinctive centre, emotional centre, or intellectual centre; or it may be from influences of external form; or from feelings – I love you because you love me, or because you don't love me; suggestions of others; sense of superiority; from pity; and for many other reasons, subjective and egoistic. We allow ourselves to be influenced. We project our feelings on others. Anger begets anger. We receive what we give. Everything attracts or repels. There is the love of sex, which is ordinarily known as "love" between men and women – when this disappears a man and a woman no longer "love" each other. There is love of feeling, which evokes the opposite and makes people suffer. Later, we will talk about conscious love. (7)

For most people love is based on attachment and subjective needs, and is not truly free and independent of external conditions and attractions. In contrast, love in the deepest sense is universal and not limited or selective:

To many people, love is the ultimate attachment: when you love somebody you want to possess them. Often what passes for love in modern consciousness is a very strong attachment to another person, thing, or creature. But if you really want to apply this word to that which accepts, then you have mettâ – love that is unattached, which has no preferences, which accepts everything and sees everything as belonging. When you begin to trust in the awareness, the conscious moment that is infinite, then everything belongs in it. From the perspective of this conscious being, whatever arises in consciousness is accepted and welcomed, whether it's through the senses from the outside or from inside – the emotional and physical conditions which become conscious in the present moment. This sense of love, acceptance, and non-judgment accepts everything that you are thinking, feeling and experiencing; it allows everything to be what it is. When we don't allow things to be as they are, then we are trying to get something that we don't have or get rid of something that we don't want. (8)

Love based on desire and attachment is dependent on changing conditions and circumstances. "If you love one person more than another, this is not true love, it is an attachment created by desire. To love all things equally, seeing the Self in all of them, is true love. It is love

that binds the universe together and sustains it." When love is equated with desire it prevents the discovery of unconditional love and joy:

In his [*Symposium*], Plato defines love as being the desire to possess permanently what is good. But the desire or the love of good is only conceivable if there is knowledge, a previous experience or a memory of the good. One might thus say that any love is a home-sickness, a longing for a lost paradise. The man who lives in a condition where he knows no liberating activity, lives in a world of pain and sadness which from time to time gives place to sparks of joy. All human endeavor strives towards the keeping and the prolonging of such moments. The mistake that most men make is to believe that these moments of joy are caused by the conditions which precede them. It is a long and arduous task to free oneself from this error. What may help us is when we notice how relative are such joys, which, as we very soon see, are not always produced by the same conditions, since what is a condition of joy for one man is not so for another, and what was the condition for yesterday's joy is no more so today. Thus a man finds himself on the threshold of true spiritual research which begins with a return to oneself. This is the first step towards the Self. (9)

So-called romantic love is often tainted by subjective needs and desires. "Love is not homogeneous. There is possessive love, love that wants to absorb, smother, control; and submissive, dependent love that wants to surrender, be cared for, comforted and given security."

Sometimes love has an emotional connotation for short periods. Truly loving somebody doesn't mean we feel emotional about them, however. We can love our children and wish they'd wipe their feet before coming into the house. Being irritated that they don't wipe their feet is an emotion, but the underlying love is not. The love for one's children remains steady. In the case of romantic love, there's nearly always an element of need, a thought that we are going to get something out of it . . . In fact, nobody makes us happy or sad; we do that to ourselves. Romantic love is full of illusions; genuine love, or compassion, has no illusions. It is simply who we are. (10)

When a relationship is based on real love it has an open spacious quality in which there is an awareness of the silent background of essential oneness and unity. "In stillness there is an absolute absence of any state or concept. You are this fullness. This fullness *is* love, *is* peace, *is* happiness. It is indescribable. Don't try to objectify love or peace and make a state of them."

Q: You said earlier that real friendship is the silence when there is nothing left to say. Would you talk more about this?

