

IDIOT COMPASSION  
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By Michael Erlewine ([Michael@Erlewine.net](mailto:Michael@Erlewine.net))

Compassion is something that for me is a work in progress. Sometimes I feel I know what compassion is about, and at other times I don't. It is often easier for me to feel compassion for helpless animals than conniving humans, but I understand why I feel this way and am working on it.

I also find most of the guides to developing compassion not very helpful. I know the authors' mean well, but trying to be kind and trying to be compassionate is just that, trying. "Trying doesn't do it; doing does it" is my motto. There has to be a better way.

Let's face it, true compassion is something pretty rare in my book. Yes, it does come over me from time to time, but more often I am subject to what is called "idiot compassion," where I feel empathy to make 'myself' feel better, or so I don't have to actually deal with the situation, or just to cover up the symptoms of suffering, make the problem go away, etc., -- something like that. I feel I ought to do "good" for someone or I feel sorry for them. Use your own words, but you know what I am pointing at here. This is not true compassion. Real compassion is still elusive for me much of the time. Nice work if you can get it.

My own view is that the natural world, the world of Mother Nature, is conspicuously lacking in compassion. In that world, it is mostly eat or be eaten, and don't stop looking over your shoulder as long as you have life, and so on. Check it out. And how are people any different? There is one notable exception, and that is the love and deep compassion that a mother has for her child. However, we are not all mothers. What about the rest of us and mothers when they are not with child? Where should we look for compassion to come from? That is my question.

Let's face it, true kindness is in short supply, and "forcing-a-smile" compassion often has to pass for the real thing. I have spent time thinking about where greater compassion is ever going to come from, short of going to some place like India and, in Mother-Teresa style, immersing myself. I am no saint, either.

Many fellow dharma practitioners that I have met are also worried about a lack of spontaneous or natural compassion on their parts. You can't get blood from a stone, and beginning dharma practice, like any kind of practice (guitar, sports, etc.) can be a bit on the dry side -- not a lot of juice. That is why I found the following teaching to be so clear.

As often is the case in my experience, I found my answer in some very esoteric Buddhist texts. I am not saying this is the only answer, but the moment I read it, something clicked, and I found myself saying (to myself), "of course." Instead of trying to manufacture or drum up some compassion, these very advanced texts suggest that compassion is simply a natural result or

byproduct of increased awareness. Compassion just comes naturally when we develop our awareness. End of story.

In other words, we don't have to worry about compassion and the lack thereof. We don't have to somehow manufacture it. Instead, if we just concentrate on developing greater awareness (like most dharma practices involve), compassion will naturally arise over time just as the Sun comes up each morning.

I never liked the idea of "trying" to feel compassionate anyway, mainly because it didn't work. I tried it on as best I could and rejected it. Much better is the concept that as we gradually become more aware, compassion just arises to the degree that our awareness grows. We become responsible to (and for) all and everyone around us, naturally, and gradually. It finally dawns on us.

The miniscule amount of my own experience with awareness and compassion has shown me that this teaching is the truth. The more aware I become, the more naturally I just respond to everything around me in a more compassionate way. I can assure you that my family is very happy when I show greater kindness and compassion around the house. And of course, until true compassion clicks in, I do the best I can to be kind. I try.

The moral of the story for me is to forget about faking it and just put my head down and work on my mind training, on generating awareness of my own mind and the situation around me. Compassion will just occur on its own as I progress. I don't have to find it somewhere and then add it to the mix. Compassion is already a natural byproduct of my awareness. I just need more awareness, and I am working on it.