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A free publication celebrating your evolving spirit • Issue Forty Four • January 2011

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—The Dalai Lama

# Compassion

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# Compassion...



Happy New Year to all of you!

At the beginning of this new year, 2011 (can you believe it?) I think it's a great time to focus on compassion. This issue is filled with terrific points of view on the topic, and you can go very deep in your understanding if you choose to meditate on some of the concepts here.


Even with much awareness and understanding there is always the opportunity to go deeper, as so many of you know.

I found 2010 to be a challenging year, both personally and professionally. I learned a lot, suffered, and enjoyed many blessings. I can feel that as I have certain experiences—they allow me to have greater compassion for others. I used to think I understood certain things, and I may have on an intellectual level, but I can really feel what they are going through once I have gone through it myself. Experiential understanding. Wisdom.

So into 2011 we go! A fresh start, a new slate to fill up with exciting new possibilities. I am taking the opportunity this year to create a new business name and identity for my company. The new company is called *Shine Visual Communications*. I'm excited about it, and the name feels right.

I hope you also have plans to create, expand and shine in this new time. Check out our calendar of events on the [www.evolvingyourspirit.com](http://www.evolvingyourspirit.com) website or sign up to receive the calendar via email. You'll find ways to connect with each other and share knowledge and experiences. And please click to "like" us on facebook! It all connects and creates community.

I'll leave you with this quote by Fredrick Buechner, which I feel sums it up beautifully: "Compassion is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too."

Peace and joy,  


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*Issue Forty Four, January 2011*

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## Check out our Website!

We've got a great Calendar of Events up there (you can sign up to receive it monthly as an email!), all the past issues of the magazine that you can download, as well as info on how to sign up to have *Evolving Your Spirit* delivered to your home if you like.

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The next issue of *Evolving Your Spirit* will be available March 15.  
Our theme will be *Beauty*.

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Please write in with your ideas and comments to [debbie@evolvingyourspirit.com](mailto:debbie@evolvingyourspirit.com). Thanks!

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# Divine Mother's Milk

By Sara Connell

After years of trying Eastern and Western fertility treatments and procedures, my husband and I became pregnant with twin boys. We were ecstatic! I meditated every day of my pregnancy and rejoiced in my expanding belly and the thrills of seeing them on the ultrasound machine at our OB appointments. Then, at 21-1/2 weeks (about five months), I went into premature labor. After

desperate attempts to save them, the twins were delivered via c-section—stillborn.

For ten days, I could find not a single moment of peace or relief. I felt agony at the babies being ripped from my body and a colossal grief at the loss of their lives with us. I called out for some message of comfort or support, but heard nothing.

On the eleventh day, I lay on the floor trying to breathe. My husband had gone out for lunch with some friends, trying to find his own way through his hurt and unable, in that moment, to bear the grief in my face. I turned over on my back. Any way I tried to lay felt wrong. I flipped over again and stomped my feet on the floor. I wanted to cry but felt too exhausted.

In the next moment, the lighting in the room changed. I felt what can best be described as a whoosh of energy. I felt a palpable but invisible presence enter the room; one I had come to know as The Divine Mother.

"I have two things to say to you, Sara." I heard the Divine Mother's words clear in my mind, as if she'd spoken aloud. "First, some babies die. It's inherent in nature. Dolphin babies, dog babies, and human babies. This isn't personal. Two: this is an initiation. You've now been initiated."

