



Compassion in Action, by Ram Dass

When we look at the vast sadness and suffering in the world, we often experience intense pain in our hearts. The suffering so often seems cruel, unnecessary, and unjustified ~ reflecting a heartless universe. The human greed and fear that are causing much of the suffering seem out of control. But when our hearts open in the midst of this, we want to help. This is the experience of compassion. Compassion is the tender opening of our hearts to pain and suffering. When compassion arises in us, we see and acknowledge what we often push away ~ the parts of life that cause us sadness, anger or outrage. The powerful awakening of our own compassion can tune us not just to the nurturing and sustaining forces of the world, but to the oppressive and destructive ones as well. When we open to these directly and become familiar with them, instead of avoiding them as we often do, we are more likely to hear ways to respond with love and support to relieve the suffering. When the pain is our own, we want to end it. If we can't do this by ourselves, we long for help. When it is not our cry, but someone else's, compassion allows us to feel it as our own, to feel the same longing, to hear our hearts calling us to help. The Dalai Lama has said, "Love and compassion are not necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive. With them, we can make a joint effort to solve the problems of the whole of humankind." Compassion is the basis of all truthful relationships: it means being present with love ~ for ourselves and for all life, including animals, fish, birds, and trees. Compassion is bringing our deepest truth into our actions, no matter how much the world seems to resist, because that is ultimately what we have to give this world and one another.

--Ram Dass