

Week 16 - Live Questions and Answers

How do I stay with my fear when it feels so uncomfortable in my body, like I am slipping on the mountain and about to go into a free fall with no harness or rope or rock to grab onto, when my voice is gone? Is it important to stay with the fear? Or can I quickly try to change it into love and compassion? Bonnie

"A Taoist story tells of an old man who accidentally fell into the river rapids leading to a high and dangerous waterfall. Onlookers feared for his life. Miraculously, he came out alive and unharmed downstream at the bottom of the falls. People asked him how he managed to survive.

"I accommodated myself to the water, not the water to me. Without thinking, I allowed myself to be shaped by it. Plunging into the swirl, I came out with the swirl. This is how I survived."

Letting go of control and defense, is indeed like a free fall of a cliff into fear. Examine what the fear might be? It can seem like the fall will result in a bloody crash, death, infinite falling into an abyss out of which you will never be able to get out. It takes courage to surrender our illusionary safety and stop grabbing for defenses. Fear is a memory - you have already survived it.

There are a couple of principles inherent in your question, Bonnie. The one is that the energy of fear is only transformed by moving fully into the fear and integrating it into the vastness of your own consciousness - you cannot change it by an act of will. In other words, you need to fall - surrender fully to the fear without losing your awareness of infinite self that is NOT fear. In other words, we bring the mature spiritual self to the free fall.

The second principle is that the fear itself is a memory - and is an anticipatory fear of feeling shame. It is fear resulting from our unmet need to be heard, validated and loved, in a small child that cannot yet discern truth that this was not their fault. It is important to realize that all moments are in this moment. So, in this moment your attention is on the moment of experiences of shame that are all encapsulated in this moment right now.

Thirdly the fear of feeling shame is linked to the belief system of the feeling of shame. Shame and beliefs around not being "enough" are actually the same thing. Shame is just a very low vibratory experience in our bodies of a slightly higher vibratory experience of the thought that accompanies the fear - namely, the belief that I am unworthy of being heard, validated, seen or loved - in other words "I am bad and unlovable..

So, it is not enough to validate/hold the feeling. We must also see or set a firm limit, using our mature understanding, with this belief system. The belief that one is bad and unlovable is a lie perpetrated by the original need not being met. Your job is to validate/hold the feeling of the child and see (meaning realize and understand) the beliefs of the child. Both are aspects of love - namely, compassion (suffer with the feeling of the child while remaining separate from in awareness) and wisdom - see truth instead of agreeing with the primitive and inaccurate thought forms of the child. Essentially this means knowing (gnosis) - "it is not your fault you believed this and felt this but it is inaccurate." To not correct this is to further perpetrate against yourself and self-perpetuate the shame.

This entire inner dialogue, and interchange, can happen as slowly or as fast as your awareness allows. In the beginning it takes deep investigation and exploration. Later on it becomes self-evident what is happening and can happen in seconds. The principle is always to relate to the fear, shame, needs, beliefs and defenses of the wounded child with compassion and wisdom. The more expanded our state of empathy and understanding,

the more it becomes compassion and wisdom connected to the Truth and Love of God. And the more expanded the quicker the whole inner relational transaction occurs.

Yes, it is uncomfortable in the body - this too is a memory state. When we bring the infinite love of spirit to the mind/emotion/body state, you will find that you have the capacity to be the non-anxious present to your own fear. We are told we need to do this for our clients, but of course, this is impossible until we can do it for ourselves. Learning to hold discomfort with complete comfort is the goal. The quicker the full awareness comes, the quicker the fear is absorbed into the non-fear.

Letting go of control and defense, is indeed like a free fall into fear.

“Don't look for peace. Don't look for any other state than the one you are in now; otherwise, you will set up inner conflict and unconscious resistance. Forgive yourself for not being at peace. The moment you completely accept your non-peace, your non-peace becomes transmuted into peace. Anything you accept fully will get you there, will take you into peace. This is the miracle of surrender”

~ Eckhart Tolle, The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment

My question is, how do I ... or even should I ... find compassion for the anti-maskers? Where are the lines between personal values and broader social/ethical issues?

The first thing to recognize in the question is that the question is posed as if compassion is *for* the anti-maskers. Compassion is an innate quality of Self and so is not “for” anyone.