A: Let us say that you live with someone you really love. There may be many moments when there is nothing to feel and nothing to think. There is only being together. You often feel it with couples who have been together a long time. When

you live with a man or woman there comes a time when you know all about each other's past and there is nothing left to say. But the intervals are full, not empty, and the complete comfort in the interval is the background of the whole relationship. Then it is beautiful to be together. Everything comes out of this silence and dissolves back into it. (11)

Our usual conception of love is a faint reflection of what its evolved expression is. For most people their most sublime ideas about love are actually "the lowest of the possible perceptions of real love."

Q: Why is there so much suffering in love?

A: All suffering is born of desire. True love is never frustrated. How can the sense of unity be frustrated? What can be frustrated is the desire for expression. Such desire is of the mind. As with all things mental, frustration is inevitable.

Q: What is the place of sex in love?

A: Love is a state of being. Sex is energy. Love is wise, sex is blind. Once the true nature of love and sex is understood there will be no conflict or confusion.

Q: What can make me love?

A: You are love itself – when you are not afraid. (12)

## Love and Spirituality

Love is both the means and ultimate goal of spiritual development. It dissolves the barrier between self and others, connects us with all of life, and opens the heart to compassion and forgiveness. "Love is based on recognizing our fundamental interconnectedness. We need each other to become enlightened, because the development of genuine wisdom depends on developing warm-hearted love and compassion. All the happiness and virtue in this world comes from selflessness and generosity, all the sorrow from egotism, selfishness and greed."

Love is the vehicle which leads humanity to spiritual fulfillment and completion. "Within humanity there is an element, activated by love, which provides the means of attaining to true reality, called mystical meaning." The teachings of the Buddha offer a progressive path from all-embracing love to compassion and joy which ultimately "blossoms into the flower of serenity, your being naturally open to others as you expand in the experience of light and radiance."

When you see the suffering of others from a state of serenity you naturally enter and become the other, you participate with passion. Before you can truly

understand the suffering of the other you must be based in love and serenity – not coming from a sense of agony. Be in the state of love and then make it active. Higher compassion is not thinking of the other as separate for you are irrevocably rooted in the universe; there is no other. It is not compassionate for you to see only the suffering without also seeing the joy. Don't think that you have to follow concrete rules to become compassionate, just remove ego clinging and spontaneously insights will arise. Following rules will not bring you into a state of compassion, life is not that simplistic. The only solution is that you be in a state of love and serenity; the act is not as important as the motivation. (13)

The highest state of human consciousness is pure love: "The ultimate dimension, in the very depth of being, the supreme dimension of life, is universal consciousness and love. Each cannot exist without the other. *Truth and love are one and the same thing.*"

True love is a universal, non-discriminating sense of care and connectedness. In it we can include those whom we may not at all like or approve of. We may not condone their behavior, but we can cultivate understanding and forgiveness towards them. True love becomes a powerful tool for transforming any situation. Love is not a passive acquiescence. Love is inclusive and powerful, and when we touch it in our spiritual practice this becomes a direct experience for us . . . There is no hardship and no difficulty that enough love cannot conquer, no distance that enough love cannot span, no barrier that enough love cannot overcome. Whatever the question, love is the answer. This is a universal law and a lesson in spiritual practice that our hearts must learn. The Buddha said it clearly: "Hatred never ceases through hatred. Hatred only ceases through love." (14)

Love transcends our conventional ideas of what its true nature is. It is not limited by our nominal conceptions, beliefs and formulations. It embraces the totality of life:

Love is not really the experience of beauty or romantic joy alone. Love is also associated with ugliness and pain, as well as the beauty of the world; it is not the re-creation of heaven. Love or compassion, the open path, is associated with "what is." In order to develop love – universal love, cosmic love, whatever you would like to call it – one must accept the whole situation of life as it is, both the light and the dark, the good and the bad. One must open oneself to life, communicate with it. (15)

Love, according to Rumi, enables a human being to integrate instinct and reason with intuitive perception, thus allowing direct involvement with every aspect of existence. Love, service and knowledge are all integrated in one unified whole: "With knowledge you know what love is, and what it is not. With knowledge you can serve. Knowledge may not be superior to love, but it is the essential prerequisite. If you do not understand, you cannot love. You can only imagine that you love."

