

## **Chapter 2: Becoming a Radiant Being of Compassion**

(Last updated: July 2006 – still in draft form)

A common observation in the world is that that people have different levels of compassion. It is clear that some people demonstrate more compassion than others. Almost all of us have met people who have shown little compassion and fortunately those who have shown greater levels of compassion. It is also clear that people of compassion are present in every culture/society and that nearly every culture/society has written material supporting the importance of compassion (which is not to say that it is applied universally in the same manner across cultures). Given these points the following assumptions can be made:

1. Compassion is a universal construct common to the laws of morality, social conscience, and religious conduct.
2. The majority of people possess the ability to act in a basic compassionate manner.
3. The majority of people possess the ability to improve their understanding and practice of compassion.
4. Some people have demonstrated very high levels of compassion that have resulted in positive movements away from suffering toward well being. This can be called radiant compassion.

Radiant compassion is a highly developed form of compassion, an expression along a continuum of compassion experiences. Aspects of this continuum are described in the two books “The Healing Relationship” and “Calling God Collect”. This book is being used to extend the compassion continuum, to build off of the information in these previous books, to formulate better defined concepts, and to offer readers a source of inspiration. This book offers a look at the nature of radiant compassion in hopes of inspiring readers to seek the path.

Radiant compassion is that deep compassionate state of being where one individual maintains a vibrant compassionate presence and this presence in itself is felt by others and reduces suffering. It is doing nothing and yet movement occurs. Radiant compassion is a state of being that has been achieved by a few enlightened beings – saints, mystics, gurus. It may be possible that it has occurred in the lives of others, perhaps as brief moments when without saying anything, or doing anything, one person decreased the suffering of another simply by being present and maintaining strong compassion. Such a moment contains the characteristics of the ultimate relationship. It is also something that can stretch from a moment to an hour, a day, and ultimately into a state of being.

Radiant compassion is not a concept that is well described in Western literature. As this author stated in the previous two books there is a serious lack of clarity regarding concept definitions of both empathy and compassion. When there is not a mutual understanding of the concepts involved in the development of compassion than it becomes very difficult to speak to a society, or an individual, about improving compassion. Radiant compassion is offered here as part of a continuum but it is not possible to understand that continuum if there is confusion about the terms along that continuum.

The terms along that continuum are sympathy, empathy, compassion and altruism. These terms are all interconnected, yet they all signify separated phenomena, and they also contain an internal spectrum of experiences. This internal spectrum is based largely on the opportunity to practice. The more we practice empathy the more skilled we become at it. This then changes our understanding of empathy as we encounter deeper levels along the spectrum of empathy experiences (see “The Healing Relationship”). This is also true for compassion. Understanding the idea of a continuum of experiences reflected in these terms, and how that relates to how we define the constructs, is the first step to concept definition consensus.

The next step toward more accurate concept definitions is to understand that each of the terms refers to a slightly different aspect of the helping process. Sympathy is mostly a thinking process, one of role taking and identification. You practice sympathy by listening to a person’s story of suffering, remembering something similar, and then

identifying with the associated feelings. It's that voice inside that says, "oh yeah something like that happened to me". It is possible to extend the spectrum of sympathy experiences into skilled interviewing by adding not only our own stories but a collection of stories we have heard from hundreds of people. Advanced levels of sympathy can be used for gathering information, and done so with very little compassion. It is not uncommon to encounter this when being interviewed by helping professionals who are seeking to find out "what is wrong" and how they can "fix" the problem.

Sympathy can be an early stage in the spectrum of empathy experiences if one seeks to move beyond thinking and into feeling. Sympathy can be a door that opens into basic empathy if one can listen to feeling and sensing. Empathy is more about experiencing the moment than about thinking. You don't try to "understand", instead you seek to share the experience, and later take the time to reflect and understand. Empathy is not a process where the goal is for you to understand another (although that might occur), but rather it is a process of helping the individual to see themselves with the intent of promoting well being. Empathy is a shared moment of mutual emotional expression. It is a moment when two people are experiencing very similar feelings (the clarity of which changes along the empathy spectrum) and one person is there to help the other person by simply being the reflective mirror. It is a reflective process balanced by the intent to promote well being, not guided by the desire to understand (as is often the case with sympathy). Empathy is a process that carries the intent to NOT add to the other's suffering, but rather to share their suffering and to reflect what is appropriate to decreasing that suffering by experiencing (sharing) the journey through the suffering to well being.

Compassion and empathy are directly linked to each other. Compassion is aimed at the reduction of suffering. Empathy is the process of sitting within another's suffering. This is a process that is incorporated within compassion. But compassion adds to empathy the wisdom of action. Compassion can be simply defined as empathy plus wisdom.