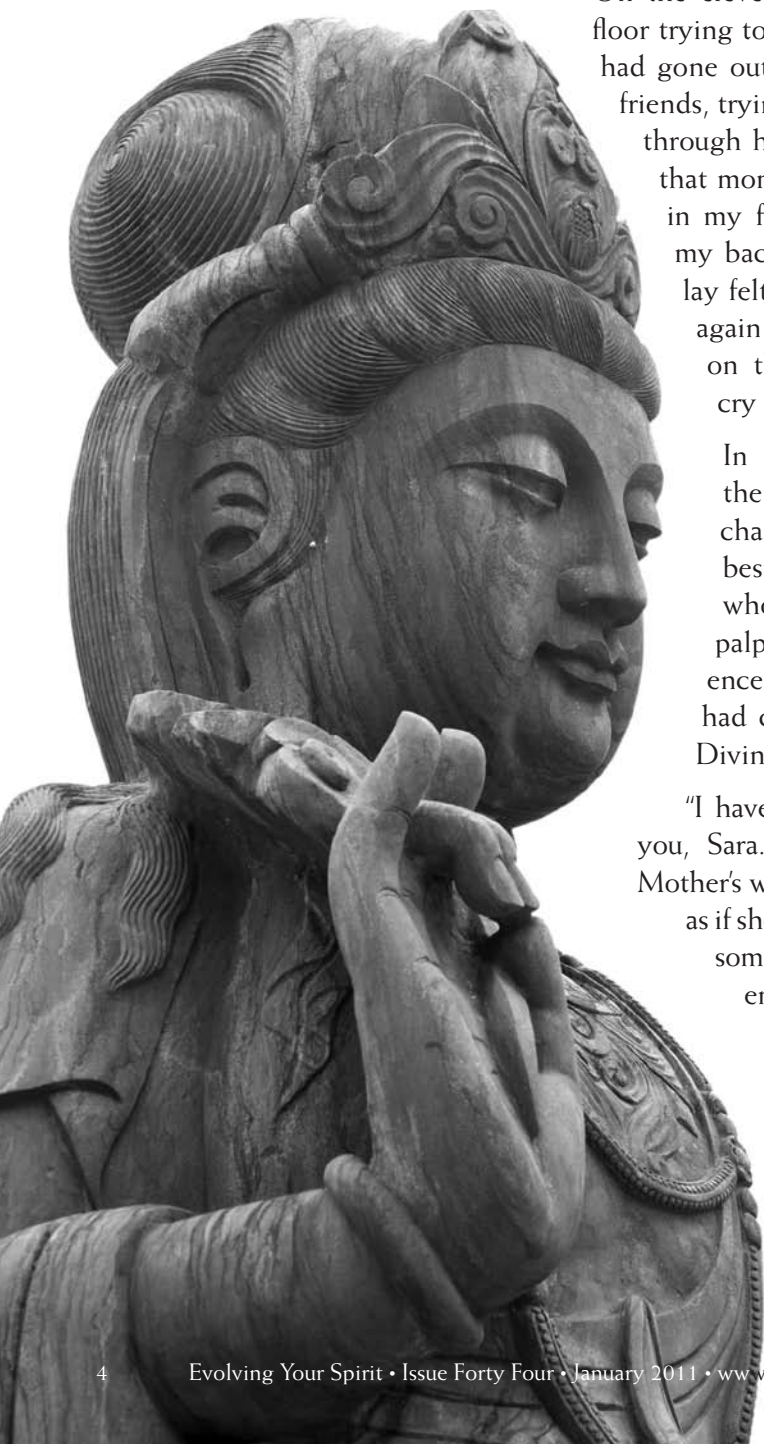
The room went still and I was alone again. I remained on the floor, contemplating her message. She hadn't told me why this had happened, or that it would all be made right; she hadn't taken away my grief, but her message did bring me comfort and I took the first deep breath I'd taken in nearly two weeks.

In the three years that have followed the twins' death, I've been presented repeatedly, in some of the spiritual and counseling circles in which I run, with inquiries to find or look for the blessing or the gift in the situation. I sometimes resented those prompts, especially when still raw from the pain and roiling effort of grief. There have been days I've been resistant to look for anything good that could be part of the experience. But even in those moments, I've held the awareness that someday I might be able to find the gifts. I'd experienced the way that other pain from my past was often a doorway to greater awakening, but that awareness usually presented itself with the detachment and distance of time and more healing.

The Tao de Jing encourages "not to look for the blessing in the midst of our trials and tribulations." So I've given myself space. Recently however, I have felt my heart opening. Last week, when a colleague asked me if I'd discovered a gift, I heard myself answer, "Compassion."

The dictionary definition of compassion is: "deep awareness and sympathy for another's suffering and the desire to alleviate it."