Rumi regarded love as both a universal evolutionary impulse and a formative developmental influence on human consciousness: "Mankind has an unfulfilled desire, and struggles to fulfil it through all sorts of enterprises and ambitions. But it is only in love that one can find real fulfilment and peace."

The motive force behind creative evolution is love. It is love which compels matter to become life, and life to become mind. "Beneath the visible evolution of forms is the force of love which actualizes all striving, movement, progress . . . All things are moving towards the first Beloved – the Eternal Beauty. The worth of a thing is decided by its nearness to, or distance from, this ultimate principle." Life is a journeying back to God; it proceeds according to a process of evolution. The minerals develop into plants, and plants into animals, animals into man and man into super-human or angelic beings, ultimately to reach back to the starting point – "God is the beginning and God is the end. To Him do we return." (16)

Spiritual realization reveals that the experience of the Self or Ultimate Reality is synonymous with love. Ramana Maharshi: "Only if one knows the truth of love, which is the real nature of Self, will the strong entangled knot of life be unified. Only if one attains the height of love will liberation be attained. Such is the heart of all religions." Love is our natural state of pure being and joy:

Love is a state of Being. Your love is not outside; it is deep within you. You can never lose it, and it cannot leave you. It is not dependent on some other body, some external form. In the stillness of your presence, you can feel your own formless and timeless reality as the unmanifested life that animated your physical form. You can then feel the same life deep within every other human and every other creature. You look beyond the veil of form and separation. This is the realization of oneness. This is love. What is God? The eternal One Life underneath all the forms of life. What is love? To feel the presence of that One Life deep within yourself and within all creatures. To be it. Therefore, all love is the love of God. (17)

### Conscious Selfless Love

Love exists in its fullest expression when any sense of separation and distinction is absent. In the words of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: "Love is not selective, desire is selective. In love there are no strangers. When the centre of selfishness is no longer, all desire for pleasure and fear of pain ceases; one is no longer interested in being happy; beyond happiness there is pure intensity, inexhaustible energy, the ecstasy of giving from a perennial source."

The purest form of love is all-encompassing and embraces all that lives. "In love there is no 'me.' In love we are in relationship and in relationship everything is in contact with everything else, everything is part of everything else. We cannot be separate in love."

Love simply is. By its very nature, it is without conditions or limits. Because it does not pursue anything, it does not fear anything. It has no dependencies, attachments, vested interests, or possessions. Because it does not, and cannot, cling to anything, it is completely without frustration, envy, anger, jealousy, disappointment or sorrow. It is freedom. Our problems are not with love, but with the things we *call* love, which are really clinging, longing, depending, worrying, projecting, manipulating, and trying to control. These bring endless misery and loneliness. They are the process by which we torment ourselves unknowingly, out of ignorance. Loving has nothing to do with any of these things. It is beauty, freedom and joy without measure. (18)

At its deepest level love is both personal and impersonal, without limit or definition. "When you recognize yourself completely in others and when there's no more separation between you and them, there's love. You realize that what you are is also what the other being is. Where there's no more 'you and others,' there's only love."

Love can only exist when there's no concept of "love." As long as it's limited by a concept, it's imprisoned. You want to define love, and the word "define" literally means "to limit." Your desire to define love this way or that way turns it into your possession, a love that you have at your disposal, a love that has an owner. Love that's thus limited and imprisoned certainly isn't the infinite love that everyone longs for.

Q: But isn't there a love that isn't imprisoned?

A: There is. It exists where there's nobody who could own love. This love is freedom, and only this is love. Love is the absence of a person who defines true love this way or another. Love is the absence of one who discriminates.

Q: Do you also approve of personal love, the spontaneous love that's directed at a particular human being?

