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Uncovering Compassion: What Gets in the Way

by Padme Nina Livingstone

Do you know what it is to be loving? Can you feel the difference between what's loving and what's not? Is there a curiosity about this?

Compassion is simply the way love expresses itself. It is love in action...as it flows within the heart, and out into the world. When we are fully aware of another's pain and suffering..... difficulties and challenges...our hearts are naturally open, and we embrace the other, with a loving, caring response. Sometimes more is called for. Sometimes simply seeing and loving...is all that is necessary. It is our undivided, whole, clear, open, awareness that embraces the other.....embraces the situation .. and knows what to do.....just being is enough.....And nothing is in the way.

Is there a motivation...a desire...to find out what gets in the way? When our awareness is clouded and dull, we are unconsciously reacting...and being triggered in situations that become full of suffering and pain. At those times, we are so caught up in the pain we experience, we are not even aware of anything else. Thinking about what has just happened...what caused this mess is the farthest thing from our mind.

If we are to enter into a process of change in our behavior, we need to be open to a new perspective. We need to be noticing our situation...wondering what we can do to stop hurting ourselves and others. We need to see that whether we explode or implode, we take more pain on ourselves...and pass that pain onto others, in a never ending chain of unconscious reactivity. We need to understand that a possibility for change exists.....and want it for ourselves. There needs to be a deeply felt curiosity about how to change this personal pattern of behavior.

It is our natural desire to be loved and loving. This is what gives us the energy and motivation for more awareness..... for finding out what gets in the way....for wanting to feel more compassion in one's life.

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Having more awareness of the mess we're in, is part of a process that takes time. Usually we notice that we were in reaction after a painful eventsometimes days...months or years later... With practice, we become aware of our reactivity closer and closer to the event. At some point in the process, we can be aware in the midst of our reaction....and then, we can begin to recognize the internal signs before we are triggered into reaction.

Let's talk about what it is that gets in the way. Unless we understand what that is, unless we can see the root cause of obstacles, (the stuff that's in the way to this all-embracing openhearted possibility of living) we will not uncover our own potential for living compassionately.

What is it that covers up our compassion? One way to begin uncovering our compassion is to understand how our unexamined "stories" block its expression. You may be wondering what is meant

by the word "stories". We are referring to the relationship we have with our personal history and how we think and talk about it to ourselves and others. You might think, "my father hated me", or "my brother...or sister was better at everything, than I was". You likely have a particular way of describing a relationship with a brother, sister, mother or father. You probably find yourself describing your work in a particular way..... again and again. Think about how you talk about your spouse, and your children.

Can you see that the way you describe your life can be called storytelling?

We are each the main character in a book called "The Story of My Life". Our stories have been written by us throughout our lives. We have looked for meaning, and connected experiences to beliefs and concepts that fit our understanding at the time. We have tied together all our experiences with people, places and things in "our story"- just as a writer of fiction creates a story line, main characters and themes.

We have molded our story to fit our world view. We are usually attached to our interpretation of our story, as well. When a parent is abusive, a child will usually believe that it is his or her fault. This interpretation may be made in a child's mind...and is not usually questioned. The child can grow up carrying this belief, that somehow, he or she was responsible for.....and...or..... deserving of the abuse that was experienced.

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Or, perhaps, parents get divorced, and children feel it's their faultor a parent dies and a child feels responsible because there had been an argument and mean things were said before the parent died.

These beliefs continue to create pain and suffering within us, when they are left unexplored. These interpretations of our personal history will continue to live in us, even though they are based on the past, and may be incorrect, and may have no relevance to what is happening right now. These unconscious stories can wreck havoc on our emotional, social, physical and mental condition. Can you see this?

"We are each the main character in a book called "The Story of My Life".

When we begin to explore our stories, we notice beliefs we have blindly accepted. When we take the time to explore them, we can see that they are often based in fiction. Then we can begin to trust what feels true and what doesn't. By gently examining our stories and beliefs...with no blame...no accusation....., we find our hearts opening.... just a bit at first. We can carefully, honestly, wonder what is true.....We can stay open to whatever comes up.....Then we can see a slightly bigger picture and appreciate an expanded, more compassionate view of our own life story.

As we notice our prejudices and consciously explore our beliefs, our heart can expand to include those we have kept out. People of a different country, religion, race, sex, sexual orientation, or financial situation can then be embraced, instead of excluded from our heart. Continuing with this work, we can see more of why we're in so much pain. We can see more of why others are in so much pain. Our ability to feel empathy, the ability to be moved by the pain of others ...grows.

We can also see how living with unexamined beliefs gets in the way of experiencing our present situation directly and honestly.



Confusion based in our unexamined beliefs and stories can create and sustain world problems, such as war. If we look at what happened on Sept.11, we can assume that the terrorists who carried out their mission were confused. They each came from a family. They may have wanted to be loved and loving. They may have believed the people they were killing were evil. They may have believed they would have a positive effect on the world...They likely thought it was the good and right thing to do. The stories the terrorists told themselves probably covered up any compassion they might have felt for the people they were to kill.

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We can see the potentially terrible effects of not examining our stories, not because we are in danger of becoming terrorists, but because we also create pain from unexplored, unconscious beliefs.

How do I begin this work myself? First, notice when you're caught in your story, notice the confusion.....then wonder, "Is this working for me?"....."Is this who I really want to be?"....."What is blocking my heart?" When we are curious, honestly wanting to know what's blocking the compassion, the work begins.

Looking within ...curious...exploring with awareness.....without judgment...not knowing what the answers are.... brings an active open curiosity to What Is.and brings to life a compassionate exploration of self. And then we are compassion...nothing else to do.....just practicing just noticing...just right here....right now.

Sometimes we blame others for our present situation, and get caught up in right or wrong. We don't question or see our responsibility. It's really never about the other person's behavior. We cannot change another. We are each responsible for how we respond to our own thoughts, beliefs, and actions.

This work is about growing our heart's response to the pain in the world...It's about untangling the web of our confusion, and being love.

Compassion is truly uncovered when we embrace a way of living that is honest, courageous, and aware. When we remember to bring our awareness back to our breath, back to the moment, we are being compassion. When we remember to bring our awareness back to the moment, to whatever is happening IN the moment, we are awake and alive to whatever is needed. The heart will always be there, ready for compassionate response.... whenever it's needed. It's the way things work. It's the way we were made.

Please take care. Thank you.

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