**COMPASSION & THE ENNEAGRAM**

**Enneagram LV Study Group by Ken Larson (Type 5-Social) –** [**khlarsonsd@gmail.com**](mailto:khlarsonsd@gmail.com)

What is Compassion? Two definitions of compassion that speak to me are from *Thomas Merton*; i.e., “compassion is the keen awareness of the interdependence of all things”; and from “Mindful Compassion” by *Paul Gilbert and Choden* as follows, “a sensitivity to the suffering of oneself or others combined with a commitment to do something about it”.

Why should I care about compassion? Here I reference “The Charter of Compassion” by *Karen Armstrong*. We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous, and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

How is compassion revealed and applied in our lives? Again, from “The Charter of Compassion” by *Karen Armstrong*, the principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical, and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world, and put another there; and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity, and respect.

What is the “compassionate way”? *Henri Nouwen*, in “Compassion”, says it is the patient way. Patience is the discipline of compassion. But true patience is the opposite of a passive waiting in which we let things happen and allow others to make the decisions. Patience means to enter actively into the thick of life and to fully bear the suffering within and around us. Patience is the capacity to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell as fully as possible the inner and outer events of our lives. It is to enter our lives with open eyes, ears, and hands so that we really know what is happening. Patience is an extremely difficult discipline precisely because it counteracts our unreflective impulse to flee or to fight. For example, when someone approaches a sensitive issue, something in us tries to change the subject. Also, when a shameful memory presents itself, something in us wants to forget it. And if we cannot flee, we fight. We fight the one who challenges our opinions, the people who question our power, and the circumstances that force us to change. Patience requires us to go beyond the choice between fleeing or fighting. It is the third and most difficult way. It calls for discipline because it goes against the grain of our impulses. Patience involves staying with it, living it through, listening carefully to what presents itself to us here and now. Patience means overcoming the fear of a controversial subject. It means paying attention to shameful memories and searching for forgiveness without having to forget. It means welcoming sincere criticism and evaluating changing conditions. In short, patience is a willingness to be influenced even when this requires giving up control and entering into unknown territory.

What is required for compassion to take place? From an interview “Presence of Compassion” with *John O’Donohue*, “For compassion to take place, awareness (inner and external), attitude (that we are all one), and action (out of awareness and attitude to alleviate or prevent suffering) are all needed. Beginning with a perspective and conviction that we can become increasingly aware of who we are and how we influence our environment, we can make choices that are life giving for all.”

As background in understanding the experience of compassion in the range of Enneagram types, I present from work done by *Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson*. In their book “Understanding the Enneagram”, they remind us that in addition to giving us insight into our day-to-day behaviors, the Enneagram offers an answer to our spiritual yearnings because it shows us how our personality has limited us, what our path of growth is, and where real fulfillment can be found. It teaches us that the longings and structures of our personality are actually useful guides to the greatest treasures of our soul. By regarding our self-defeating patterns and even our psychological pain and limitations as indicators of our spiritual capacities, we are able to see ourselves in a different light. With this new perspective comes compassion, healing, love, and transformation. As Riso and Hudson believe, rightly understood, the Enneagram can have a tremendously positive effect in the world today. By touching people profoundly, mirroring their experience of themselves and helping them trace the trajectory of their lives, it reveals our common humanity. In speaking to the soul, compassion and love are reawakened. The Enneagram is therefore not only about understanding and transforming ourselves, it also helps us in understanding others, in fostering compassion for them and developing insight into how they think, what they fear and desire, what they value, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. Understanding others more profoundly allows us not only to appreciate the good we find in them but also to be more objective and compassionate about things we may not like about them. By understanding personality types, we can see others more objectively, connecting deeply with them yet remaining in our own center, true to ourselves. By understanding the Enneagram, we paradoxically become more self-possessed and more capable of reaching out to others.

Relevant to our relationships, especially our depth of connection to others, I reference Riso and Hudson’s emphasis on modern psychological theory that identifies three fundamental “affects”, which are universal emotional states that are major building blocks of the personality…*attachment, frustration, and rejections*. Each Enneagram type operates primarily, but not exclusively, out of one of these affects.