A: When you recognize yourself completely in others and when there's no more separation between you and them, there's love. Then love is synonymous with Self-realization. You realize that what you are is also what the other being is. Where there is no more "you and others," there's only love. Everyone desires this love; it's the true meaning of relationship. (19)

All living things, whether plants, insects, animals or human beings, are interrelated and interdependent. For instance, as Gurdjieff observed, plants act on a person's moods and the emotions of a person can affect a plant. Zen teacher Philip Kapleau: "Universal or cosmic love is a natural outpouring toward all creatures, great or small, and is fueled by direct awareness of the indivisibility of all life. When one loves in this way there is no attachment and no expectation of

something in return. Such oceanic love is realized not by standing apart, alone with the beloved, but by relinquishing one's self and in so doing embracing all selves."

The highest form of love welcomes the totality of life. "Love is boundless. What is limited to a few cannot be called love. All is loved and lovable. Nothing is excluded."

When you love the Self and nothing else, you go beyond the selfish and the unselfish. All distinctions lose their meaning. Love of one and love of all merge together in love, pure and simple, addressed to none, denied to none. Stay in that love, go deeper and deeper into it, investigate yourself and love the investigation and you will solve not only your own problems but also the problems of humanity. You will know what to do. (20)

Real love expresses itself in everyday life through our relationships with other people and the world. In the words of Byron Katie: "Love doesn't stand by – it moves with the speed of clarity. Love is action. It is clear, kind, effortless and irresistible." Love is not a state of quiescence but rather a living expression of energy in action:

It is the nature of love to express itself, to affirm itself, to overcome difficulties. Once you have understood that the world is love in action, you will look at it quite differently. But first your attitude to suffering must change. Suffering is primarily a call for attention, which itself is a movement of love. More than happiness, love wants growth, the widening and deepening of consciousness and being. Whatever prevents becomes a cause of pain and love does not shirk from pain. *Sattva*, the energy that works for righteousness and orderly development, must not be thwarted. When obstructed it turns against itself and becomes destructive. Whenever love is withheld and suffering allowed to spread, war becomes inevitable. Our indifference to our neighbour's sorrow brings suffering to our door. (21)

Objective, conscious love may sometimes appear in a form that seems contradictory or even apparently malicious or cruel. An example is so-called "tough love," whereby someone may be genuinely helped by being challenged or criticized. Gurdjieff describes this process in a conversation recorded by one of his pupils:

When asked to define a proper, objectively moral love between people – one for another – he said that it would be necessary to develop oneself to such an extent that it would be possible to "know and understand enough to be able to aid someone else in doing something necessary for himself, even when that person was not conscious of the need, and might work against you." Only in this sense was love properly responsible and worthy of the name of real love. He added that, even with the best of intentions, most people would be too afraid to love another person in an active sense, or even to attempt to do anything for them; and that one of the terrifying aspects of love was that while it was possible to help another person to a certain

degree, it was not possible to actually “do” anything for them. “If you see another man fall down, when he must walk, you can pick him up. But, although to take one more step is more necessary for him even than air, he must take the step alone; it is impossible for another person to take it for him. (22)

There is no need to acquire or develop love since it is already fully present as our own true nature. “Silence is the background of all that happens, all that appears and disappears. It is unqualified love. The moment you live knowingly in oneness, there are no ‘others.’ There is only Self. This is love.”

The state of pure being, the sense of “I am,” is the love *to be*. This love is not individual or personal love, but is the indwelling principle animating all beings, the life force itself. “Your own Beingness is love and bliss. You have objectified your love. Your very nature is love. By stabilizing in Beingness you collect all the love which was diffused and spread outside. You abide in the knowledge ‘I am’.”

This love is the universal love. Not directed at any particular person or thing, it is very much like space. Space does not say, I am exclusively for so and so. It does not make love privately to someone. That love is manifest and universal. Because you identify with the body, all the troubles begin. Primary love is ‘love to be’ – only after that can you think of loving others. Why do you strive ‘to be’? simply, because you ‘love to be.’ The biggest stumbling block is the identification with the body-mind. Understand that it is not that you can become God; you *are* God. You are godly. Originally, but you became something ‘you are not.’ You should understand that your destination is your own self, the ‘I am.’ It is the very source of everything. (23)

## Compassion

The cultivation of compassion lies at the heart of the world’s spiritual traditions. For instance, Buddhist teachings stress the importance of *metta*, loving-kindness and non-discriminative love, and *karunā*, compassion and the active alleviation of the suffering of others. The Buddhist ideal of compassion is all-embracing and a manifestation of absolute, unconditional love: “The Perfect Compassion of Buddhahood is a Love that is identical with Perfect Wisdom, that arises not from any form of clinging, but from a total liberation from all attachments.”