According to this definition, I was already a compassionate person. The new compassion I experienced was



different, however: more expansive, more elemental. Compassion is the best name I can give to the way I can sit with someone after they've experienced a loss in their life, and the way I can look someone in the eyes when they speak of their sadness or their fear or their hopes: without flinching, without fixing, without turning away. The new compassion is deep. It is the ability to be present and offer a spaciousness that can hold and allow all things; a whole spectrum of feelings.

"I feel like you really understand," people say often to me now—from clients to close family members to people I've just met who don't know anything about me at all. Apparently compassion is an energy that is felt before words. And the interesting thing is that these people are right. I do understand. I understand now in a way I never could have before.

In the initial throes of grief after the death of the twins, I put a picture of Quan Yin—one of the faces of the Divine Mother—on the table next to my bed. The illustration features a strong and beautiful woman sitting with her eyes turned inward in meditation, on the petals of a large lotus flower, light radiating from her heart. I learn from reading the back of the card that lotus flowers grow in the mud. The compassion of the Divine Mother has grown from the mud of my loss; it is an essential nutrient in The Divine Mother's milk.

Richard Rohr, a modern-day mystic and spiritual teacher, says that the heart can be opened by either great suffering or great joy. Given a choice, I would never choose suffer-

ing, but I cannot discount the good that can come from the pain.

I've heard it said that the ancient Sufi poets used to chant, "Break my heart, Oh God. Break my heart, oh break my heart again." I imagine they asked this because they knew the particular gifts that come from being cracked open. They knew that however one was opened, the results of more presence, more aliveness, more compassion, were ultimately the same.

I believe that more will be revealed about my initiation to motherhood and the gift of our twins. I'm content to allow the insights to unfold in their divine timing and to practice the gift of compassion that the Divine Mother has proffered. In the meantime, we're pregnant again (24 weeks!) and I've put in a request that this time I be cracked opened by Joy.



*Sara Connell is an author, speaker and life coach specializing in women's health and empowerment. She has a private practice in*

*Chicago and speaks regularly to groups and organizations locally and around the world. She hosts the monthly internet radio show, "Being Woman," and she is currently writing a memoir, Call of the Goddess, on her journey of re-claiming healthy sexuality and the Power of the Feminine. Contact Sara at: [www.saraconnell.com](http://www.saraconnell.com) or on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/SaraConnellAuthorSpeakerCoach>.*

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# And— Let it Begin with Me

by Alyse Rynor

How often have you stood in front of the mirror and said something not so nice to yourself while looking at your own reflection? And, when was the last time you made a verbal blunder while speaking to someone important, feeling as if once more you had just put your foot in your mouth? Do you then let yourself *have it* all day long with continued criticism running inside your head? Like most of us, you've probably done some of these very things. Yet, the question here is not so much about what you did at the moment, but how long you continued to carry on the negative self talk and blame afterwards.

If someone you dearly loved was hurting or had a tough day at work or school, how would you speak to them? I'm guessing you'd have some compassion. Yet, each time you criticize yourself it hurts, doesn't it? What do you think happens to your ability to have compassion for *you*? One thing that I know about compassion, is that it is often much easier to find for others than it is to give to myself.

I have found that compassion, stemming from love, truly is a healer. People often fear that giving compassion themselves a selfish thing to do. Yet, I will tell you that if you don't give it to yourself first, you won't have any to share with anyone else. The biggest gift of developing compassion for yourself is that it can then be easier to give to others; for what you judge in another is typically the very thing you don't like about yourself. Therefore, when you learn to be compassionate towards those parts of yourself that you've deemed

unacceptable, it opens your heart to offering this same compassion to another. The gift of compassion brings with it a greater sense of freedom, lightness, self acceptance and love. And that feels good.

I invite you to take a moment out of your busy life, to notice where

self, you open up to the gifts your old wounds have been holding. Most times the part of ourselves that we don't like are merely a part that was created in an effort to keep us safe years ago, something we no longer need today. Can you do the simple act of thanking yourself for taking

## If you don't go within, you go without" —Conversations with God

you are not yet feeling compassion. *What do you still find intolerable in yourself?* How have you been treating that part of you? Is it time to learn to love your body? Accept the part of you that fears getting hurt again? Understand what might be going on with your finances? When you can own, love and accept these parts of yourself with loving compassion, you will be able to find the gifts that are hidden within, just waiting to come out into the Light for your healing and the healing of others. *Those gifts are always there because as a Divine Being, you were made perfect, whole and complete.* When you give compassion to a part of yourself that you haven't liked, you take a step towards integration and a return to wholeness.