Attachment represents ego’s desire to maintain stable relationships, holding on to whatever works well. Attachment-based group includes types *Three, Six, and Nine*; all of which have problems with deeply held attachments to people, situations, or states that are working for them. Threes learn to adjust their self-image and feelings to become more acceptable and valued by others, thereby holding onto whatever attention and affection is available to them. Sixes have learned to associate with and defend certain attachments for security or safety, even if they may be harmful. Nines become attached to comfort zones as a source of stability and peace, not to be tampered with or changed.

Frustration relates to feelings of unmet needs, with self being experienced as “hungry”. With identity based on being frustrated, sometimes roles are reversed to frustrate others as a defense against our own feelings. Frustration-based group includes Types *One, Four, and Seven*; who seem never to be able to find what it is they are looking for, and can quickly become disenchanted with any past solutions to their desires. Ones are frustrated that the world is not more sensible and organized than it actually is; nothing measures up to their standards. Fours are frustrated that they have not been adequately parented, and unconsciously expect valued others to nurture them, which leads to disappointment and frustration when others fail them. Sevens are frustrated because they pin their hopes for happiness on experiences, which ultimately fail to satisfy and lead to continually moving on with hope of fulfillment, only to be disappointed again.

The Rejection-based group includes types *Two, Five, and Eight*; in which the self is unconsciously seen as small weak, and potentially victimized, while others are seen as powerful, abusive, and rejecting. They repress their own genuine needs and vulnerabilities, attempting to offer some service, ability, or resource as a hedge against further rejections. Twos must be good and try to please others so much that they cannot be rejected. They offer caring and affection. Eights feel they are innately bad and will be rejected unless they are so powerful and in control that others won’t dare reject them. They offer strength. Fives feel negligible, on the sidelines, and must therefore cut off their feelings and compensate through knowledge or skills so useful that others will not reject them. They offer knowledge/expertise.

For all of these, Riso & Hudson present *antidotes* for each of the most troubling affects. For Ones’ feeling that theirs or others’ efforts are never enough is “acceptance of reality”. For Fours’ feeling that they can’t get their needs met is “self-renewing equanimity”. For Sevens’ feeling that they can’t find/get enough of what they want is “gratitude for what is available”. For Two’s feeling that they are loved only for their service is “to love themselves and others regardless of others’ reaction to them”. For Eights feeling they must control to protect from further hurt is “self-surrendering open-heartedness”. For Fives’ hoarding quest for mastery is “nonattached compassion and clarity”. For Threes’ attachment to performance is “an authentic humility and self-regard”. For Sixes’ ambivalent attachment to others is “their courageous self-reliance”. For Nines’ comfortable complacency is their “love of life and growth”.

Our growth and transformation can be consolidated and expedited by focusing on three principal attitudes associated with our “dominant affect group”, summarized from the previous paragraph:

Types 1, 4, 7: Need to reflect on the qualities of “acceptance, forgiveness, & gratitude” as a way of transforming their difficulties with their underlying feelings of “frustration”.

Types 2, 5, 8: Need to reflect on the qualities of “unconditional positive regard for themselves and others, compassion, & self-surrender” as a way of transforming feelings of “rejection”.

Types 3, 6, 9: Need to reflect on the qualities of “authenticity, courage, & self-possession” as a way of transforming their difficulties with their feeling of “attachment”.

Focus on Transforming Relationships

A final focus will be on compassion in human relationships, summarizing from “The Enneagram Made Easy” by Renee Baron & Elizabeth Wagele, on each type and the primary characteristics exhibited when at their best and worst, with suggestions for improved authentic & compassionate relationships.

*Type One (Perfectionist) Characteristics in Relationship*:

* At their best – loyal, dedicated, conscientious, & helpful. Well balanced with good sense of humor
* At their worst – critical, argumentative, nit-picking, & uncompromising. Have high expectations of others
* Suggestions for Relationship Building – Learn to forgive self and others for flaws and mistakes; learn to respect others’ ways of doing things; be generous with praise and encouragement; when urge to criticize or correct arises, keep quiet or surround response with positive remarks; become aware that tone of voice can be harsh and upset or frighten people; avoid fantasizing about changing people.