*Metta* is generosity of the heart that wishes happiness to all beings, both oneself and others. Lovingkindness softens the mind and heart with feelings of benevolence. The mind becomes pliable and the heart gentle as *metta* seeks the welfare and benefit of all. The feeling of lovingkindness expresses the simple wish “May you be happy.” Because we react less and remain more open when we cultivate *metta*, the softness and pliability of love becomes the ground for wisdom. We see

with greater clarity what is wholesome and skillful in our life and what is not. As this discriminating wisdom grows, we make wiser life choices that lead us again to greater happiness and more love. In a beautifully interrelated way, mindfulness creates the field in which metta grows. We first collect the attention and gather the scattered mind. In the beginning of mindfulness practice, we may be distracted or overcome by hindrances. But slowly awareness works its magic. We observe, come back from being lost, begin again, and gradually our mind becomes more accepting, less reactive, and less judgmental. We do not get so totally lost in discursive thoughts. A soft and gentle awareness allows our mind and heart to relax, to loosen, to open. (24)

In the Buddhist tradition, a *bodhisattva* is a person who provides selfless service to others regardless of the situation or circumstance:

Q: I assume that being a bodhisattva means helping people, and people make specific demands. So, a bodhisattva must perform specific acts. But how does this idea of being totally open fit in with the need to perform specific acts?

A: Being open does not mean being unresponsive, a zombie. It means being free to do whatever is called for in a given situation. Because you do not want anything from the situation, you are free to act in the way genuinely appropriate to it. And, similarly, if other people want something from you, that may be their problem. You do not have to try to ingratiate yourself with anyone. Openness means "being what you are." If you are comfortable being yourself, then an environment of openness and communication arises automatically and naturally. (25)

A noble or compassionate heart radiates a selfless love which includes but also ultimately transcends simple kindness to others. It is genuine and heartfelt sympathy, a total communion between two human beings built on a foundation of deep spiritual understanding and wisdom:

In reality Compassion has nothing particularly to do with being compassionate, in the sense of being charitable or kind to one's neighbours or giving regular donations to refugees or various charitable organizations, although that may also be included. Real charity is fundamental; it amounts to developing warmth within oneself. Out of simplicity and awareness the Bodhisattva develops selfless warmth. He doesn't even think in terms of his own psychological benefit; he doesn't think, 'I would like to see him not suffering.' 'I' does not come into it at all. He speaks and thinks and acts spontaneously, not thinking even in terms of helping, or fulfilling any particular purpose. He does not act on 'religious' or 'charitable' grounds at all. He just acts according to the true, present moment, through which he develops a kind of warmth. And there is great warmth in this awareness and also great creativity. His actions are not limited by anything and all sorts of creative impulses just arise in him and are somehow exactly right for that particular moment. (26)

True compassion is based on love and a non-dual understanding of life free from any sense of separation and division. It emerges naturally when one's mind and heart are open to whatever arises in experience. "Love is a universal force that flows through us, it is our beingness. When there is oneness there is happiness, there is affection, there is compassion." Byron Katie describes a depth of compassion that has no motive and does not judge or discriminate:

How can I not be available to anyone who asks me for help? I love people just the way they are, whether they see themselves as saints or sinners. I know that each of us is beyond categories, unfathomable. It's not possible to reject people unless you believe your story about them. And, really, I don't accept or reject; I welcome everyone with open arms. This doesn't mean that I condone the harm that people do, or any form of unkindness. But no one is bad by nature. When someone harms another human being, it's because he or she is confused. This is as true of ordinary people as of the murderers and rapists I work with in prisons. (27)

Compassion has sometimes been called "the language of the heart." The seed of compassion lies in the discovery of the universal nature of human experience which transcends gender, age, race, geographical location and historical time:

