

EMBODYING COMPASSION

Kripalu Positive Psychology Summit

Enlightenment's Image Problem



Enlightenment as Relationship

- ❖ Seva: selfless service
- ❖ Bodhisattva: one who works for the enlightenment of all beings

We don't get enlightened
from suffering...

...we become enlightened *to* suffering

Guan Yin

Bodhisattva of Compassion



The Challenges of Witnessing

- ❖ The Good Samaritan Study
(Darley and Batson, 1973)
- ❖ Emotional regulation mediates
compassionate behavior
(Eisenberg et al, 1994)

Yoga & Meditation as tools of Emotional Regulation

- ❖ Demonstrated benefits to resilience, anger expression, mindfulness, and disturbing emotions.

(Chambers et al. 2009, Farb et al. 2012, Kumare et al. 2008, Shapiro et al. 2007, Noggle* et al. 2012...
...and about a million others)

Metta Meditation

- ❖ May you be happy
 - ❖ May you be healthy
 - ❖ May you be free from suffering
 - ❖ May you be at peace
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- ❖ Self – Loved One – Stranger – Enemy – All

Metta Meditation Benefits

- ❖ Increased expression of compassion
(Jazaieri 2013)
- ❖ Increased altruistic behavior
(Reb et al. 2010, Weng et al. 2013, McCall et al 2014)
- ❖ Reduced pain and anger
(Carson et al. 2005, Pace et al. 2009)

Compassionate Yoga Practice

- ❖ Practice with the intention of body, breath and mind serving one another to create awareness.
- ❖ Body awareness (interoception) determines resilience. (Haase et al. 2016)

*Sensitivity to stress is heightened,
yet reactivity is diminished.*

- ❖ Resilience determines our capacity for compassion. (Eisenberg et al. 1994)

Tonglen Meditation

- ❖ Tibetan meditation of giving and taking
- ❖ Breathing in the suffering of others,
Breathing out healing

Compassion Meditation in the Brain

- ❖ Increased activity in the inferior parietal cortex (IPC), associated with **empathy**



- ❖ Increased activity in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), associated with **emotional regulation**



- ❖ Increased activity in the nucleus accumbens, associated with **reward**

Compassion Meditation in the Brain

- ❖ With training, instead of triggering the stress response, the neurological experience of witnessing and attending to suffering in others leads to the activation of reward centers.

(Weng, Fox... Davidson 2013)

- ❖ A stress response to suffering in others is more likely in people who habitually avoid suffering and therefore deprive themselves of the practice of compassion.

Metta Meditation

- ❖ May you be happy
- ❖ May you be healthy
- ❖ May you be free from suffering
- ❖ May you be at peace

Compassion in Practice

Breathe

Relax

Feel

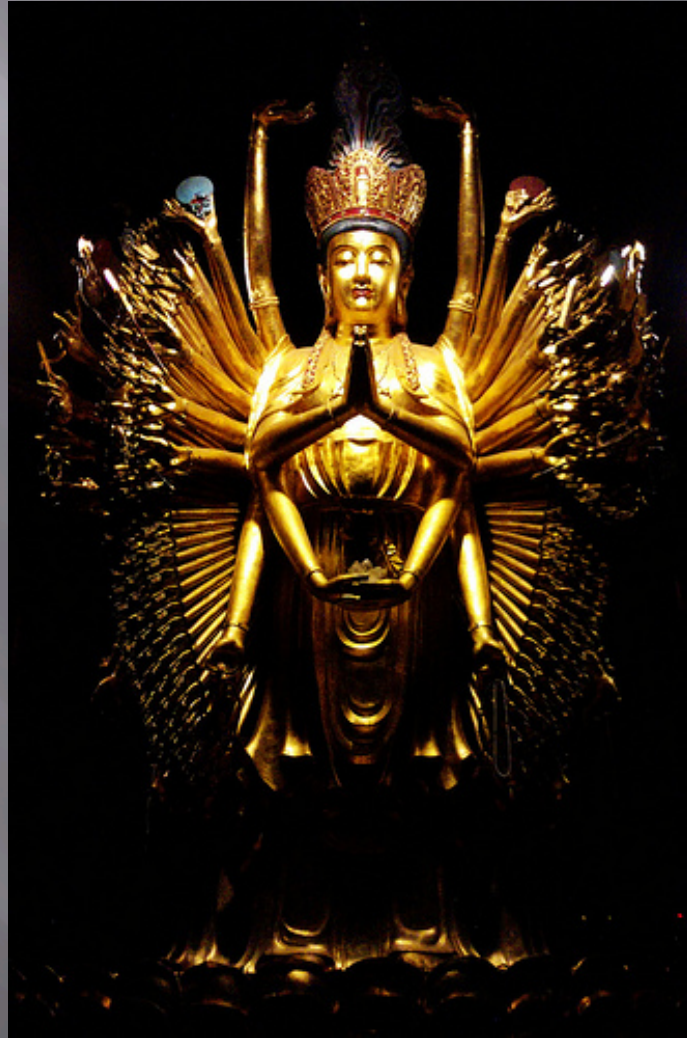
Watch

Allow

Tonglen

*“Offer what you can, where you can,
and let it be enough.”*

What Compassion Can Become: Avalokiteshvara





“The next Buddha may be a community”
-Thich Nat Hanh