Divine Abiding, c. Compassion - read by Biddy O'Connell

Noirin Sheahan · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Noirin Sheahan · 43:28

Tonight I want to look at the way metta shades in tone when we come across difficulties. Metta itself remains intact. Our basis is wishing ourselves and others well. But the goodwill is expressed in compassionate terms with sensitivity to the particular situation.

Compassion is sometimes described as the trembling of the enlightened heart in response to the suffering of the world. There is deep sympathy with the suffering being and the wish that their suffering may come to an end. But there is no anxiety about the situation. This can be very difficult for us to understand. The enlightened being is in touch with a level of peace that is untouched by the suffering and can sustain a calm tenderness even when the heart is breaking or the body is being torn apart. Within the context of peace and tenderness, anything can be borne.

This is what Julian of Norwich learned when, in revulsion at the sufferings of the world, she heard the words: "All shall be well. All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

Compassion is the manifestation of wisdom in the face of suffering. It allows the suffering to elicit a response of tenderness and care without any hint of anxiety or aversion. Sustained by compassion, the enlightened person does not get in any way flustered by the situation and can respond appropriately—for example, caring for an injured being or finding words to comfort.

The Vinaya, the book of monastic discipline, includes a story of the Buddha and Ananda coming across a monk who had acute dysentery and was lying in his soiled robes. You can imagine the sight and the stench. The Buddha and Ananda cleaned the monk and his robes. Afterwards, the Buddha addressed the sick monk's fellows, clarifying that it was their duty to look after one another in case of illness. "Monks," he said, "if you don't tend to one another, who then will tend to you? Whoever would tend to me should tend to the sick."

Another part of the scriptures describes the Buddha finding a monk who had been abandoned by his fellows because of the sores oozing all over his body. His robes were sticking to him, and again just imagine the stench and the sight of this man as he lay there abandoned and dying in agony. The Buddha boiled water and washed the monk with his own hands to clean off the pus. He similarly washed the soiled robes and attended the monk until these were dry. Once the monk had been comforted, the Buddha talked to him of the Dharma, and as you can expect, the monk became fully liberated.

In both of these stories, the Buddha modelled a steadiness of heart that allowed compassion to flow where most people would retreat in alarm and disgust.

At other times, compassionate action could take the form of warding off an aggressor. Sharon Salzberg tells the story of being attacked while in a rickshaw in India. She was badly frightened when she told her teacher Munindra-ji about the incident. He replied, "Oh Sharon, with all the goodwill in your heart, you should have taken your umbrella and whacked that man with it."

Compassion does not mean passivity. We can oppose injustice vigorously so as to prevent suffering.

At other times there may be no appropriate action, no way to prevent or minimise the suffering. In those cases, just to stay nearby and witness the suffering is our only option and is a very precious gift. Simply staying with a suffering person, refusing to abandon them though we can offer no practical help, gives them the best possible opportunity to let their suffering open the door to wisdom. If we can take to heart the first noble truth—that there is suffering—this opens the door to the other truths which liberate us from suffering.

Whether we are caring for a sick person, vigorously opposing injustice, or witnessing some suffering we cannot prevent, we need to be able to resist the reactivity which comes up in the face of suffering. Such non-reactivity is learned every time we sit with difficulties during vipassana: even a slight pain in the knee, the noise of machinery, someone fidgeting nearby, a worrisome thought. All these are forms of suffering. As we learn to bear with these types of disturbance in meditation and their myriad spin-off thoughts and anxieties, we are cultivating the skills we need to respond compassionately in the face of deeper suffering in our own lives and in others.

True compassion has this non-reactivity as its basis. Even though we may be speeding around in an effort to cope with the reality, a compassionate hurry is motivated by care rather than alarm and is completely at ease with the situation.

Barriers to compassion, as with all forms of dukkha, come back to reacting to our feelings. In the case of suffering, there will be an unpleasant feeling at the core and the automatic urge to get rid of this. In many real life situations, we won't have the level of calm concentration needed to recognize this very simple level of our being. We will be spinning such a complex story around the unpleasant feeling that we get hooked by the myriad emotions that the story generates.

The stories we tell ourselves at times of distress emanate from the perceptions of self—the notion that there is a substantial entity lodged somewhere in our body and mind. This self is, or should be, in control of matters.

