



Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche Teachings

What is compassion?

Today, compassion is not only a topic within a religious context, but is also an awakened interest within the scientific community. It is a very important topic. Before we discuss compassion in more detail, we first need to understand clearly what it is, so that we can create the right conditions, the right environment, and, the right situations for it. We can then use the right techniques to more easily increase our own compassion.

The Meaning Of Compassion

Compassion is a feeling of not being able to bear someone else's situation, based on a deep understanding of the suffering the person endures. Every sentient being is endowed with compassion, but the intensity varies. There is compassion for children, parents, partner, people of the same community, city and so on, until this expands to having compassion for the people of the same country, of the same continent etc. The optimal way is to generate compassion encompassing all sentient beings.

We often confuse love with compassion, or, think they are essentially the same. There are, however, small, but significant differences. Love is primarily based on attraction. We develop love because we find someone else is appealing to us. Compassion, on the other hand, is based on the understanding of someone's difficulties and not just on attraction.

For example, when we fall in love with another person, we require some sort of reason. We might be attracted by this person's smile, their way of speaking, figure, complexion, or, whatever strikes our fancy. We won't fall in love because this person is going through some difficulties! Our love for our parents and friends is usually based on actions that benefit us and/or please us.

I believe that compassion is more durable than love; love is dependent on someone else's behaviour, looks and so on, so we might stop loving the other person the moment whatever attracted us changes. This is a very unstable position, and that is why partners can split up so easily. But compassion has nothing to do with attraction. As I said before,

it is based on understanding the suffering of the other. Once acquired, this understanding does not change easily. If that person is appealing to us, it helps us to engender a feeling of closeness, which can be helpful. Anyway, that is how I see it.

Being attracted to, and then falling in love with someone, makes us want to be close to that person. But compassion does not necessarily mean we want to know the other person more intimately. What we are aiming for is the alleviation of the suffering of the other, not to make a personal or intimate connection.

Compassion might result from loving someone, but it is not dependent on that. For example, when I came for the first time to Germany, I met a couple that was very much in love. One day, the woman got seriously ill, so her beauty and overall appearance faded. She was not desirable to her partner anymore and he split up with her. Actually this was the time, when she needed him most. He had made no deeper commitment to her beyond her beauty, which would have been the basis for understanding and compassion in order to help her. Therefore, it is important that when we love someone, we also generate compassion for his or her hardships.

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