Self compassion is a practice of self love. If you can allow the parts of you that you call good to accept, (rather than push away) the parts of you that you don't see as perfect, you will be taking the first step toward being compassionate to yourself. And, when you offer compassion to your-

care of *you*? With that little gesture of gratitude, you are offering yourself compassion. When you bring a greater sense of compassion to yourself, you fill yourself with love and acceptance from within. And what you put in, you are able to give out in greater numbers to the world; thus putting into action the lyrics of the song we know so well, which says, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with ME." ✨



Alyse Rynor, LCSW is the founder of Soul Choice Counseling in Evanston, providing Holistic Counseling & Integrative Coaching

to those on a path of personal and spiritual growth, helping heal what blocks you from making self-loving choices. Private counseling sessions are available in office & coaching by phone. Contact Alyse at 847.840.0884 or [alyse.lcsww@gmail.com](mailto:alyse.lcsww@gmail.com).

## Giving Women a Place to Tell Their Stories

### **Meet Pat LaPointe**

Pat has always enjoyed writing and working with women. Though things are changing these days, she saw how she, her mother and mothers before her had been taught to keep their mouths shut. When they did speak, rarely did they get any validation back. Pat herself felt she had much to say and share... perhaps many could be helped by being given a space to express their opinions. It might help others to share and to feel more empowered.

Pat's passion is to provide a place for women to be heard. We all have a story, and it is so great to sit down and write it down. By reading each others work, they can share each other's stories with compassion, and are validated by each other.

One of the organizations she's involved in is called Story Circle Network, and she's the chairperson of the membership committee.

In the internet writing circles, women share their life experiences and have these experiences honored and validated by other women. This allows the women to celebrate the positive stories that are shared and have compassion for those that write about their struggles and challenges.

Check out one of Pat's websites: [www.changesinlife.com](http://www.changesinlife.com). You might find you'd like to submit your story!

## Money and Compassion: *Reclaiming Your Power*

by Julie Murphy Casserly, CFP®, CLU, ChFC

It happens every year. The holiday season sneaks up on us. And we spend, spend, and spend some more to show our loved ones how much we care. Come January, however, the season of giving turns into the sinking feeling of regret. That holiday cheer becomes the winter blues once the credit card bills and bank statements sink our high spirits. And all that compassion we felt for our friends and family transforms to commiseration over our financial faults.

This time of year—the post holiday period—it's difficult to feel compassion for others when you're in a state of financial shock. And it doesn't help that our culture teaches us that spending is the best way to show compassion and feel happiness during that special time of year.

It's so easy to practice compassion during the holiday season. We feel love from all angles—at work, at home, and even in the mad dash to find that perfect last minute gift. So why do we feel so guilty when it's over? We gave so much, practiced compassion even when it was difficult, yet we find ourselves in a place of commiseration.

*Here's an exercise.* Get a piece of paper and write 'MONEY' on the top of it. Then put it aside, and sit in silence. After a few moments, go back to that paper and write down the first three things that come to mind when you see that word.

If you feel burdened or anxious about money, what you wrote probably had a negative connotation. This is especially true if you went a little overboard on your "compassion" during the holiday. Did you

stress out when the holiday spending cleared and you were left with more bills than you thought? Or maybe you panicked about a large purchase you made during that after-Christmas sale.

Though it is normal to feel guilt about spending more than you expected, it's not okay to let that feeling bring your whole being down. So here's your task: don't commiserate with yourself about those negative feelings. Sit with them. Examine them. Figure out where they stem from, but don't feel sorry for yourself while you're doing this. Remember, you have the power to change your situation. Don't give that power away to negative feelings of pity or self loathing.