Imagine you have a pet goldfish who swims quietly around in a tank in your living room. Today when you sprinkle some food into the tank, Goldie doesn't dart around after these nibbles as he usually does. He stays put at the bottom of the tank. Taking a closer look at him, you notice he's lost some of his lustrous

colour and there are some whitish spots in amongst his scales. By this stage there will be unpleasant feelings stirring, causing your face to frown and perhaps stiffening much of your body in tension. What happens next will depend on your habitual tendencies in the face of a perceived threat. Let's say you're a leap-into-action type. A sense of yourself as powerful and resourceful will be established.

A determination to save Goldie from peril. Although you have hardly given Goldie a thought for months beyond tossing a few grains of food into the tank from time to time, he's fast becoming your nearest and dearest, and a sense of enmity is forming around those whitish spots on his scales. Your eyes narrow as you examine them. Aha! Fungus! Dear Goldie, attacked by rotten spores of horrid fungus. Outrage and indignation—it's you and Goldie versus the microscopic world. "Don't worry, Goldie," you whisper into the fishbowl before making a dash to the computer to search for solutions to goldfish spots.

You pace about in consternation as it goes through its infuriating start-up routine. "Everything's going to be fine," you call, banging the keys furiously to get "white spots goldfish" into the Google search line. "Mummy's looking after everything."

What's happening is that compassion has got entangled with one of its near enemies: pity. Pity lets us feel superior to the suffering person. Goldie has been reduced to a pathetic entity that you must rescue and restore to health. There's a clear separation between me, the valiant saviour, and Goldie, the poor creature who needs me. In pity, we can also be suppressing our fears that exactly the same kind of suffering could be visited on us. Thus we can quietly despise a drug addict while outwardly sympathising with their plight. The experience of compassion, on the other hand, unites us with the suffering person. Our own heart trembles in resonance with their plight.

Pity so easily masquerades as compassion. It doesn't help that pity is listed as a virtue in many Christian texts—but in the context of the Christian virtue, the word pity is being used to mean compassion. The difference between the two is that pity includes aversion. We have generated a sense of enmity around the unwelcome sight of those white spots, which in turn evokes a sense of self to combat this enemy. In our rush to rescue, everything that gets in our way is seen as the enemy: computer delays, an incoming phone call, the rest of our agenda for the day, the cat crying for her saucer of milk. These are all irritating demands on our time which is urgently needed for poor little Goldie. And when our trawl through the websites convinces us that most fungal problems result from unclean water, we ourselves become the enemy. We berate ourselves angrily, trying to remember the last time we changed the water. Later, as we scrub and scour the tank, Goldie, in his replacement bowl, can also become the enemy. That good-for-nothing fish putting me to all this trouble!

While compassion has goodwill as its basis, pity adds a big dollop of aversion to the mix. It's very easy for compassion to slide stealthily into pity when we are caring for someone who is ill. With compassion we can see the sick person's strengths as well as their illness. We respect them fully and value their friendship despite their reduced state. When compassion slides into pity, we sense ourselves as strong and

resourceful, the other as needy and weak, depending on us. Whenever there's a very clear dividing line between yourself and the person you're caring for, it's likely that pity is emerging.

Like attachment, pity is a normal aspect of human relationships. It gives us energy and motivation to look after vulnerable people. But it's destructive in the long term. In subtle ways, we might even be preventing the other person from recovering. We fuss over them, trying to anticipate their every need. We sympathise profoundly with every complaint. We counsel against taking any risks—never mind what the doctor says, doctors don't understand. All of this excessive caring drains our energy. In our low moments we resent the sick person and we see ourselves as the victim of their neediness. The aversion has now found a different outlet. Instead of the sickness being the enemy, the sick person has turned into the enemy.

To complicate matters, the sick person often reacts against the aversion underlying our pity. They resent being reduced to the role we are creating for them: the needy person. In their low moments they hate us for so clearly showing them their dependent status. Pity breeds resentment in both parties.

When we see ourselves as the injured party, self-pity is a common reaction. Suppose we valiantly scrub out Goldie's tank and replace it with sparkling clean water. We do this daily for a week, but still Goldie isn't recovering. The spots are getting bigger and the food is still untouched. What started out as aversion to the spots now grows to encompass aversion to all the work I'm doing for no reward. It's all so unfair. It's not just Goldie who is injured.