Compassion is not just a feeling; it is a response to pain that is deeply rooted in wisdom. It is a commitment to alleviating suffering and the cause of suffering in all its forms. The human story is both personal and universal. Our personal experiences of pain and joy, grief and despair, may be unique to each of us in the forms they take, yet our capacity to feel grief, fear, loneliness and rage, as well as delight, intimacy, joy, and ease, are our common bonds as human beings. They are the language of the heart that crosses the borders of "I" and "you." In the midst of despair or pain, you may be convinced that no one has ever felt this way before. Yet there is no pain you can experience that has not been experienced before by another in a different time or place. Our emotional world is universal. (28)

Compassion naturally arises when there is inner peace and a certain detachment from the world of ever-changing perception and experience. "You abide in Being – unchanging, timeless, deathless – and you are no longer dependent for fulfillment and happiness on the outer world of constantly fluctuating forms. You can enjoy them, play with them, create new forms, appreciate the beauty of it all. But there will be no need to attach yourself to any of it."

Q: When you become this detached, does it not mean that you also become remote from other human beings?

A: On the contrary. As long as you are unaware of Being, the reality of other humans will elude you, because you have not found your own. Your mind will like or dislike their form, which is not just their body but includes their mind as well. True relationship becomes possible only when there is an awareness of

Being. Coming from Being, you will perceive another person's body and mind as just a screen, as it were, behind which you can feel their true reality, as you feel yours. So, when confronted with someone else's suffering or unconscious behavior, you stay present and in touch with Being and are thus able to look beyond the form and feel the other person's radiant and pure Being through your own. At the level of Being, all suffering is recognized as an illusion. Suffering is due to identification with form. Miracles of healing sometimes occur through this realization, by awakening Being-consciousness in others – if they are ready. (29)

Compassionate action is a positive, harmonizing force in everyday life. This living compassion goes hand in hand with wisdom, and wisdom with compassion:

Loving friendliness is the underlying principle behind all wholesome thoughts, words and deeds. With loving friendliness, we recognize more clearly the needs of others and help them readily. With thoughts of loving friendliness we appreciate the success of others with warm feeling. We need loving friendliness in order to live and work with others in harmony. Loving friendliness protects us from the suffering caused by anger and jealousy. When we cultivate our loving friendliness, our compassion, our appreciative joy for others, and our equanimity, we not only make life more pleasant for those around us, our own lives become peaceful and happy. The power of loving friendliness, like the radiance of the Sun, is beyond measure. (30)

The jewel of compassion is the awareness of the deep connection between oneself, other people and the natural world. There are two sides to this bond, common to all humanity: the inevitability of the death of the physical form of every living creature and the reality of the eternal, timeless dimension of our true nature – pure Being:

The realization of this deathless dimension, your true nature, is the other side of compassion. On a deep feeling level, you now recognize not only your own immortality but through your own that of every other creature as well. On the level of form, you share mortality and the preciousness of existence. On the level of Being, you share eternal, radiant life. These are the two aspects of compassion. In compassion, the seemingly opposite feelings of sadness and joy merge into one and become transmuted into a deep inner peace. This is the peace of God. It is one of the most noble feelings that humans are capable of, and it has great healing and transformative power. But true compassion, as I have just described it, is as yet rare. To have deep empathy for the suffering of another being certainly requires a high degree of consciousness but represents only one side of compassion. It is not complete. True compassion goes beyond empathy or sympathy. It does not happen until sadness merges with joy, the joy of Being beyond form, the joy of eternal life. (31)

## Love and Compassion Towards Ourselves

Before we can treat others with compassion we need to begin with ourselves. Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön: “The basis of any kind of compassionate action is the insight that the others who seem to be out there are some kind of mirror image of ourselves. By making friends with yourself, you make friends with others. By hurting others, you hurt yourself.”