Wisdom as a part of compassion refers to the wisdom to take action on behalf of reducing the suffering of another. This wisdom is two fold: first it is the wisdom of knowing how to sit in suffering, and second it is

the wisdom of knowing how to act (live, think) in a manner that reduces suffering. This wisdom may be applied immediately following an empathic moment with an individual, or applied sometime later. It can also be applied to persons or situations related to the individual's suffering. Compassion is a process, a state of being, and a way of living. Compassion is the combination of deep empathic sitting in suffering with the motivation and wisdom to act to reduce suffering.

The level of a person's compassion is often seen through the effects it has on individuals and community. Sometimes this includes altruistic acts. Altruism is very much action based, and perhaps linked to compassion. But this will require more study since we need clearer definitions of, and consensus regarding, the concepts involved.

A person is known to be altruistic when they perform an altruistic act, and act to reduce the suffering of another that involves sacrifice, or the risk of sacrifice. Kristen Renwick Monroe's book, "The Heart of Altruism", explores the subject of altruism in great detail. She presents the numerous problems facing our understanding of altruistic acts that include poor concept definitions, misapplication of theories, and the overgeneralization of belief systems that attempt to link the altruistic act to personal gratification (from genetic, to social, to familial). These are problems similar to those this author has described in regards to empathy and compassion. These varied descriptions of important human development concepts present to the reader audience a muddled picture and is delaying research progress.

What is important to notice is that in many instances writers have presented their understanding of each of the four terms (sympathy, empathy, compassion, altruism) from their particular viewpoint along the continuum. This is often done without reference to that continuum which then leads to multiple definitions of the same term that often are confusing. It is as if they are on a journey and upon stopping for lunch announce, "We have arrived". The lunch break is substituted for a description of the entire journey rather than a one point along the journey. This is not to say that the meal was not important and meaningful, and perhaps quite tasty.

Proclaiming a single point definition that lies along a continuum of experiences to be the accurate definition is not uncommon. It is due to

the observer's ability to view, and what can not be viewed is often not included within the definition. What is hard to view along the continuum being described here are the more developed forms of the experience. Yet it is these more developed forms that may show us the potential of our developmental journey.

This author writes about radiant compassion as the “ultimate relationship”. Perhaps it is near the end of our continuum of mortal compassion. At this moment, the radiant, halo like, compassion seems to lie at the end of the compassion continuum. It serves as a beacon for us to move toward. There doesn't seem to be any consistent writings across cultures to suggest that there is something more significant to strive for within our mortal form. But, perhaps there is something beyond that remains out of the view of this author. Should it come into view then this continuum description would need to be modified.

## **The Basic Assumptions of Radiant Compassion**

The above definition of compassion stated that compassion was empathy plus wisdom. In this author's previous writings it was proposed that empathy could be experienced at an advanced level term holistic empathy or halopathy. It has also be suggested that the halopathy experience includes a sense of the sacred, a sense of a connection to the divine. It has also been proposed by this author that the connection to the divine, to God, can be experienced at an advanced holistic level – a unity, or oneness, experience. It has also been proposed that some healers have experienced the gift of halopathy and some mystics have experienced the gift divine unity. In a few instances there have been mystic/healers who have experienced both. When this happens there will also be the presence of radiant compassion.

Radiant compassion is a state of being, a radiant presence, that emanates through and around the mystic/healer. It is part of a deep empathic connection, a sacred process, and oneness with the divine at that moment. It does not require that anything be “done” in order for it to occur. When it does occur that is no doubt in the minds of those involved that something did occur. Naming it, describing it, is quite difficult and

often leads to the development of culturally laden explanatory systems. It is these explanatory systems and their accompanying rituals that have lead to a history of conflict. These explanatory system conflicts continue in our times and have resulted in considerable suffering. The ultimate relationship leaps across cultural boundaries and has the potential for reducing explanatory system conflict.

Radiant compassion is very powerful. It brings about change simply by being present. Nothing else needs to occur. Radiant compassion serves as a catalyst for change with the intent to reduce suffering. Although some people initially react with hostility and there can be a temporary increase in suffering. There is always a reaction to radiant compassion. It is always a catalyst for change. This is fitting with the definition of compassion – empathy plus wisdom with both directed at the reduction of suffering. Radiant compassion illuminates suffering and shows that wise path that must be followed to decrease that suffering. This can happen without anything being done, or as an addition to things that are being done (caution should be taken so as not to attribute doing to the state of being radiantly compassionate).

It may never be possible to prove that radiant compassion exists, although I believe experiments could be designed to show the effects of a skilled practitioner or radiant compassion on the state of suffering experienced by another. It is not the intention of this book to “prove” that radiant compassion exists, but simply to propose its existence.