We've joined him and feel ourselves the injured party. The only comfort is to sympathise with ourselves. We run through the story from our point of view, insisting again and again that we're doing absolutely everything right, and how unfair and awful it is that no good is coming from our hard work. Sympathy feels pleasant and we cling to it, unwittingly prolonging and deepening the injured party role, nursing a victim mentality. We start telling all our friends about our plight, eliciting their sympathy. Goldie, who for months went quite unnoticed, becomes the centre of our lives.

Instead of being the spring-into-action type, let's suppose your habit when faced with suffering is to crumple in grief. So when Goldie refuses his food, you stare at him in dismay. When you notice the white spots, your worst fears are confirmed. He's a goner. Your head hangs in misery until someone or something helps you snap out of it, leaving Goldie to his fate.

While pity can spur us into action, grief takes the suffering so deeply inward that it paralyzes us. We mistake grief for compassion because we want the suffering to stop, but we overlook the role aversion is playing—distorting our perceptions, overstating the problem.

I remember one time when I was sitting on a park bench watching a group of pigeons pecking at some food on the ground. I noticed that one of the pigeons had lost his toes on one foot. That leg ended in a bulbous stump, and rather than walking, he was hopping from place to place on the other foot. *Oh no*, I

thought, *how awful*. Inwardly I was writhing; my face was wincing. I would have sworn that I was feeling the pigeon's pain.

I had noticed this before—the belief that I could feel the pain of other beings when I saw their physical wounds. But I had never questioned this belief, as my attention was always so fixed on thinking about the awfulness of their situation. However, this time I registered the belief and started to wonder about it. How could I possibly be feeling the pigeon's pain? It didn't make any sense. I don't have any special powers of that nature.

I closed my eyes, took a few deep breaths, and vowed to let mindfulness sort it out. It took a while, and I went through a lot of fear and confusion. But after a time, it was as if a veil lifted and I realised the pain was in my own body. It was simply an unpleasant tingling at the base of my spine. Once I could locate the pain, it became quite bearable. My mind stopped amplifying it and projecting it onto the pigeon. After a few moments, I hardly even noticed it.

I opened my eyes again, and this time when I looked at the pigeon, I noticed how well he was coping with his lameness—how he was managing to hold his own and get at some food. I saw that he was actually quite plump and healthy looking. Within this more hopeful scenario, my spirits lifted, and with this came a simple wish that he come to no harm on account of his injury. Instead of feeling awful about him, I felt respect for his plucky attitude and gratitude that he had taught me a worthwhile lesson. Since then, I've never been quite so overcome when seeing a person or animal with a physical injury.

When we are grief-stricken in the face of suffering, aversion is colouring the whole scene. We can only think in negative terms—about the suffering person, about ourselves, about the future. We've taken one instance of suffering and magnified it out of all proportion, just as I was doing in the case of the pigeon. This paralyses us. We've become so bound up in suffering that we have no resources left to add anything positive to the situation, not even a good wish. A child stands by in mute misery as their sibling is punished by an enraged parent. We look away from our bereaved neighbour, feeling anguish on their behalf but not knowing what to say.

When grief gets overwhelming, we can go into a state of shock and even denial. A friend told me of her meeting with her cardiologist. When he told her she would need open-heart surgery, she looked around to see who he was talking to, because she knew it couldn't possibly be her.

C.S. Lewis's book *A Grief Observed* gives a very honest and poignant account of the moment-to-moment experience of grief. The book was written from a journal he kept during the first weeks and months after the death of his wife. It opens with the statement: "Nobody told me grief was so like fear." His perceptive inquiry showed him the fear underlying all the thoughts and emotions resulting from her loss. He needed company but dreaded when the spotlight was turned on him. "Why can't they just talk to one another but not to me?" His book gives many insights into the development of compassion and equanimity through his scrupulous and honest tracking through the suffering of bereavement.

To develop compassion, we need to learn to feel our fear without buying into the thoughts and perceptions it suggests to the mind. It can motivate us to sit through knee aches and itchy noses when we remember this.

As we learn to disentangle the knots of confusion that emerge in reaction to these small discomforts, we are freeing our capacity for compassion in response to the inevitable sorrows of life.

Grief, pity, and overwhelm are examples of the near enemies of compassion. We sympathise with the suffering person and wish to relieve their suffering, but the very thought of suffering gives rise to these reactions. At the opposite extreme of reactivity we have cruelty, which is the direct opposite or far enemy of compassion.

