

28th July 2021

Compassion

**“A Bodhisattva who is full of pity
and concerned with the welfare of all beings,
who dwells in friendliness, compassion,
sympathetic joy and even-mindedness.”**

Mahāyāna Buddhist Texts, Perfect Wisdom in 8,000 lines (100BC to 100AD)

A dictionary definition of the word “compassion” is:

*A feeling of sorrow or deep tenderness for one
who is suffering or experiencing misfortune.*

It literally means “a suffering with another” and comes from the Latin word *compassionam* for “sympathy”, with its root in *cum*, meaning “with” and *pati*, meaning “to suffer”.

I once attended a Palliative Care conference where there wasn't a *rapporteur* who would write up a summary of the event, but an artist who took phrases people had used and drew cartoons round them. By the end of the day, the walls of the conference hall were covered in clever – and arresting – cartoons of what had been shared. The one I remember most was centred on the word “compassion”. A healthcare chaplain had said, “When we offer real compassion, we come out from our protective suit of armour and truly enter into the troubled world someone inhabits. We offer our humanity to be fully involved in people's suffering.” The cartoon depicted a doctor in a white coat by a patient's bed. The doctor was encased in a medieval suit of armour. But the suit of armour was open at the back, and the doctor was stepping out of it to get closer to the patient.

The world of suffering is a lonely and scary place to be. What people *don't* need is someone who keeps their distance by hiding behind the armour of certainty, disinterest or self-concern. What people *really* need is the compassion of those who will take the risk of stepping out of their armour-plated shell to be fully engaged – in all their hopelessness – with those who suffer. Concerned as we should be for the “welfare of all beings” let's divest ourselves of our suits of armour and offer “friendliness, compassion [and] sympathetic joy” where and when it is needed most.

A prayer for today

*Lord, let me understand your compassion
so that I might be more compassionate to others. Amen*