In proposing the existence of radiant compassion the following basic assumptions need to be considered:

- 1- Radiant compassion will be present when both halopathy and divine unity are present.
- 2- The ultimate relationship is one that occurs when radiant compassion is present.
- 3- The level at which radiant compassion can be shared depends on the *compassion readiness* of both participants in that moment.

- 4- The level at which radiant compassion can be understood depends upon the person's level of empathy development and the person's level of spiritual development.
- 5- Moving toward a state of radiant compassion involves movement from ignorance to knowing, then from practice to being and then to not doing. It is a cyclic process that is revisited.
- 6- It is possible to move ourselves toward radiant compassion, toward the ultimate relationship.
- 7- As we move ourselves toward radiant compassion and the ultimate relationship we affect those around us and this begins the movement toward a *culture of compassion*.

These seven basic assumptions define the parameters of radiant compassion as a state of being and as a process with observable effects.

Radiant compassion will be present when both halopathy and divine unity are present. When a person is deeply connected to another, sharing their suffering and holding the intent of well being AND simultaneously is sitting in a deeply connected relationship with the divine then this is when radiant compassion occurs. Halopathy allows for the person to share the suffering of another leaving no mistake about its character and the connection. Halopathy opens the door of compassion readiness. The divine connection allows for the radiance to "extend", or to reach out and touch the other person. It is like plugging the light into a strong source of electricity. We have the light bulb, but we don't have the strong electricity to make the bulb glow or radiate.

The ultimate relationship is one that occurs when radiant compassion is present. When two people sit within radiant compassion it is the ultimate relationship experience. This is not to deny the importance of many other relationship experiences. This statement simply means that the sharing of radiant compassion teaches us about the potential of the human relationship, teaches us about our individual potential, and offers us a look forward into a way of living in bliss.

The level at which radiant compassion can be shared depends on the *compassion readiness* of both participants in that moment. Not everyone is ready to receive a deeply moving compassionate experience. Some may be ready to receive a gentle breeze, some a stronger wind and others can sit with the lightning and the rainbow. Some will not identify anything notable in the experience at that moment. Some may sense something after some time has passed, as if a seed had been planted. Then there will be those who will resist, in a wide variety of ways. These are all levels of compassion readiness and the practitioner who radiates compassion needs to be aware.

The level at which radiant compassion can be understood depends upon our level of empathy development and our level of spiritual development. Compassion is empathy plus wisdom and both are related to our ability to become a radiant compassionate being. It is very difficult to deeply know the phenomena associated with advanced empathy and advanced spiritual development by just hearing about them. There are aspects to living through these advanced phenomena that cannot be shared through dialog alone. Sharing the phenomenon with another allows us a look at what it is like to BE radiant.

Moving toward a state of radiant compassion involves movement from ignorance to knowing, then from practice to being and then to not doing. It is a cyclic process that is revisited. This sequence is continually revisited throughout the movement toward becoming a radiant compassionate being. Initially we sit in ignorance of why we are not compassionate. Then we come to know, to understand some small aspect of the answer. This may then lead to a new way of living, practicing improved compassion. As this is repeated the roadblocks start to fade away and we may begin to see a shift from having to practice to where it becomes a way of life, of being. We may then also become a “beacon” for others who seek to open their hearts to the ultimate relationship.

Ignorance of the possibility of the ultimate relationship is one of the major cultural roadblocks we currently face. Accepting that it is possible to move toward radiant compassion, toward the ultimate relationship, needs to happen if we are to take this journey. This can be stated only because there have been living examples. It need not be viewed as a standard of “perfection”, but rather as a path to follow – a path with no end. It is as if we were going on a trip across country. We

know that there is a general direction but we do not set our vision so narrow as to be lost in the goal. Instead we visit each moment along the way with as much of ourselves as we have to offer. We seek to visit each moment with the compassion we have to bring within that moment, and we then hope to learn from the experience.

As we move ourselves toward radiant compassion and the ultimate relationship we affect those around us and this begins the movement toward a *culture of compassion*. This is one of the most important assumptions to understand. It alludes to the strength of compassion to be a catalyst for change. Compassion has a great potential for bringing about change, especially when it become part of the community. When a community (peer group, family, workplace, town) establishes a consensus of compassion (by agreement not through a “rule of law”) then a culture of compassion can develop. This culture of compassion will affect the behavior of newcomers, sometimes without words needing to be expressed. The collective expression of compassion in action will result of being a strong catalyst for change. A culture of compassion helps to improve compassion readiness. The opposite is also true, residing in a culture devoid of compassion decreases compassion readiness.