Cruelty shows up in circumstances where we feel threatened and need to defend ourselves. Anger arises and energises us to overcome our enemy. But then the anger sticks around even in victory, compelling us to twist the knife. Cruelty prolongs the other's suffering and enjoys the power that enables us to do this.

Cruelty can take the form of bullying, where the more vulnerable person is physically or emotionally abused by the bully. We regularly read of abuse of animals, children, the elderly, and those with mental and physical handicap. A recent academic review reported that if a physician was seeing twenty elderly patients a day, then at least one of these was likely to have been abused in the previous year. A recent probe into abuse of mentally handicapped adults in a care home in Ireland showed patients being treated with quite casual cruelty—refusing their requests to be taken to the toilet, being made to sit in their own urine, being slapped when they made a disturbance. And a few years ago, the UK Secretary commented that cruelty had become the norm in some health and social care institutions.

Much cruelty is not from willful glee in the suffering of others but because we neglect to examine what is happening. As a society we tolerate widespread abuse of animals in factory farming and when they are transported on long journeys for slaughter. Even as vegetarians, how often do we think of the suffering of cow and calf separated from each other so that we can enjoy our dairy milk and cheese? If fish could cry out, would we still be fishing as a peaceful recreation?

As against so many instances of cruelty in our society, there are also outstanding individuals and institutions that oppose cruelty and treat the vulnerable with care and respect. Many voluntary organisations look after animal welfare. There are hospitals and care homes which don't hit the headlines but do quiet, often heroic work to care for the sick and the handicapped. Web-based pressure groups get millions of signatories daily in an effort to prevent injustice. All such efforts bear witness to the innate human quality of compassion, the antidote to cruelty.

Hopefully none of us seriously committed to the Dharma will be involved in overt brutality. But cruelty can show itself in subtle ways. Does a sarcastic remark slip out now and again? Do we indulge daydreams where the boss gets his just desserts? When someone we dislike is losing an argument, are we secretly

gloating, cheering on the opponent? When caring for a vulnerable person, is our tone of voice at times chosen to show how idiotic we think they are? Or do we take it out on ourselves, chiding ourselves savagely when things go wrong?

Because most of us are conditioned to view cruelty as aberrant, it's very hard for us to admit to cruelty. It helps to remember the Buddha's assertion that the basic problem is ignorance—not understanding the nature of suffering and how to bring it to an end. Because of this, we make all kinds of mistakes in trying to shield ourselves from pain. One of these mistakes is cruelty.

After the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1989, the media probed into conditions in many Romanian orphanages. I remember one image in particular: a little boy of about two, hitting his head repeatedly against the bars of his cot. His face was cut and bruised, and someone was trying to restrain him, but the moment they let go of his head, he would bang it forcefully against the bars again.

I think he gave us a graphic image for the innocent mistake at the basis of cruelty. As I see it, he senses the world as awful and naturally tries to find a way out. Because he can't change anything else in his environment, he turns on himself. Banging his head against the bars gives him a sense of control. The sense of control is gratifying, probably his only source of pleasure, so he keeps it up. This is self-inflicted cruelty. But the child is not inherently cruel. He just can't find any other way of asserting himself.

Similarly, our moments of cruelty do not make us a cruel person. For that moment we take the only pleasure we can envisage in the situation—delight in prolonging suffering. When conditions change, we can be kind and caring.

Because we tend to judge cruelty as aberrant, we find ways of denying or justifying our subtle cruelties. The phrase "there is no other way to deal with them" can quickly dismiss the person and cover over our harshness. That kind of blanket justification is what allows institutional abuse to flourish. A culture of brutality can grow around such simple slogans. Such thoughts harden our hearts against whoever we are dealing with. In the stress of the situation, we are denying their humanness and vulnerability, their need for understanding and love.

When we are being cruel, we delight in the misery of the suffering person or animal. By contrast, pity and grief lock us into some identity with the suffering state. The challenge is to find a balance—to open our hearts to suffering without taking on the role of perpetrator, heroic saviour, or victim.

At times, compassion flows naturally. But then the suffering touches a deep core within, and we sense ourselves taking one of the reactionary roles. We're suddenly flooded with aversion or overcome with anxiety, and can't find any way back to the easy flow of compassionate goodwill.

