

Living a Life of Engaged Compassion in Personal and Professional Contexts
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By Melissa Moore

Dear Karuna Training Community,

This year Karuna Training is offering a series of free online talks and emails - with engaging insight into a variety of Karuna related topics. Here is a little in depth discussion from Karuna Founder and Senior Teacher Melissa Moore about our next topic, which will be further explored in our next online interactive session: Karuna Live....

How to Live a Life of Engaged Compassion in Personal and Professional Contexts

Living a life of engaged compassion in either our personal or professional lives, requires that we keep our hearts open and feel the full gamut of feelings we encounter on a day to day basis in the human domain. This isn't always easy or practical, however when we learn to do so we benefit in multiple ways; we find we can be more present with ourselves and with others. Over time we learn to be more grounded in our own sense of openness and availability toward others and not afraid to touch into our vulnerability - which is ironically where we find our greatest strength.

I began teaching Karuna Training in the mid-90's in Bielefeld Germany, where Karuna Training was born. I found myself in process circles where primarily German participants were processing their feelings about the sins of their forefathers in Nazi Germany. For the first three years, I watched profoundly brave Karuna students address these difficult and sometimes very personal familial issues from a place of genuine engaged compassion.

One participant in particular engaged in writing letters with a man who was a Jewish descendant of a family that was exterminated in death camps in Germany by her own grandfather during the Nazi Regieme.

This was the fulfillment of the requirement of the third "graduate" year of Karuna Training to practice compassionate exchange with someone outside of the Karuna cohort. Few take on a situation as emotionally challenging as this one.

Discovering Engaged Compassion

So how do we discover this kind of engaged compassion? The key to living a life of engaged compassion is that one has to feel deeply one's own pain and the pain of others while holding one's mind open and calm. Karuna teaches a time-tested set of skills for discerning and

appropriately transmuting destructive habits of communication into the skillful means of trusting that there is wisdom held within the confusion. This requires that we hold our vulnerabilities with courage and work with habits of fearing that we will fall apart if we feel our emotions fully. In fact emotional energy is dynamic by nature and by feeling emotional energy completely we are not trapped in the endless patterns of managing the energy.

The Tibetan Buddhist wisdom tradition teaches that engaged compassion — a compassion that arises from a deeply engaged sensibility of our human shared truth of suffering — creates genuine understanding and healing in relational contexts. Karuna Training’s experiential dive into Buddhist psychology is designed to bring forth our limitless potential of deep compassion.

According to Chogyam Trungpa, Tibetan master and the founder of Naropa University where the the contemplative psychology taught in Karuna Training was birthed said...

“You should try to connect what you study to your personal experience. Each aspect of the dharma is based on personal experience, so you can relate the dharma to what you experience on the spot.”¹

The Karuna Path to Engaged Compassion

In Karuna, we aspire to apply the ancient wisdom of Tibetan Buddhism which operates out of a worldview of compassion and contemplative practices which are highly applicable to the problems of today. Participants in Karuna Training first learn to apply engaged compassion by working with themselves and their own lives, in order to establish a habit of learning to stay with one’s own emotions through an embodied feeling of emotional energy fully and completely without manipulation or managing the energy in any way.

Karuna participants experientially study Tibetan Buddhist Psychology and learn to offer themselves in compassionate exchange, practicing in the cohort of other learners. Participants also work experientially with the wisdom and confusion of the Five Buddha Family mandala, a cosmic worldview of the world, human mind and human psychology itself. The foundation of these teachings is embodied learning that comes from the contemplative practice of meditation. This is how students learn to lead with their hearts and cultivate the strength of their mind. The

¹ Trungpa, Chogyam. *The Bodhisattva Path of Wisdom and Compassion: The Profound Treasury of the Ocean of Dharma, Volume Two* . Shambhala. Kindle Edition.

training culminates in the project where participants offer themselves to another person as a compassionate friend.

The skills developed in Karuna Training are very practical and personal. We are dedicated to personal practices of meditation, loving kindness toward oneself and others (Maitri), the cultivation of genuine compassion, and skillful action that culminates in a non-reactive, compassionate life.

This life is not limited to professional or personal contexts, there is literally not a moment in time when we do not have the opportunity to practice kindness and love toward ourselves. And there are few instances in life where we cannot use our mindfulness and potent heart to transform our relationship with others.

Awakening Compassionate Social Action

These are personal skills that are needed before we jump into social action in the world, whether personal or professional. If we do not take responsibility for the way we engage in social action, free from aggression and personal agenda, then there is the risk of propagating the same confusion we are trying to overcome. When we learn to work with ourselves and others skillfully and compassionately interpersonally then we can truly affect the world.

I am writing this on the day after Greta Thunberg's, Teen Climate Activist's, address to the United Nations on September 23, 2019, where she let loose a genuine heartfelt cry to the leaders of the world to take action for the sake of her generation.

"We are watching you" she cried. I find her plea both inspiring and painful to watch and she reached me deeply, leaving me to contemplate my own planetary transgressions and American habits of over-using the world's resources.

Her powerful and wise-beyond-her-years words are shaking the Internet awake. I would say she is an example of extreme 'engaged compassion,' which isn't always gentle and nice. I applaud her bravery and compassionate warriorship and pray that examples like this inspire us all to live a life of integrity and truth which is the same as a life of engaged compassion.

At the same time, there is a young black girl in Flint Michigan who is sitting on the street, quietly letting the world know with a sign that in Flint Michigan, they have not had clean water since April 2014. Mari Copeny is also making her mark in an act of engaged compassion, without the same level of fanfare as Greta Thunberg. To live a life of engaged compassion, we have to wake up our hearts to the wide reality that the world is full of socially conditioned biases. There

are so many places to feel into and be awake to at the same time, and to act compassionately. Thank you to these courageous young women.

Living a life of engaged compassion does not let us lull ourselves to sleep for a moment.