



Hello everyone, welcome back. My name is Jampal Namgyel [Dungse Jampal Norbu], and it is once again my great pleasure to present the final episode of *Compassion in Polarizing Times*. We’ve covered a lot of material in the past three episodes, and I’ll do my best to summarize it.

We’ve gone over happiness and suffering, and how they cannot be inherently found within our outer world, but it is really our relationships with objects, our internal world, and our ability to self-reflect which brings about our understanding of how to pursue happiness and how to be free from suffering. We’ve covered how suffering is caused through attachment to the sense of self, which manifests into five negative emotions—attachment, aggression, stupidity, jealousy, and pride—and how the antidote to these, the path to happiness, is our ability to develop altruism, to let go of that attachment to self so that the five negative emotions do not arise again. Through consistent practice, we are able to break negative habits by developing confidence, both in the practice material itself and also in our own ability to liberate ourselves from those causes of suffering. As we develop more confidence, we develop a greater ability and agency to transform our lives as we would like, to live better lives free from habitual tendencies and neurotic emotions.

In this episode, I’d like to get into some of the practical applications of generating altruism in the world, not just on the meditation cushion, but also in our engagements with other people and how we conduct ourselves in a worldly sense. Meditation practice is a powerful experience, and there is enormous benefit in setting time aside every day to sit on a cushion, to find a quiet spot, and to really take the time to dive deep within the mind and our own experience. This can’t always be done on a commuter train, in traffic, going to and from our house, or buying groceries. It takes time to dive really deep.

But we can’t spend all day in deep meditation. We are constantly engaged with the world. We are constantly engaged with other people, which provides its own interesting opportunities for compassionate practice. As we develop experience, we develop self-confidence, and through developing confidence, we have a greater ability to naturally manifest our compassion wherever we are in any given situation. At a certain point, self-reflection becomes more automatic. Our awareness of mind—our mindfulness of our feelings, emotions, and thoughts—has its own momentum, so it doesn’t require as much cushion time to get back into that good mind state. This is really helpful in all kinds of situations.



One of the most high octane, intense situations in which I find this practice to be most useful, is driving on the highway. For a lot of us that comprises one, two, or three hours of our day driving at 70 miles an hour in a vehicle that is potentially dangerous in the wrong circumstances. We're driving with hundreds of other people who are going the exact same speed or maybe too fast or too slow, unaware of how we're all affecting each other, unaware of how that is affecting our minds. The practice of dharma, kindness, and altruism is a literal lifesaver in these situations. It allows us to not only focus on our own situation and our own life—me, myself, and I—but to extend our concern, awareness, and compassion to other people on the road.

It doesn't take a whole lot of driving for someone to make a bold or seemingly aggressive move on the road. Whenever I'm cut off in traffic I know that I do tend to have a flash of: "What's wrong with this person? Why are they doing this? There's something wrong with them." At the same time, through a consistent practice of self-reflection and compassion, I'm able to curb that thought and let my anger fizzle out. I let my anger arise, but I don't give into it. I don't give into the road rage, and then it pacifies itself.

Then I develop something else. I develop kindness and altruism, and especially the ability to put myself in someone else's shoes and develop sympathetic understanding. This is known as the practice of tonglen, the ability to exchange self and other and to put ourselves in someone else's shoes to understand their state of mind. It allows us to relate to other people and understand conditions and situations which are not directly applicable to us, but which we can understand because we are all living beings who desire happiness and want to be free from suffering.

At the moment of road rage, I often put myself in someone else's shoes. Particularly when I know that I have made some sketchy driving decisions in the past, like when I was frantic and late for an appointment, or when a friend in trouble needed me, or I was driving out as soon as I could during a family emergency. In those cases, I don't care so much about the rules of the road, and I tend to do anything in my power to get from point A to point B as fast as possible. Could it be that another person on the road who has cut me off is in a similar situation? Maybe or maybe not, but at least I'm not stuck in my own fixed negative emotions. I'm allowing myself to open my mind more and more. I'm allowing myself to not habitually jump to a state of suffering, and not habitually cling to my ego and my ego attachment. Regardless of another person's situation, my ability to put myself in their shoes, open up my heart, and open myself to a larger self rather



than just to my small self becomes a saving grace for my own mental well being. It also opens up new opportunities in how I can interact with someone else.

It can be difficult to form friendships and relationships, be they business or romantic, with those who are unrelatable to us. The unfamiliarity of another person can cause fear, discrimination, or conflict. But children have the ability to look at someone else and put themselves in their tiny little shoes, to reach out and not care so much about their own little world, but open themselves up to someone else. They can ignore the perceived boundaries between self and other and make friends easily. This is a skill children naturally have before contrived boundaries and differences arise over time which tend to separate us rather than unite us.

Through the practice of tonglen, exchanging self and other, we consider what it would be like to put ourselves in someone else's shoes, take joy in their success, and feel concern during their difficulties. We extend our altruistic practice, our care and concern, and ultimately, the ability of our mind to feel more joy and peace beyond attachment to the sense of self.

We become happier people by extending ourselves further outward and letting go of attachment to the sense of self. It may seem counterintuitive, but this is the case. This is something which cannot be told or taught, but has to be understood from our own personal experience, our own ability to exchange self and other. When we widen our mind and perception and feel the freedom that comes from that, we feel the joy which comes from letting go of the attachment to the sense of self. When we experience that joy, our confidence grows and builds more and more into second nature.

As our confidence and understanding builds, so too do our skillful means and our ability to skillfully apply our intentions of being kind to others. Having a compassionate intention is a powerful thing, guiding many great practices and bringing much benefit to both ourselves and the world. But there is also the need for the skillful means in where to apply our efforts, applying them where we are most likely to succeed. Not that we should not have compassion where it seems like we cannot succeed, but putting our best skillful efforts into helping others without getting swept away in spiritual vagueness. We should fully appreciate both the circumstances that have brought us here, and the circumstances which bring ourselves and other beings benefit. This is fully appreciating and enjoying our world, not just picking it apart for what is positive and what is negative, but transforming all our experiences for the benefit of self and others. The

Dungse Jampal Norbu
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path of dharma and the path to enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism greatly emphasizes the two-fold benefit to both the self and the other. This is because letting go of attachment to the sense of self is a benefit to us as we find more happiness over time, but it is also a benefit to others as our practices of compassion, kindness, sympathetic joy, equanimity, and equality also benefit those around us.

By skillfully applying ourselves to situations, putting ourselves in someone else's position, and working for the benefit of others, we benefit our communities. As we all know, when the community thrives, we thrive. We tend to live in polarized times and in situations where a person is either right or wrong, good or bad, right or left. This doesn't leave a whole lot of positive impetus for crossing that line. It doesn't leave a whole lot of opportunity to reach out and be a good neighbor, a good friend, and to extend ourselves to others to make connections rather than building walls.

Through dharma practice we influence our environment by being that positive change that we want to see in the world, as Gandhi said. Through altruism we benefit our community, and that community in turn benefits us. Through skillful means we see not just with blind faith, but with full confidence, and a wealth of experience about how we can best serve the world. When we best elevate our environment, we too are elevated to a point where the separation between ourselves and others dissolves, and our well-being is the well-being of all people. This is what I wanted to speak about in *Compassion in Polarizing Times*.

Thank you very much for joining me for these broadcasts. It's been my great pleasure to speak with you, and I hope to see you again in the future, whether through Tricycle or some other means. You can find more of the programs in the Mangala Shri Bhuti sangha at MangalaShriBhuti.org, and keep practicing.