We need to be patient with our repeated encounters with the near and far enemies, finding ways of working alongside these tendencies rather than expecting them to disappear.

To cultivate compassion, the classic phrase is "May you be free from suffering," but vary this if it helps. For example: "May you have a peaceful death." "May you not despair." "May you not be troubled by little things." Use images if these work better than words. Some people like to visualize a healing light flowing into a person. Others prefer to imagine the healing as emanating from their own breath. Remember, it doesn't matter if you don't feel anything. What matters is the wish that suffering will stop.

In formal meditation, it's best to start with someone you know is having a hard time and then move through all the various categories of people, not forgetting yourself, ending by radiating in all directions. It helps to take a few breaths so as to relax between each good wish.

Directing compassion at the difficult person is often a challenge. Don't be surprised if the far enemy emerges and you find yourself thinking, "Well, they deserve it," gloating gleefully at their plight. This is part of the purification process. Even if we don't behave in overtly cruel ways, the practice of compassion can reveal our deep fears—places where cruel retaliation seems like our only defence. Glimpsing our underlying savagery can be quite dismaying.

One teacher told me that the deeper we go in meditation, the more clearly we see that we have the seeds of all things within us: the child molester, the schoolyard bully, the rapist, the murderer. Our job is to recognise these urges, see them in the calm light of wisdom, and decide not to follow them because they lead to suffering. Our usual reaction of self-judgment is a second arrow which deepens the suffering rather than relieves it. The more practice we get at letting go of the second arrow, the easier it becomes to feel the enticement towards cruelty and contemplate this calmly.

Where do these urges come from? In my own experience, I sense cruelty as a refusal to forgive. Deliberately shutting my heart to myself or others gives me a self-righteous glow. But if I look carefully at that glow, there is a shadow side—the sneer of the tyrant.

To give an example: I ordain when I come here to Satipanya, but return to ordinary clothes when I am at home in Dublin. I also wear a wig to cover up my bald head. I haven't told many people in the family, as many of the older generation were brought up in a strict form of Catholicism, and I reckon they wouldn't be cheered by the thought of having a Buddhist nun—even just a part-time one—in the family.

As you can guess, the inevitable happened. My aunt came to visit for a few days. I was in my room getting ready for bed. I had taken off the electrolarynx and the wig when I heard her knocking at my door. I couldn't tell her "wait a moment" because the electrolarynx was at the other side of the room. I had just managed to grab the wig when I saw the door open and her head appearing around to ask whether she could take a sandwich. For a second she gaped at me in horror while I glared at her in fury. I was infuriated at the invasion of privacy, my bald head suddenly exposed, and my own powerlessness to say anything in protest. I barely managed a curt nod to indicate she could take all the blasted sandwiches she wanted so long as she got out of my room fast.

Although I was very angry, mindfulness allowed me to watch the process play itself out. After a while I was able to giggle at the humour of the situation and see that she had meant no harm. When I could manage to forgive, I felt the welcome relief of friendliness and the wish to meet with her and explain everything.

But then a deeper tangle showed itself: how to explain my attraction to ordaining as a Buddhist nun within what I anticipated as her abhorrence at the idea? In an instant, friendliness was replaced with an image of myself fully wigged up, haughtily asking her not to enter my room until I answered the door. It would have been so easy to ignore the note of cruelty in this, painting it over with a thought like, "That's what she deserves for being so rude." But because I could sense the glow of power as I clung to that haughty image, I recognised the underlying cruelty and had to admit this wasn't exactly in keeping with my aspirations as a Buddhist nun.

With that recognition, the journey towards forgiveness resumed. The following morning I was able to explain that I was now enrobing when I came to Satipanya. The conversation went through a few ups and downs, but ended with her telling me of a sorrow she bears regarding her own religious life. Thus we ended with a sense of mutual understanding and compassion.

One great advantage of being able to recognise and work skilfully with our own urges towards cruelty is that we can start to understand and forgive cruelty in others. We can practice compassion even for tyrants whose cruelty has caused horrendous suffering in the world. No longer so horrified by our own feelings of cruelty, we can imagine their world and the feelings that drove them. We can take them to heart and wish that they find forgiveness for their deeds.

