

# Karuṇā: A Path of Liberation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

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Although Right Understanding stands first on the Eightfold Path and is certainly the accent of the Buddha's teaching, the second is Right Attitude. Here we find selfishness transforming into generosity, hatred into love and cruelty into compassion, and implied all unwholesome mental states turn into their opposite. The inner discomfort and distress caused by unwholesome mental states raises the desire to be rid of them and to make constant effort to purify our hearts. In so doing, we find ourselves becoming more generous, more loving, more caring. And these virtues connect us with fellow humans and all sentient beings. Our behaviour moves towards spontaneous response, appropriate to the given circumstance – giving freely, rejoicing and caring. Our relationships change from 'me' to 'we'. Sometimes we care for the other by allowing them to care for us! This is the experience of not-self in action. Since we are in a constant state of flux where words, images, feelings and sensations resonate within us, you can never point to anything and say that is solely me or solely mine. Just become aware of talking to anyone and realising that you are receiving words that produce images in your mind, feelings that resonate in your heart and that we are responding and causing the similar conditions to arise in them. This is true also for the pleasures and joys of life as when we share a spoonful of a served dish with the other and we delight in a spoonful of theirs. These Tips I write are distilled from articles and books. This not-self, then, is not pointing to some abstruse proposition that we have to grasp intellectually. It points to a way of being and behaving in the world that is not governed by an insular sense of who I am, cosseted by a few, but alienated from the many. Although developing compassion became almost if not more important than developing wisdom in later Buddhism, the one feeds into the other. Our insight practice leads us to understanding and directly experiencing not-self in that this organism does not constitute a whole entire, self-existent being, but is made up of parts over which we have little control, manifested primarily in that we cannot stop the process of ageing and death. And any wrong view leads to suffering at some level or another. And I'm not alone. This leads to contemplating that all beings suffer. When my prolapsed disc gave me debilitating sciatica, it's good for me to remember I'm not the only one. My suffering is not especially unique and noble! Or as Samuel Beckett puts it: Is there any suffering loftier than mine? As I offer patient forbearance to myself, I then make an offering that all beings suffering from sciatica may develop patient forbearance. It was a comfort to me when retreatant said he had suffered from severe sciatica himself and was on crutches off and on for two years and he fully recovered. It gave me the courage to keep on bearing up with the pain rather than going for an operation which my doctor and everyone else was telling me to avoid. Even the spinal consultant warned me to keep away from spinal surgeons!!! The Tibetan Tonglen Practice[i] helps us dismantle the barriers created by the belief that we are independent beings. In this way our self-centredness, transforming into generosity and compassion,

expands to embrace all sentient beings. And there, paradoxically we find our true happiness.

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