Now that you've thought about those adverse feelings and sat with them for a while, let them go. You know where they're coming from so you know how to counteract them with a positive thought and action. Feeling compassion for others and yourself will get you moving in a direction of happiness and power over money. ✨



*Julie Murphy Casserly, CFP®, CLU, ChFC, is a 15-year veteran of the financial services industry, founder of JMC*

*Wealth Management in Chicago and author of the award-winning book, "The Emotion Behind Money: Building Wealth from the Inside Out." Julie helps people understand how their emotional attitudes and behaviors affect how they earn, spend and save. For more information, please visit <http://www.juliemurphycasserly.com>.*

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## Compassion and the *Family*

A holiday season with much giving and receiving is behind us and we've entered a branding new year—I think it is vitally important that we seek to deepen our family's understanding and outpouring of compassion now more than ever.

Beyond the way many traditionally view compassion, we can heighten our mission to assist and heal if we perceive compassion in a slightly new light. Most of us are taught that pity and compassion are close cousins, if not identical twins. Whether outwardly stated or not, often the energy behind the healing thoughts, words and actions that we extend towards others in the name of compassion is laced with pity surrounding their unseemly predicament or

state of being. The assistance is well-meaning, to be sure, but usually along with a helping hand, the donor subconsciously doles out an energetic belief that matches the "unfortunate" situation, actually helping to sustain the current energy surrounding the state of affairs.

A soul nurturing perspective, however, shares that true compassion is not an *I can do it for you* vibe, but rather a *YOU can do it for yourself* vibe. In other words, the most healing offering that we can ever freely give to another is to fully see/feel him as who he really is beyond the physical mask and predicament—past the "human suit" and into his true eternal and infinite nature. The individual before us is a spirit, pure and simple, no matter

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by Annie Burnside

what aspect of humanity he is currently exhibiting. It is imperative that we teach our children that it is another's highest potential as a self-realized spirit-embodied human being that we hope to ignite through our offerings, not simply a reinforcement of his perceived "stuckness" and misfortune. If we see an individual as lost, disabled, or down-and-out, then we only help to keep him there energetically. It is actually our change in how we perceive him that most offers him the gift of a lifetime—an expanded awareness.

I feel children must be taught to recognize the *feeling* underlying all gestures as the most important component of any offering, be it through thought, word or deed. As far as compassion, it is always the feeling behind the assistance that matters most to initiate true and lasting change in our good works. Compassion that leads to healing comes through nothing less than a heightened awareness of the other's divine essence. Acknowledgement of this in our heart and mind as we offer the warm cup of coffee, the used clothing or the large financial donation is of utmost importance to both the giver and the receiver. It is the energy exchange that really seals the deal, for upliftment and expanded awareness are truly priceless.

*Teaching children to see themselves in all others is an important first step.* When they come to recognize their legitimate energetic connection to all that lies before them, they are better able to identify all others as part of the same divine whole. The old adage encouraging us to "put ourselves in someone else's shoes" begins to carry an even deeper meaning with a new perception of compassion. No longer an outer possibility that we may someday face the same circumstances, but rather an inner revelation that we are all indeed *one*.

Throughout the year, I invite us all to give a gift that keeps on giving through a new understanding of compassion and let us encourage our children to do the same with their peers and all others.

Why not offer compassion to those in "need" sans pity with a powerful punch behind it—an infusion of positive, empowering energy that speaks volumes without necessarily opening our mouths. Let's really see the individuals before us. Feel their presence. Acknowledge their magnificence as an aspect of infinite divine essence, for what stands before us is nothing short of a luminous soul in human form, whether rich or poor, healthy or physically challenged in the moment. Let's teach our children

the feeling behind loving service—Compassion Unplugged—and make an active healing difference in the lives of those we touch in 2011 and beyond.

Let's make *compassion* and *gratitude* the most-used words in our home this year. Beyond the words, let's teach our children the vibratory surge when the words are actually felt from a place deep within. We can choose to explain and model the true meaning behind these common terms so that our children understand their infinite power to create change.

"JOY to the World" can simply be sung or it can be deeply felt and offered up and out. It is always our choice! ✨



*Annie Burnside is a parent, educator, and professional soul nurturer, residing in the Chicago area. As a soul nurturer, she helps others to awaken to their own spiritual truths by providing spiritual support and encouragement. Her book, Soul to Soul Parenting is available now on her website, where excerpts and information can also be found: [www.annieburnside.com](http://www.annieburnside.com)*

# The Power of Compassion

by Maggie Amari Wilkins

I witnessed the power of compassion this past year when my husband and I traveled to India. As soon as I stepped outside the airport I was swept away by the layers of smells, sounds and expressions that hit me all at once. As I stepped into the taxi we drove off into traffic that crisscrossed so fast that it looked like madness, yet in an odd way seemed to have a divine order to it. The barrage of sensations was overwhelming and signaled to me to sit back and allow.