Sometimes when we feel our own cruelty, the second arrow of self-judgment brings on anxiety. This is the flip side of cruelty: fear. Suppose a bully is taunting his victim. The glee comes from the thought, "This is happening to you, not to me." But bullies cannot maintain their superiority forever. Sooner or later—perhaps in sickness or old age—they have to admit their vulnerability. Knowing what can happen to vulnerable people, they are petrified. Think of how much reassurance you would have to give that person before they would dare to trust you.

That is the amount of reassurance we need to give ourselves when we catch a glimpse of our underlying urges towards cruelty and shrivel back in fear of ourselves. If we can keep reassuring our inner bully that they will only meet with kindness and forgiveness, then any urge towards cruelty can be transformed into the response of compassion.

Before finishing this section on working with cruelty, let me say a word about self-judgment. We have to be careful to note this impartially rather than reacting and thinking we shouldn't be so judgmental. When we can calm down and see things impartially, such judgment can even become an ally. Guy Armstrong, a renowned Vipassana teacher, tells how he found it impossible to forgive someone for their behavior until he saw the element of cruelty in his anger. His self-image revolted against the notion of himself as cruel,

and this persuaded him to forgive the person. So in this case, his conditioning to censure cruelty served him well. Within the light of wisdom, all our emotional habits can be transformed so that they help us along the path.

At other times, when you bring a suffering person to mind, you might find yourself being pulled towards pity—getting lost in plans or worries about how you could help. Or you could find yourself overcome by grief. Recently, a meditator described how he would become saturated by a kind of horrified anxiety when practicing compassion for the refugees trying to find their way into Europe. Or your mind may simply go blank and refuse to engage—this is another example of grief, one that has led to overwhelm. These are all instances of the near enemy of compassion.

Try to simply acknowledge and continue, knowing that the emergence of enemies, near or far, just indicates that we are plowing new depths in our heart. We don't have to be discouraged by them or start judging ourselves because of them. Smile at them if possible and soldier on. We're not interested in how we feel, remember, but in the wish that suffering be alleviated. So we can put these feelings to one side and focus on the good wish. Similarly, for any of the hindrances, acknowledge and then re-engage with the compassion practice.

If self-judgment, pity, or any emotions become overwhelming, experiment with self-compassion. "May I be free from self-judgment. May I be free from pity. May I be free from grief." Or add in some mettā: "May I be happy and confident and free from self-judgment." And so on.

Radiating compassion is quite a challenging practice. In ordinary life, our hearts have so many clever tricks to stop us from acknowledging suffering. In compassion practice, we do the opposite—we ask ourselves to think about the suffering of our friends, our benefactors, and all other categories of people. We need to remind ourselves that in compassion, as for all Brahma Vihāra practice, we always try to make things as easy as possible for ourselves. Look for the route of least resistance in the heavenly direction, and be prepared to experiment.

For example, it often helps to switch back to mettā regularly and think of the person in happier circumstances. Or try putting a hand on your heart to steady yourself. I often prefer to work on compassion while walking rather than sitting, and when the going gets tough, it often helps to look around—not at people but at surfaces and furniture—and to touch surfaces as I pass them by. This practice, remember, deliberately brings suffering to mind, so it can bring up deep fear. Looking at surfaces and touching them helps reassure me of the basic goodness of the world. If the emotions become overpowering, I take a Vipassana break, acknowledging the emotion without any attempt to generate goodwill.

Finally, let's look for a moment at how we practice compassion in daily life. Any effort to alleviate suffering is also a practice of compassion—feeding the birds, looking after a sick friend, contributing to good causes, campaigning for human or animal rights, safeguarding the environment. If we have hurt

someone, we could apologize and see if there's any way to make reparation. To practice self-compassion, we could make time for an activity we enjoy, like swimming, yoga, or music.

The near and far enemies will also surface in daily life. The attempt to engage with vulnerable people may show us how callously we feel towards them, how easily we get exasperated by their limitations. As in meditation, acknowledge and continue. Remember, the opening of the heart naturally brings up these defense mechanisms. The experience of callousness could indeed be welcomed as a sign we are moving beyond our comfort zone. At the other extreme, we might be fussing anxiously about them. Here we need to restrain ourselves, and if we feel overwhelmed by the situation, we need to extend compassion inwardly. This may mean simply wishing ourselves well, or we could reinforce the wish with a caring gesture.

May we find ways to comfort and encourage ourselves through every obstacle as we develop true compassion.

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