

Living a Life That Matters

Lay Buddhist Practice/Lectures for Coastside Vipassana

Part II: Compassion, Acceptance, and Forgiveness: Having a Ready Heart

- I. **Forgiveness of our supposed ‘non-perfection’**
 - a. **To live without ‘anxiety about non-perfection’ begins with forgiving ourselves (and others) for being human; in understanding ‘emptiness’ (non-separation of self and other), our view of perfection changes radically**
 - b. **From “*Shantaram*”: “*What characterizes the human race more, Karla once asked me, cruelty, or the capacity to feel shame for it?* I thought the question acutely clever then, when I first heard it, but I’m lonelier and wiser now, and I know it isn’t cruelty or shame that characterizes the human race. It’s forgiveness that makes us what we are. Without forgiveness, our species would’ve annihilated itself in endless retributions. Without forgiveness, there would be no history. Without that hope, there would be no art, for every work of art is in some way an act of forgiveness. Without that dream, there would be no love, for every act of love is in some way a promise to forgive. We live on because we can love, and we love because we can forgive.” P. 370**
 - i. ***Endless retributions*: actually still happens**
 - ii. **No history: we’d have wiped each other out completely**
 - iii. ***No art, for every work of art is in some way an act of forgiveness*: no matter how great an artist of any kind that you are, it never approaches the perfection in your mind and so you must always be forgiving yourself for the imperfect realization of your inner muse**
 - iv. ***No love, for every act of love is in some way a promise to forgive*: after many years’ experience, we realize that love itself is imperfectly expressed...either party becomes less skillful over time because our increased familiarity causes us to be less careful and take the other for granted**

- v. **Still, *'We live on because we can love, and we love because we can forgive'*: even knowing the imperfect realization of love in advance does not stop the human heart from feeling it, and because we know it in advance, we also know that it will require forgiveness**

- II. **My experience with a fellow teacher at school**
 - a. **Teacher getting very angry with me over some committee work being done at school, but the anger being directed very personally**
 - b. **Feelings of shock, bewilderment, hurt, betrayal...how could my friend be so cruel?**
 - c. **Hearing two voices in my head: the 'Zen' voice reminding me that this person was deeply suffering and that their outrage was not personal; the 'little girl' voice feeling hurt and unjustly accused, taking the outrage very personally**
 - d. **Continuing to sit with my oceanic emotions, knowing that the next day I would need to face this person in some way: could I forgive this person and if not, why not?**
 - e. **Our reconciliation the next day**

- III. ***Hsin Hsin Ming: "Gain and loss, right and wrong: such thoughts must finally be abolished at once."***
 - a. **Discussion on Saturday about this line; Mu Soeng comments: *"Once we see that all ideas about gain and loss, right and wrong are nothing more than dream-projections, it is possible to drop them as a frame of reference. We train ourselves, instead, to use language more carefully and creatively so that these dualities are seen as nothing more than conceptual constructs without any inherent meaning to them."***
 - b. **Dropping the 'frame of reference' in the case of this teacher's upset meant having to return to my 'training'**
 - i. **"Perfection is achieved not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away." (Antoine De St. Exupery) (i.e., dropping our frames of reference over and over again)**
 - ii. **First: to remember that it's never personal no matter how personal it may seem...that the other person's upset was 'nothing more than dream, projections'**

- iii. **Second:** to override old habitual feelings of hurt and betrayal, and the response of either closing down or hurting in return which are my own 'dream-projections'
- iv. **Third:** to intentionally arouse the mind of compassion which will allow space for forgiveness

IV. From compassion to forgiveness

- a. **The Dalai Lama:** *"Try to develop a good heart, a warm heart, a compassionate heart. This is very important for society as well as for one's own health and peace of mind. To reject belief in formal institutionalized religion is perfectly all right, but to reject a good heart is destructive to oneself and others."*
 - i. *'To reject a good heart is destructive to oneself and others':* to intentionally refuse to allow the arousing of the mind of compassion is to reject your own good heart, and yet that was my very own struggle with the two voices: to take it personally and feel hurt and betrayed vs. to not take it personally and arouse the mind which understands the true nature of suffering and its expression as anger in this case
- b. **The importance of understanding emptiness as the gateway to compassion**
 - i. *"Buddhist tradition speaks of two levels of bodhichitta, or compassionate mind. On the relative level, compassion consists of intentional acts of kindness. on an absolute level, bodhichitta requires a total recognition of the nondual nature of reality. Abiding in the selflessness of our true nature, compassionate actions occur spontaneously without thought or premeditation, as expressions of enlightened awareness."* (Ian Baker)
 - ii. **Thus, understanding the non-dual nature of reality—emptiness—becomes an imperative within our practice:**

- 1. We manifest compassion on the relative level when we intentionally perform acts of kindness (my 'decision' that evening, to purposely let my hurt feelings take a back seat and try to meet this person the next day with some level of kindness and understanding)**
- 2. We manifest compassion on the absolute level when bodhicitta arises naturally and spontaneously, without premeditation: (my response when the person returned the next day and all my 'intentional' ideas went out the window and pure love for this individual took its place uninvited)**
- iii. First we need to practice intentional acts of kindness and compassion and 'train' the heart; eventually, with enough practice and training, we see our tendencies and our 'dream projections' and begin to let them go; as that happens, bodhicitta begins to arise naturally—it's a lot like playing a piece of music: first you learn the notes and the timing in a very intentional way until they become second nature; only then do you have the opportunity to manifest the REAL beauty of the music and imbue it with all the nuances of pure love**

V. A ready heart

- a. Many Zen stories refer to meeting the moment, of being ready for it (Suzuki Roshi's 'In case of an emergency', Wumen's 'appropriate response')**
- b. Hamlet's statement speaks for us all: ...There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all..." (Act V, Scene 2)**

- c. My experience with my friend showed me so clearly the importance of readiness: having 'trained' myself in intentional acts of compassion over many years and in understanding suffering and its causes, I managed not to respond in kind at the time; and although I still succumbed to hurt feelings afterwards, by the next day I was able to completely let them go and be ready for my friend's apology (or not)**
- d. The readiness is all...that is what we are doing on our cushions: preparing for the emergency, no matter how small**