Two hours later the taxi dropped us off in front of the ashram we were visiting, leaving a swirl of dust behind it. I was instantly greeted by a group of children begging for money, it seemed they came out of thin air. I was surprised how present their faces looked. Not one wore shoes and they wore shirts that had holes and missing buttons. I looked up to see women waiting in the distance. I thought maybe they were the children's mothers hoping their children would get from me some Indian Rupees, equivalent to about two U.S. pennies.

In an instant, compassion filled my heart. I wanted to bring my world of abundance to them. I felt my compassion pour over these children and wanted to help in some way rather than just giving them a few pennies.

I knew that to understand them I needed to live among them. We rented a house in the town and so began my authentic Indian experience. It was there, living with the local people in their community, that I witnessed something that had not seemed possible to my current awareness. My neighbors were compassionate about all things—even if they did not have one thing. Every person rose in the morning at 4:30 a.m. and gathered outside of their homes. I watched as they prayed as a community—they started the day with the awareness of the infinite. Chants of thanks for being alive to experience another day of God, nature, and each other filled the morning air. Their prayer was only of praise, not asking for something, just simply thanks for what is. This was

uncommon in my experience, in my culture. I had never witnessed such simple pure love. The experience was profound.

During the day, when I went off to sit with a spiritual master in an Indian temple, my new friends left the village to ask visitors for money. Their begging was like my going to work every day. They begged to live because other work was not to be had. When I would return to our house, the dirt floor of the hut had been swept. One time I came home to find an ornate, flower design drawn with chalk at the door. The artistic matt was a symbol, an expression that my house was loved. Children would visit me and bring papayas that they had collected by climbing a nearby tree. Their compassion for me awakened an even deeper love in my heart. A silent bond, filled with love, grew between us. By being on the receiving end, I felt the acceptance that compassion offers as a gift to the world.

In the evening, we would gather at a villager's house for biscuits and Chai tea. The same children that had spent the day begging on the streets ran about in youthful pleasure. Stories were shared, not of pain or of sadness for suffering, but of joy and laughter. Suffering came to them as it does in our world, but with them suffering left as fast as it came. A boy that often visited me came by my house one day. It was obvious he was ill, his eyes were glassy and his manner was slow. Contaminated water was a constant problem. I asked if I could help him in some way, do

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anything to ease his discomfort. He dismissed my need to care for him as though I made too much of the situation. He was only ten and he held an absolute belief that his suffering would pass.

*"...to know what we see is not always what is. There is something more than what we are really seeing" — Eckhart Tolle*

In bonding with the villagers, I found a profound peace. There were no requirement to be nice, or happy, or well. I was fully embraced merely because I lived among them. Compassion brought the bond of oneness— allowing the real truth to be told.

The last time that I crossed the threshold of my hut, I once again offered them money. Compassion moved me to connect to them, to understand who they are, and upon leaving to offer them even the smallest gift to make their life easier. They accepted only what they needed and said to me "what is remaining you can give to others."

I saw that community and compassion is the foundation upon which the people of India survived. If a family had not collected enough money for their needs, the women of town left food at their doorstep. The depth of compassion they had for others is a greater social interconnectedness and humanism than I'd ever witnessed.

We might be moved to write, offer a service, or help another to expand his or her compassionate bond of the human experience. Compassion is not required for you to be a good person but when it is given greatness becomes you. Why not let compassion be offered today and witness greatness! ✨



*Maggie-Amari Wilkins was Eckhart Tolle's personal assistant when he first published The Power of Now.*

*Maggie now works and teaches in the Chicago area and in Vancouver BC, sharing her experience and knowledge in various groups and workshops. Reach Maggie at [www.one-heart.net](http://www.one-heart.net), or call 847-648-8955.*

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## Better than a Multivitamin!

by Laurie Buchanan

I feel that love includes many different emotions; among them are pity, sympathy, empathy, and compassion. They all include the capacity for sharing the painful feelings of another, however, they're different:

Pity is a thought that usually results from an encounter with an unfortunate or injured person, animal, or situation. It usually ends here—a mental acknowledgement that isn't followed by action steps.

