

All beings seek happiness and avoid suffering. Paradoxically, one of the most powerful ways to achieve happiness is to care about other people's suffering.



The wish to alleviate the suffering of others is called compassion. Compassion has three progressive levels:

1. The first level is simply wishing to alleviate the suffering of others.
2. The second level is actually rendering help to the needy, motivated by an unwillingness to passively tolerate the suffering of others.
3. At the third and highest level, compassion must be reinforced by the insight that neither oneself nor the subject has any absolute reality.

HAPPINESS = COMPASSION

Compassion counters self-centeredness. One may think that it is fine just to work for one's own benefit, so long as one does not harm others. While there is no doubt that this is true, doing this alone is not a complete way to happiness.

We always believe that inside us there is an absolute entity – the core of our being, our “self.” We hold it dearly and cherish it, while working unceasingly to please it. Such a self-cherishing attitude in fact undermines our mental and physical well-being.

A study from a psychologist in the United States revealed a correlation between excessive self-cherishing and damage to one's physical well-being. The constant obsession with “I”, “me”, and “mine” leads to early death, high blood pressure, and heart disease.

On the other hand, I have had experiences that have revealed how compassionate thought ensures mental and physical well-being. A few years ago, when I was in Los Angeles teaching a meditation retreat, a sudden and acute pain in my lower abdomen woke me up in the middle of the night. As usual, I tried to separate "myself" from the pain by contemplating unpleasant sensation as unpleasant sensation, not myself. But I was still shaken by the pain. The pain was so severe I started to groan helplessly.

As I reflected on my own misery, suddenly there arose in my heart a thought of compassion for those who were, at that moment, experiencing the same suffering as I was. Moved by that compassion, I put aside my pain and focused my attention on others' suffering. Mentally I repeatedly wished, "May all beings be free from the same suffering I now endure."

Amazingly, within a few minutes, I fell sleep. The next day, I woke up smiling, with only a very faint pain remaining; the acute pain had subsided. This experience strengthened my faith that as long as our mind dwells not on our own suffering, but rather on the suffering of others, the healing power of compassion will manifest itself.

Another experience two years ago reaffirmed the same truth. While in the Himalayas, I suffered a strong headache due to mountain sickness. At first, I just endured it, forgetting that I was endowed with the healing power of compassion. When the pain had become more severe and lasting, the thought of compassion suddenly flashed into my mind. I put aside my own headache and wholeheartedly generated thoughts of compassion to all others who suffered the same headache.

The compassionate mind created a dynamic energy that enabled me to see in minute detail how the pain in my head was suddenly decreasing and disappearing. This took only few minutes. My gosh, what an amazing experience! My headache subsided like magic. The thought of compassion had created immediate healing power.



Most people live in worry and fear.

Compassion makes one courageous, peaceful, and fearless.

It is holding on to the "self" that makes the mind lose its courage and stay in constant fear. Let go of the self-centeredness, reach out and care for others. You will experience tremendous inner strength and happiness as a result.