



## What We Always Need

By G. Raymond McCullough

It has been months since I wrote my last article, which sometimes feels like a Blog and/or editorial column. I have been inspired of late by everything that has happened since the beginning of 2020, e.g.: Corona virus pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, Black Lives Matter movement, divisiveness of the 2020 presidential campaign, and the general instability on the world scene.

More, recently, I was inspired to write when I once again encountered a young man (Jeremy)-who is a familiar face in my neighborhood. He appears to be homeless and destitute (my bias or reality?). I could ask him? I often see him selling "Real Change" newspaper—go to <https://main.realchangenews.org>.

I have given him money in the past with little hope my meager contribution would have a major impact in his life and circumstance. I have often pondered if I had the courage and resources would I do more to help Jeremy and others in his situation. I do believe Jeremy is confronted with judgment, disdain, and likely fear from the people who encounter him. This all reminds me of a song by Everlast titled "What It's Like".

The first stanza goes as follows:

We've all seen a man at the liquor store beggin'  
for your change

The hair on his face is dirty, dread-locked, and  
full of mange

He asks a man for what he could spare, with  
shame in his eyes

"Get a job you fucking slob, " is all he replies  
God forbid you ever had to walk a mile in his  
shoes

'Cause then you really might know what it's like  
to sing the blues

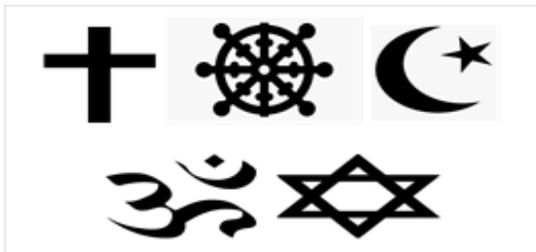
To get the full effect you must listen to the  
whole song. The video is powerful:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qA1nGPM9yHA&list=RDqA1nGPM9yHA&start\\_radio=1&t=0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qA1nGPM9yHA&list=RDqA1nGPM9yHA&start_radio=1&t=0)

Before I proceed, I should address the title of this article. This is what I know about compassion. I could not have done the work I do for 35+ years without having a modicum of compassion. I would like to believe I have more than my fair share. What is compassion? Compassion is the ability to feel deeply for another person as they experience 'life on life's terms.' From my personal experience compassion can be impeded by a person's unwillingness to understand the travails and suffering of a fellow human. Also, compassion for others can be limited by our inability to accept our own possible woundedness/pain and not comprehending the emotional and behavioral impact. Compassion requires an openness to others, a willingness to engage people authentically with care, and of course presence. Let's examine what I believe are key character traits of the compassionate:

- Authenticity—the expression of oneself in a way that is real and congruent with an undeluded self-perception
- Care –think of (if you can) the first time you held a newborn child that was entirely dependent on you for its safety.
- Concern—you know when someone is concerned because it is likely they will reach out to provide guidance, support, solace, etc.
- Empathy—if someone has empathy for your circumstance you will, without a doubt, feel seen and heard.
- Honesty—greatest measure are words and actions are congruent (Integrity).
- Patience—think the opposite of impatience. Being physically and emotionally present as we sit with ourselves and others in our attempt to achieve deeper understanding and connection.
- Forgiveness—disappointment with self or others may require you to let go, as challenging as it may be, of the perceived transgressions after thoughtful consideration

The major religious traditions of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism all frequently reference compassion as a tenet of the respective religious philosophy.



For example, in the Quran (the religious book of Islam) there are at least 200 verses related to compassion. One quote about Islam and compassion states: ‘Compassion represents the true spirit of Islam and compassion is far more vital to Islamic teachings than anything else.’

In the Christian Bible compassion is mentioned in the following books (there are many more):

Isiah 30:18	Exodus 33;19
Isaiah 49;10	Isaiah 49:13
Isaiah 54:10	Isaiah 63:7
Nehemiah 9:16-18	Psalms 86:15
Psalms 103:13	Psalms 116:15

I think it is clear there are numerous mentions of compassion, in some form, in the Christian Bible. Use the table above as your reference if you feel compelled to examine the topic further from a Christian perspective. For those of you that are Christian the video link below may aid in attaining in deeper understanding. Go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXBKaOkmQhw>

As it relates to Buddhism, I will share this belief from the faith: ‘Feeling connected to others overcomes negative states of mind.’ The Dalai Lama states, “the feeling of affinity with others leads to overcoming negative states of mind. It is through empathy that compassion is created.”

As a reminder, empathy simply stated is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. I must interject, experience has taught me the parental expression of empathy is critical to emotional development of children. It is equally important in maintaining healthy adult relationships.

If you are interested in how Compassion and Buddhism intersect? I suggest familiarizing yourself with The 3 Universal Truths, The 4 Noble Truths, and The Noble Eightfold Path.

Let's not forget Hinduism. One quote summarizes compassion in Hinduism as follows: 'Compassion is the basis for ahimsa (respect for all living things and avoidance of violence toward others) a core virtue in Hindu philosophy. Compassion in Hinduism is discussed as an absolute and relative concept.'

Lastly, believed to be the second oldest religious tradition is Judaism, behind Hinduism. Compassion in Judaism is one of the central attributes of the divine and one of the core obligations of humanity. This is a far reaching and profound statement when it comes to the essence of humankind.

At this juncture I believe you may have an inkling, sensation, or certitude about the paramount importance of compassion as it relates to all successful human interactions. Whether it be with our own internal struggles, with one another, or the environment. I propose it will only be the embracing of compassion that we can save ourselves from despair (this includes all addictions). I believe the same applies to humanity in general.

Let's conclude this exploration of compassion by examining emotional states that pervasively erode the foundation of compassion. The most prominent, in my estimation, are:

- Anger—a natural human response to a threat. Problematic if one is constantly in a threat state. (Aggression)

- Resentment—we all know what it feels like when we are slighted, offended, maligned, ridiculed, unfairly judged and we refuse to and/or cannot let go of the perceived transgression. (Alienation)
- Fear-- a natural human response to a threat. Problematic if one is constantly in a threat state, which can feel like and be perceived as an emotional and behavioral paralysis. (Withdrawal)
- Shame—not to be confused with feelings of guilt. Shame is much more debilitating and insidious because it's a negation of self. (Unworthiness)
- Envy—you have it and I want it. The qualifier is I am not willing to put in the honest personal effort to attain what it is I covet. (Jealousy)
- Greed—the absence of sharing and community. I want as much as I can get and will do whatever I have to hold onto what I have. (Condescension)

These all erode the capacity for compassion. Just as the ocean and wind erode the bluff and sandy beach.



These are stream of thought interpretations of each and are not intended to be precise.

My hope is this musing, posing as an article, will prompt your own thoughtful reflection and consideration for embracing and living a more compassionate life.