Compassion is the quality within ourselves that can hold the immense suffering leading to defenses like defiance. In other words, can I find within myself the little kid that is defiant of the teacher, the leader, the authority in my life and see the immense shame underlying being “wrong,” or “bad” that leads to defiance that always hurts ourselves and others. The anti-maskers are showing one version of this dynamic that everyone of us has within ourselves. When we can hold the shame within ourselves we will recognize the shame in others too. When we can see the defense of defiance with understanding for ourselves, we will automatically hold the defiance of others in understanding (not tolerance, but understanding rather than judgment).

The holding and validating of suffering is one aspect of Love that we call compassion.

The other face of Love is Wisdom - and wisdom sees the interaction between suffering, need, belief and defense and is able to set the limit with the behavior of defiance, or any other defense, while at the same time holding the deep sense of solidarity in suffering in love at the same time.

Wisdom will always see truth and express truth, which includes the limits of behaving in a way that reflects the deep inner lie of “I am wrong and bad,” and so I will stomp my feet and deny that I believe this about myself by being defiant of anyone who suggests I am what I believe about myself. I will deny what is going, namely, that my defiance is causing harm to myself and everyone else. Maintaining my dignity of being right when I am wrong is more important than my very life.

Not wearing a mask or wearing a mask is not a value - it is a reflection of stages of development and awareness. Both wearing a mask and not wearing a mask can be flip sides of the same coin- meaning, the fear of judgment and shame makes me compliant or defiant. The underlying motivation can be the same. Compliance can be just as judgmental and self-righteous as defiance.

A higher stage of development sees deeply into the heart of the matter and can hold the dialectic of care for both me and the other. So, the only real question here, is, when I feel rage at others not wearing masks can I dig deeply into my own psyche and see why and have compassion for myself? Yes, this is what we MUST do... if we want to be free and loving.

In this particular case being self-righteous, compliant and good actually coincides with what is in everyone's best interests and being self-righteous and defiant of authority, is actually not in everyone's best interests. However, no one is righteous until their goodness is in alignment with love and insight.

Carol, see my response to Walter as well - it applies here.

A Young disciple came to ask his master:

"Master, what is compassion?"

The Master explained: "An old man was begging at the corner of a busy street.

First an old lady passed by him and infuriated by the beggar poverty gave him a gold coin.

Then a merchant noticing that a small group of men were talking about him gave 5 gold coins to the beggar, and quickly left while walking with his head held high and having a haughty smile.

Then, later, a boy who went to collect some flowers for his mom passed by the beggar; smiled to him and gave him a flower. "

The master asked his disciple:

"Which one of them do you think felt the most compassion toward the beggar?"

"The merchant did", replied the boy.

The master, smiling, continued.

"The merchant acted out of pride, the old lady acted out of pity; however the boy felt real compassion.

Compassion is a far greater and nobler thing than pity. Pity has its roots in fear, and a sense of arrogance and condescension, sometimes even a smug feeling of "I'm glad it's not me."

When your fear touches someone's pain it becomes pity.

When your love touches someone's pain, it becomes compassion.

Feeling compassion is more essential than showing compassion.

To train in compassion, then, is to know all beings are the same and suffer in similar ways, to honor all those who suffer, and to know you are neither separate from nor superior to anyone."

(Author unknown)

One of the things that got my attention on Week 14 was the item about "being able to name specifically, not in generalities, what their spiritual practices are and how they have changed over time. They can name emotional, intellectual and behavioral practices and see how it is connected to the larger goal of growth in awareness and spirit." I would like to hear some things from you (and maybe others) about specific practices. When I examine why I don't have an intentional daily practice beyond observation and inquiry, which I try to do all day long, I hear different internal judgements. And I think that I let those judgements keep me from doing anything at all. I get too externally focused and the things I know that would help me be connected with mySelf get ignored.

Catherine, what are the internal judgments you have of yourself for not coming up with specific practices beyond observation and inquiry? This might be a valuable line of enquiry, especially the relationship issue between your little kid and what grown-ups expected of her.

As I have known you over the years, your overall practice of self-reflection has been practiced in music, poetry, journaling, writing, soul collage, pilgrimage, group, therapy, 12 step programs, study with great teachers,

reading, running and attending retreats, service to others, gardening and nature, working relationship dynamics, movies, rituals ... and I am sure you could come up with more! So, I chuckled at your question. All these practices are about helping us self-reflect. They are all practices to help us see more and hold what we see in love. You don't need any more ideas.... You have enough mind, body, emotion and spirit practices! **Whatever you do**, turn your eye inward, pay attention, see deeply into the heart of the matter, hold what you find in love. That's it. Life is the meditation - if we accept it as that.