Type Two (Helper) Characteristics in Relationship:

* At their Best – attentive, appreciative, generous, warm, playful, & nurturing. Make partners feel special
* At their Worst – controlling, possessive, needy & insincere. Difficulty asking directly, manipulative
* Suggestions for Relationship Building – Try to be your own person, not who others want you to be; refrain from automatically offering help/advice, wait until asked; take pleasure in giving in little ways; stop over giving; graciously accept when people give to you.

Type Three (Achiever) Characteristics in Relationship:

* At their Best – Value & accept their partners; are playful, giving, responsible, & well regarded by others in the community.
* At their Worst – Preoccupied with work & projects; are self-absorbed, defensive, impatient, dishonest, & controlling.
* Suggestions for Relationship Building – Include hanging out with friends/family in weekly schedule; listen with sympathetic ear and avoid giving advice when loved one brings a problem; express appreciation to your partner when tempted to think of yourself as more important; do volunteer work simply for the sake of giving; search for grain of truth in people’s criticism of you; stick to who you really are; notice undesirable traits about yourself.

Type Four (Romantic) Characteristics in Relationship:

* At their Best – Empathic, supportive, gentle, playful, passionate, witty, self-revealing, & bond easily
* At their Worst – Too self-absorbed, jealous, emotionally needy, moody, self-righteous, & overly critical. Become hurt & feel rejected easily.
* Suggestions for Relationship Building – Be direct in stating what you want & don’t want; avoid blowing others’ statements out of proportion (if offended check out what was meant); develop strong network of friends versus relying on one to meet emotional needs; avoid withdrawal & deal with interpersonal issues quickly & objectively, without overpowering emotions.

Type Five (Observer) Characteristics in Relationship:

* At their Best – Kind, perceptive, open-minded, self-sufficient, & trustworthy.
* At their Worst – Contentious, suspicious, withdrawn, negative, & on guard against being engulfed
* Suggestions for Relationship Building – Limit lengthy presentations to 2 or 3 sentences & test interest before continuing, making it a conversation; be aware of desperate need to prove my knowledge in group; let others know when they are important to me; when compelled to give to others, do it; ask for want I want, including setting limits; become member of ongoing therapy group if I want more experience interacting with others.

Type Six (Questioner) Characteristics in Relationship:

* At their Best – Warm, playful, open, loyal, supportive, honest, fair, & reliable.
* At their Worst – Suspicious, controlling, inflexible, & sarcastic. When threatened, withdraw or act tough
* Suggestions for Relationship Building – Don’t underestimate the negative effect of overreacting when stressed; give only when desired to avoid feeling drained; do reality check on what other was thinking versus what you thought they were thinking; learn to have sense of humor about hypervigilance.

Type Seven (Adventurer) Characteristics in Relationships:

* At their Best – Lighthearted, generous, outgoing, caring, & fun. They introduce friends & loved ones to new activities/adventures.
* At their Worst – Narcissistic, opinionated, defensive, distracted, & ambivalent about be tied down to a relationship.
* Suggestions for Relationship Building – Reach agreement early in intimate relationship on time apart and together; preserve intimacy time with partner; be sensitive & tactful, seeing from other’s perspective; be open to hearing feedback on your traits that could be improved; recognize self-centered tendency & ask others what they want.

Type Eight (Asserter) Characteristics in Relationship:

* At their Best – Loyal, caring, positive, playful, truthful, straightforward, committed, generous, & supportive.
* At their Worst – Demanding, arrogant, combative, possessive, uncompromising, & quick to find fault.
* Suggestions for Relationship Building – Resist dismissing/invalidating other’s experience or views; being direct may intimidate others; express appreciation out loud often; avoid driving others as hard as yourself; sparring is stimulating to Eights but not to most others; learn to negotiate.

Type Nine (Peacemaker) Characteristics in Relationships:

* At their Best – Kind, gentle, reassuring, supportive, loyal, & nonjudgmental.
* At their Worst – Stubborn, passive-aggressive, unassertive, overly accommodating, & defensive
* Suggestions for Relationship Building – Take first step to change undesirable situation; ask others to join in your interests; bring up your problems versus only listening to others; replace “I don’t know” with “I’ll let you know when I decide”; tell people when you want to be alone; express feelings & opinions (learn to rock the boat a little).