

## AWARENESS: THE ROOT OF COMPASSION

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In my years of counseling, relationships, and especially romantic match-ups were a high priority with almost everyone. Remember that marriage is the most common form of yoga or union. The word yoga simply means "to yoke", "to join", "to unite", or "to attach." When we bring another person close to us in life, like a mirror before our face, we mostly see ourselves in them. By "see ourselves" is meant that in them we mirror our persona (the good, the bad, and the ugly) just perfectly. It is when we react to what we see rather than admit and carefully respond, that all of the difficulties begin.

As I pointed out in the previous blog, there is a big distinction between reacting and responding. We work on developing our basic awareness so that we can learn to catch ourselves before we react negatively to something that confronts us. We learn to respond compassionately and skillfully to whatever it is that we see rather than just react to it.

Yes, this takes some initial training, but the training is not in suppressing our reactions, but in developing sufficient awareness that we can understand where things are coming from (how things are) and respond naturally and kindly. The more aware we become, the more we can see the bigger picture and understand the context involved, the better the chance we have for compassion to spontaneously occur. Awareness is the direct cause of compassion, every time. Compassion just naturally arises from increasing awareness. There is no other way that it can arise.

Most of us are riding the pendulum of our own mood swings, much like the big boat-ride at the carnival that swings back and forth. The time that boat spends balanced in the middle is very small indeed. Our emotions are like that, they swing back and forth, up and down. This is what is called by the Buddhists the cycle of samsara. Actually, they call it a vicious cycle or circle, because it comes around again and again. And there is no possible end to it other than to wake up, become aware of how it works, and skillfully deconstruct it ourselves.

Why are earth do you imagine that I go on and on about awareness training in these posts? I could discuss all kinds of other things in these blogs, but I realized some time ago that almost everyone, including me, is not just happy all the time. Life is not all roses. We suffer at our own hands and most of us seem powerless to do anything about it. I also have learned that increasing our awareness is the only way to be able to see what is going on around us well enough to take a different attitude, to respond in such a way as to deconstruct our own karmic accumulation.

I know of no other way, and neither do the Buddhists or the Buddha himself. In fact the Sanskrit word Buddha simply means "to awaken," which he did. Since the Buddha was an ordinary

person just like we are, the only difference between us is that he increased his awareness until he literally woke up to all the problems. His method of doing that is now called the 'dharma,' which is nothing more than the path he walked and the awareness training he learned. It is still there and it still works.

I am not a religious person and because I mention the Buddha and the dharma, I know to some of you this must sound all-kinds-of-religious, but trust me in this, the dharma is non-denominational. It is nothing other than a method to become more aware in life. This is what I write about here and try to point out to anyone who can listen. Years from now employers won't care as much about what college diplomas you have as what mind training experience you have attained and can demonstrate.

As my first dharma teacher used to say to me, "We are all initiates in life, but the question is, to what degree?" The same goes for awareness. We are all aware, but perhaps not aware enough to be able to catch our own reactions before they get beyond our control. With some awareness training, we can learn to respond appropriately and with compassion rather than just blindly react.

Awareness is the root of compassion, and compassion is the key life in this world.