In cultivating loving-kindness, we train first to be honest, loving and compassionate toward ourselves. Rather than nurturing self-denigration, we begin to cultivate a clear-seeing kindness. Sometimes we feel good and strong. Sometimes we feel inadequate and weak. But like mother love, *maitri* is unconditional. No matter how we feel, we can aspire to be happy. We can learn to act and think in ways that sow seeds of our future well-being, gradually becoming more aware of what causes happiness as well as what causes distress. Without loving-kindness for ourselves, it is difficult, if not impossible, to genuinely feel it for others. (32)

Compassion begins by learning to be gentle, accepting and kind to ourselves. “Love yourself wisely and you will reach the summit of perfection. Everybody loves their body, but few love their real being. Your real being is love itself and your many loves are its reflections according to the situation at the moment.”

To develop true compassion, cultivate open awareness. The more open you become, the more you will be able to offer assistance to all living beings. And the more you respond to the problems of others, the more your own problems will dissolve. Gradually, the distinction between your welfare and the welfare of others disappears, and you see that when you are no longer self-preoccupied, there is no individual problem. When you have gone beyond achieving, beyond thoughts, beyond giver and gift and recipient, beyond all dualities, then you have reached compassion. When giving is completely free of attachment and grasping, it is significant and appropriate, the natural expression of an awakened heart. (33)

Until we can unconditionally love ourselves we cannot truly love others. “Explore in you what is lovable and give all your intelligence and capacity to what is lovable in you. What is lovable in you is also lovable in the other one. To really love another, you must first love yourself – but not what you ordinarily call yourself – because our true self is the self of all.”

Q: What is love in life, how does it function, because sometimes it seems difficult and sometimes it is easy?

A: Before loving your surroundings, you must first love yourself. Not, of course, the image that you have of yourself, but your real self. When you look at things from this higher principle which we call love, all things become lovable. Things appear constantly according to your point of view. Love must become your

nearest. It is your nearest and also your dearest. Be in identity with it. In love there is no place for somebody. Love is not a state which you go in and out of. It is the principle which is our permanence. (34)

It is not easy to love other human beings until we are in touch with a love grounded in the experience of our true nature – timeless being and presence. When love and compassion are truly alive we feel it in others because it is not personal – its essence is common with all human beings. “Compassion is open, free, and limitless. Indescribable and utterly beyond intellectual comprehension, it responds to any situation spontaneously and without calculation, yet in a way that enlightens and transforms.”

Q: I find it much easier to unconditionally love nature and animals than human beings, except very young children, because animals and nature and very young children are innocent and not devious like human beings. Can you comment?

A: It is true that it takes more maturity to love human beings, to know that they are one with you.

Q: How can I get beyond all the unlovable things in the personality to come to what is most lovable?

A: First you must believe what I say to you, that you are lovable. Then, like a scientist, follow my advice, the same advice that I followed to know that you are lovable! Discover that you are not your body, senses and mind, but something beyond. When you have inquired into the body, senses and mind, there comes a point when there is no more to inquiry and you feel yourself directionless, at a living point from which all direction flows. You will find yourself in identity with it. It remembers you from time to time. Be this moment. It will be your companion all your life. (35)

Love embraces all that exists, including ourselves. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: “Your love of the world is the reflection of your love of yourself, for your world is of your own creation. Light and love are impersonal, but they are reflected in your mind as knowing and wishing oneself well” and “The pleasure to *be* is the simplest form of self-love, which later grows into love of the Self. Instead of trying to be this or that, just be happy to *be*.”

That which you are, your true self, you love it, and whatever you do, you do for your own happiness. To find it, to know it, to cherish it is your basic urge. Since time immemorial you loved yourself, but never wisely. Use your body and mind wisely in the service of the self, that is all. Be true to your own self, love your self absolutely. Do not pretend that you love others as yourself. Unless you have realized them as one with yourself, you cannot love them. Don't pretend to be what you are not, don't refuse to be what you are. Your love of others is the result of self-knowledge, not its cause. Without self-realization, no virtue is genuine.

When you know beyond all doubting that the same life flows through all that is and you are that life, you will love all naturally and spontaneously. When you realize the depth and fullness of your love of yourself, you know that every living being and the entire universe are included in your affection. (36)

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