*My question stems out of an interaction I had with an individual who told me that:
"Masks aren't effective"*

*After a long exchange, which ventured into health care coverage in the US and Swedish politics, I asked him:
"So, your opinion is that it is a more expedient policy for everyone to just get the virus, some people will die, and then everything will get back to normal. Do I understand you correctly?"*

He gave a long-winded technical reply which ended with:".. yes, let it run its course rather than prolonging the pain."

I was satisfied with this answer, because I concluded from this that this was not an intellectual difference in facts, but a difference of values - which is being disguised intellectually.

I should add that this individual was the valedictorian from my high school class, he is a born-again Christian and a medical doctor. And I have had other people tell me, that they have heard from doctors' friends of theirs, that masks don't work to stem the virus. Yet, what I took away from THIS particular doctor, was that he was making a value judgement on human life, not the efficacy of a possible solution. He simply accepts that people will die - and is unwilling to do anything about it.

So, my question is... what are my motivations for not confronting this doctor anymore? Why am I merely satisfied that I believe he has revealed his values? Is it because pushing further will entrench this person back into their belief system and not have any effect? If I push further, will that shame him into attacking back?

Or

Am I ashamed of my own secular values? Am I unwilling to confront this doctor's values head-on for fear of having my own values revealed as being "home-brewed?" Am I chickening out from the fight?(or as Bonnie puts it... giving into fear). Though I don't feel fearful... I actually feel kinda pleased.

Which brings me back to Monks and Mystics and chapter 7 about Peak Experiences and how religionized faith causes constriction of the human condition... but, of course, it's really easy for me to see/say that! That statement fits into my own judgement about organized religions.

So, yes, this is about me valuing my own values.

Walter

"I feel I change my mind all the time. And I sort of feel that's your responsibility as a person, as a human being – to constantly be updating your positions on as many things as possible. And if you don't contradict yourself on a regular basis, then you're not thinking." ~Malcolm Gladwell

Ah yes, the rationalizations we can come up with to support our lack of care for others, and of course, ourselves too. This doctor is just revealing in his discourse the fact that he has no care for himself or others and rationalizes or actually distorts the facts. Quite horrifying really when one considers that the first oath of the doctor is "to do no harm."

This is not a difference of values but a difference in stages of development. He is revealing a wounded young soul filled with fears and shame, a black and white mind set, with defenses of rationalization, intellectualization, denial, splitting and projection. (2nd quadrant).

To enter into a debate with someone that is living in defenses of reason (that actually makes no sense). It is foolhardy to say the least. You are right, Walter, this just gives more ammunition for the counter argument. (Ever invited a Jehovah Witness into your home?). We can only see and experience and understand the level of development that we have attained. To see beyond what we think we know requires concerted effort, deep desire, inner seeking, spiritual discipline and a stated wish to see what someone else, further along the path, can see that you cannot. You have to be able to at least discern that someone else has an awareness that you do not yet have. This requires at the minimum, humility. Every level of attainment has a ceiling and this ceiling is a one-way mirror. The person in the room below cannot see the room above. In the room above, the person can see all levels beneath, but not the one above.

The truth is you *can* see where he is at in his development, but he cannot even conceive of the notion of "care for self AND other. This requires expanded consciousness to hold the both/and. Right now, he is in the constricted state of a child who wants what he wants in the short term, (entitlement), high anxiety about "getting the punishment over and done with." Are you able to see his child's need, fear, beliefs and defenses? He learned to be a very smart boy to avoid his fears.

He is not trying, wanting or asking you to show him the way to a more loving and expanded state of understanding and insight. So, you do not offer it.

I don't know *why* you didn't engage the debate, but it was correct. My suspicion is that you have tried that so many times before and know that it does not work.

Now the issue is to not be smug in having a little more insight than someone else, or judgmental of this person, but to see the suffering in which this person is immersed, with deep compassion and correct insight into what the loving and wise response to such a person might be for yourself and for him?

I want to be very clear that it is not a "value" to disregard human life. It is abuse. There is a propensity in certain sectors of the society to try to legitimize abuse, neglect, violence, pedophilia, domestic abuse etc. as a "right" of expression and a difference of "values or culture." This is hogwash. Abuse is abuse. It is not about difference of culture or values. Either we value and respect ourselves and one another and understand what is harmful and destructive to ourselves or others, or we live violent and abusive lives internally and externally. The capacity to live in loving relationship with self and others, or not, is an issue of evolution, growth and levels of human development. All life is sacred. And I mean ALL life is sacred.

"Life is sacred, that is to say, it is the supreme value, to which all other values are subordinate."

~Albert Einstein