## **Defining Radiant Compassion**

Radiant compassion is the most important and most significant effect associated with the ultimate relationship. It causes responses in living beings that come in contact with it. Small children will stare and smile. Animals will come and seek a touch, even those whose owners say, “He never goes up to strangers.” Adults will almost always feel something. Sometimes a gentle glow of warmth they may seek to embrace and other times a disturbing angst that they may take action against.

Radiant compassion has been described as the “halo” around those blessed, as the development of the Buddha nature, the flow of the Holy Spirit, the power of chi, and the gift of the shaman. It is all the same, the difference being only the cultural eyes that view and describe.

Radiant compassion is the pinnacle of compassion development. It is also something which is experienced only briefly at first. Gradually the practitioner learns to expand the duration, frequency, and intensity of radiant compassion. Learning this is a life long journey.

For radiant compassion to occur one must also have the knowledge of advanced empathy. True understanding of advanced empathy can only be understood through personal experience at that level. Empathy can be developed to advanced levels and at these advanced levels its practice and experience is different than at beginning levels. This is also true for compassion.

At advanced levels of empathy development there is a deeper, less obstructed, way of sitting with one's suffering. This is a part of radiant compassion. There is the intent with advanced empathy to promote well being, and this intent must be present during the mutual sitting in suffering. But compassion adds to the intent the intent to shift from suffering into a state of well being. Empathy is mostly about sitting, and sharing suffering with proper intent. Compassion is more about moving from that sitting into well being, again with proper intent. At the most advanced levels of empathy development there is little difference between the two.

Radiant compassion is a state of being and, in addition to advanced empathy, is characterized by the following:

- An effect that facilitates a change in suffering without doing
- Resilient sitting in suffering

These are the two most important features of radiant compassion. The following are also often experienced.

- A deep sense of peace or calm
- A sense of the sacred
- A sense of meaning or purpose

- A sense of being seen and wanting to escape or attack

An important feature of radiant compassion is that these features may be experienced not only by the radiant person, but by other people in the presence of the radiant person. These are also characteristics of the ultimate relationship.

A person who has developed radiant compassion will see these effects in his/her interactions with others. Radiant compassion is not a self centered observation. It can only be known by its effects upon others. That is inherent in its definition.

Radiant compassion takes away suffering and puts wisdom and a sense of peace in its place. This is experienced by both the person who radiates and the person who is the recipient. This is wisdom that is understood within the moment and both are witness to it. It is not one person “telling the truth” to another. It is not your “grandmother’s compassion” as she sits in a chair sewing while you share your stories and then share some wisdom from her life and then says “everything will be alright dear”. The truth that is spoken is not someone’s opinion of what truth is or what should be said. It is through the deeply radiant compassionate nature of the moment, through halopathy and sacredness, which participants come to know that truth at that moment. They are witness to it and there is no argument.

In today’s world where everyone’s truth is “OK”, and acceptable, it may be hard to understand that there could be a *shared truth* that is experienced and witnessed within the halo of radiant compassion. It is this phenomenon, combined with the shift into experiencing well being, that gives strength to compassion as an agent of change.

Perhaps it will be difficult to “pass on” the bliss of radiant compassion in a world filled with fear of human intimacy. But this fear is simply part of one’s relationship stance and it need not be a limitation preventing our awakening to the potential for sharing the ultimate relationship. Community support will be needed if we, as a society, are to move beyond our current perceptions of relationship.

## **Building a Culture of Compassion**

**“One coal can not cook a meal”**

The importance of community supporting the development of radiant compassion is told throughout history. Whether it was a small group of disciples, the community tribe, the town’s people or an entire reformation, community support helped the teachers of compassion to spread the ideas of radiant compassion. In today’s culture, when there is so much information, so much action that lacks compassion this support is even more important.

This first important point is to distinguish between a culture of compassion and a cult. The nature of the leadership should be one that has the characteristics of the mystic/healer. The teachings should strive toward the promotion of radiant compassion toward all beings. People should be free to come and go as they wish, and free to present information as they wish.

It is very difficult to build a culture of compassion in an environment where compassion is not highly regarded. This is not the same as saying that one should not make the offer. Compassion can always be offered, and then in doing so the practitioner must be very careful in observing the response. It is the recognition of each person’s compassion readiness.

It is this author’s opinion that two key factors contribute to the difficulty in promoting a culture of compassion: 1) the roadblocks slowing the development of compassion readiness, and 2) understanding the terminology and concepts of compassion. The roadblocks will be briefly touched upon in the next chapter. This chapter (along with this authors other books) have focused on defining the language of compassion. Perhaps we, as a community, can come to openly discuss the concepts of radiant compassion. The material is presented here to stimulate that discussion. As we develop a language of compassion we can then begin to freely share our ideas and our concerns. Through sharing it is possible to slowly move toward building a culture of compassion. This is one of the main goals of this author’s writing.