Sympathy is a feeling of concern for another; the desire to see them better off or happier. It can include being personally affected emotionally by an encounter.

Empathy is more than the recognition of another's suffering. Often characterized as the ability to "put oneself into another's shoes," it's a combination of thinking and feeling—a deep emotional resonance that can spark a desire to alleviate another's suffering. It's responding to the needs of others based on how we feel.

Compassion is a profound and positive emotion prompted by the pain of others. More vigorous than empathy, the feeling commonly gives rise to action steps that work toward alleviating another person's suffering. It's responding to the needs of others regardless of how we feel.

It has been scientifically proven that when we experience sustained positive emotions like compassion, care, forgiveness, gratitude, and patience, our body produces dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) which is secreted by the adrenal glands. DHEA is known as the vitality hormone—it accelerates renewal and improves our health.

When we experience sustained negative emotions such as anger, bitterness, worry, or fear, our body produces cortisol which contributes to sub-optimal performance, accelerates aging, and is degenerative to health.

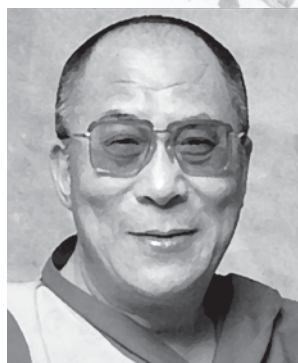
Better than a multivitamin, compassion is good for whole health—body, mind, and spirit. ✨



Laurie Buchanan, PhD, HHP, CHT, RMT is a Holistic Health Practitioner, Board Certified with the American Association of Drugless Practitioners. She is the owner of HolEssence in Crystal Lake, IL. Her specific areas of focus are Energy Medicine, Personal Growth, and Spiritual Awareness. Please

visit her website at [www.HolEssence.com](http://www.HolEssence.com) and her blog, *Speaking from the Heart*, at <http://holoessence.wordpress.com>.

## A Powerful Viewpoint



His Holiness, The Dalai Lama

*I would like to explain the meaning of compassion which is often misunderstood. Genuine compassion is based not on our own projections and expectations, but rather on the rights of the other: irrespective of whether another person is a close friend or an enemy, as long as that person wishes for peace and happiness and wishes to overcome suffering, then on that basis we develop a genuine concern for his or her problems.*

*This is genuine compassion. Usually when we are concerned about a close friend, we call this compassion. This is not compassion; it is attachment. Even in marriage, those marriages that last only a short time, do so because of attachment—although it is generally present—but because there is also compassion. Marriages that last only a short time do so because of a lack of compassion; there is only emotional attachment based on projection and expectation.*

*When the only bond between close friends is attachment, then even a minor issue may cause one's projections to change. As soon as our projections change, the attachment disappears, because that attachment was based solely on projection and expectation.*

*It is possible to have compassion without attachment, and similarly, to have anger without hatred. Therefore we need to clarify the distinctions between compassion and attachment, and between anger and hatred. Such clarity is useful in our daily life and in our efforts toward world peace. I consider these to be basic spiritual values for the happiness of all human beings, regardless of whether one is a believer or a nonbeliever.*



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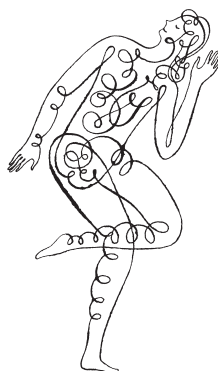
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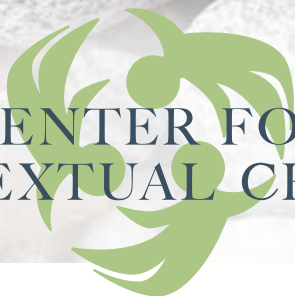
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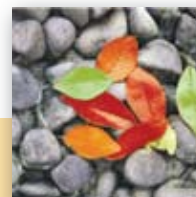
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