



Dear friends, my name is Cuong Lu. Today we are going to explore feelings. When the other person is happy, when she has a pleasant feeling and you can feel that pleasant feeling in you also, you might think, "This is your happiness, it's not my happiness. I need to find my own happiness." It does not exist. Your own happiness doesn't exist. Happiness is something we share. When you are happy, I am happy. When you are free, I am free.

So if I notice that you are not happy, I need to take care of your suffering. Suffering can be so deep. When you suffer you are overwhelmed by unpleasant feelings. You can get lost. With that unpleasant feeling you're angry at everyone; you're angry at yourself too. Some people suffer so much. They may think, "I don't want I don't want to live anymore." They commit suicide. Some people suffer so much that they want to harm other people. When you see someone who is suffering a lot you need to help before he causes suffering to himself or damages other people. You need to help. Listening with empathy is a very powerful tool for you to help.

I have used this tool as a prison chaplain. One day I went into a small room and met a prisoner who was quite young. He had killed his own girlfriend. When I met him he was overwhelmed by fear, frustration, confusion, and painful feelings. When I saw him I knew right away: we can blame this person for what he has done, we can punish him, we can avoid him, but the best way is to help him. To help him to be free, to be solid again, so he won't cause any damage to himself to others anymore. What he did was completely wrong. We need to help him so he can touch insight deeply so he will never harm himself or others anymore. And I had a chance.

When I came into the room, he sat there and he was completely cut by his painful feelings. I could feel that. In your mind, you think you are only yourself, but you are also the other person. And if the person you're speaking with is suffering, you can feel his suffering. I looked at him, and I said, let's practice breathing together. I gave him the instruction of "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in, and breathing out, I know I am breathing out," the practice we did last week. And I also gave him the instruction to practice breathing in deeply and breathing slowly so that he could stay focused on his breathing. Let's do this practice together of breathing in deeply and breathing out slowly. [Sound of a ringing bell.]

I practiced breathing in deeply and breathing out slowly with him for 30 minutes, and then I experienced a transformation in the feeling. You know, each of us has the insight of nondiscrimination. At that moment, I didn't have this discrimination between him and me. I had the insight, "I am you, you are me." Thanks to that insight I didn't discriminate against the painful feeling. I didn't say, "Painful feeling, go away, I don't want you. My friend, go away, I don't want you." With this insight, I had access to the energy of compassion. So I went to the painful feeling with compassion. I didn't say, "A pleasant feeling is much better than an



unpleasant feeling. Happiness is much better than suffering." No. The wisdom of equanimity is important. If you want to practice listening with empathy, you need the wisdom of nondiscrimination.

When you stay with suffering, when you are there with suffering without discrimination, suffering can only last for 20 minutes. That's my experience with this prisoner and with other prisoners also. When I practice sitting and breathing and being there for the painful feelings, it can only stay for 20 minutes. So I sat there with him and I practiced breathing and being there with my compassion and he could feel my compassion. He became very calm. And after 20 minutes I experience a transformation in the feeling. The painful feeling became a peaceful feeling. When I opened my eyes and looked at him he opened his eyes to look at me and he said, "Thank you, thank you." From that moment, he went on with the practice every morning.

Practice listening to yourself, to your pain, to your suffering. That is also listening with empathy. Empathy, it means you are not an outsider. When you listen to your feelings, you don't listen as an outsider, discriminating your feelings. You are one with your feelings and yet you are not overwhelmed by the feeling because you have wisdom. What does wisdom look like? Where can you find the wisdom? The wisdom here is the Buddha's insight. That wisdom is there in you. My friend, you have the wisdom. It would be painful if you had the wisdom and you didn't make use of that wisdom. You need that wisdom every day.

Sometimes a person you live with—it can be your friend, your wife, your husband—is caught by a wrong perception. What is a wrong perception? Wrong perception is when you believe you are an individual. "I am myself, I am not you." When he or she has such a wrong perception painful feelings will arise and he can be a victim of that feeling. When you are a victim of wrong perception, when you think "I am only myself and not you," you easily become a victim of your feelings.

When your beloved one is a victim of these feelings she or he may say or do things that can hurt you. You may act from wrong perception also. You might react with anger, frustration, or violence, and you may hurt each other. Don't hurt each other. I know what it is to be in war, to fight and to hurt each other. Don't do that. Please, please, we need to help each other. The best way to live your life is to help. Not to help yourself but to help the other. When you are helping the other person you're also helping yourself. When the other person is caught by a wrong perception or a painful feeling, you can help because she is the beloved one. You can practice breathing to come back to yourself. And the moment you're coming back to yourself, the moment you are truly yourself, you are truly the other person and you can feel her pain. You can feel her misunderstanding.

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*Listening with Empathy*

Part 2: "Listen with Your Feelings"

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But you also have to practice. So you practice breathing in and out, deep and slow, and you come back to your body and do your feelings in a free way because you have insight. You're free. You can be overwhelmed by your feelings or you can get in touch with the feeling and you are free. If you want to get in touch with your feelings in a free way, you need insight, you need the wisdom of nondiscrimination. That wisdom is telling you that her feeling is your feeling, her suffering is your suffering, her happiness is your happiness. When you have that insight, you're free, you're free.

Even if suffering is there, you are already free because you are protected by insight, you're protected by compassion. Thanks to insight and compassion you can recognize and touch a painful feeling in you and in her and you listen to her pain. That is listening with empathy. That deep listening helps you to transform the pain. In fact, the pain is already transformed at the moment you touch it with your insight, with your wisdom.

Don't discriminate between suffering and happiness. If you have insight, you don't discriminate between suffering and happiness. Happiness will be there when you don't discriminate suffering. You don't need to look for happiness. Happiness will come to you if you no longer discriminate against suffering. A pleasant feeling will be there with you when you don't discriminate against unpleasant feelings. In fact, feelings are produced by your mind and your perceptions.

When you have wrong perceptions and your feelings are not okay. When you have a painful feeling you may believe "Only I have this painful feeling." If you have a pleasant feeling, you may believe "Only I have this pleasant feeling." And you're very much alone in your painful or pleasant feeling. "It is my happiness. This is not your happiness." In that way, you're not truly happy. When you're no longer caught by your wrong perceptions, when you get in touch with wisdom, the painful feelings are there but you no longer say "It is *\*my\** painful feeling." Your painful feeling is also *\*her\** painful feeling. When her happiness is there you don't say it is only her happiness, her happiness is also your happiness. That is insight. With insight you can get in touch with feeling the feelings in a different way, with compassion. Compassion does not discriminate between you and her, you and him, this or that. In my experience when I listen to someone without discriminating the transformation will happen in me and in her at the same time. It's not only her transformation, it is also my transformation. Her breakthrough, her freedom, is my breakthrough, my freedom.

So the best way to take care of yourself is to take care of others. In your daily life you have many chances to care for others, to care for your beloved ones. And the tool you have to do that is to practice listening with empathy. Listen without discrimination to your feelings, to her feelings, to

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painful feelings, to pleasant feelings, to any kind of feeling. Listen to all these feelings with your compassion and insight, and you can do that to help others. You can do that to help yourself, because I know who you are. To me, you are the Buddha.