



Compassion in Times of Loss

by Suzanne Retzinger

In times where things seem to fall apart, I've also witnessed that things come together. Those arriving at our door often wonder if this can be possible. What I've also witnessed is that a major component of healing in any situation is self-compassion.

Our speaker Joan Halifax in Feb 2019 said, "We live in a time when science is validating what humans have known throughout the ages: that compassion is not a luxury; it is a necessity for our well-being, resilience, and survival."

Compassion has no agenda, no judgments, no "shoulds." It's not about fixing or changing anyone. It's simply a companion to suffering. It wants to cozy up to suffering; without compassion we aren't able to go near it. We'd become overwhelmed.

We know we've lost touch with compassion when we feel numb, fearful, judgmental, or distracted. Whatever hardens and closes our hearts leaves us rigid, frightened, and unresponsive. Let's take a closer look. For a moment ask yourself, "Do I treat myself the same way I treat cherished friends, or even a beloved pet?" When you feel bad about yourself in some way, maybe insecure, unattractive, you made a mistake, or failed at something, how do you talk to yourself? Is it in the same way you'd talk to a friend who's going through a hard time?

This changed reality can bring with it compassion, caring, healing, and greater love.

Using the acronym **RAIN**, Tara Brach offers a way to work with suffering. The **RAIN** of self-compassion can move us from reactivity to greater awareness, and kindness. **RAIN:**

Recognize what is here and give it a name; say it aloud. Acknowledge the thoughts, feelings, and body sensations affecting you in any given moment. This can be a simple mental note of what has come up right now. Speak only the truth from the heart.

Allow it to be. Make room for it just as it is. You might even say to yourself, "yes this is what is here now", without self-judgment. Just let it be.

Investigate by feeling into the body sensations, thoughts, feelings. What is here that needs to be seen and heard. Once you are able to recognize, allow and investigate your direct experience, you can call on natural curiosity.

Natural curiosity and non-judgmental awareness allows us to see more clearly. What does this vulnerable feeling most need? Breathe deep into your belly, hold a moment, and slowly release. You might even place your hand on your heart, a gesture of kindness.

If it's difficult to be kind to yourself, bring to mind someone who helped you become who you are, who cared about you, who wanted the best for you. Someone who loved you. This can be a spiritual figure, family member, friend, or pet.

The changes that come with grief have the potential to open hearts. Now is the time to reach out to those who matter.

Over the years, I've seen people come together in new ways under the most 'disconcerting conditions'. Having been seen and heard they become more loving, more compassionate; they have allowed themselves to go through whatever suffering was there, and come out on the other side more whole.

*'O Looking-glass creatures,' quoth **Alice**, 'draw near!*

'Tis an honour to see me, a favour to hear'

References:

Louis Carroll, Alice Through the Looking Glass

Joan Halifax, Standing at the Edge: Finding Freedom Where Fear and Courage Meet

Tara Brach, Radical Compassion: Learning to Love Yourself and Your World with the Practice of RAIN

Suzanne Retzinger, Ph.D., LMFT; Counselor and Education Specialist with HSB 18 years.

One of the first formal education groups at HSB was called "Year to Live" for public education and death awareness, the goal is to reduce fear around death and dying, which was developed from Suzanne's work with the Metta Institute. From this Suzanne also published a 5-part series on End-Of-Life in "Therapy News", have developed and taught courses with the Osher Institute at UCSB, Antioch University (being with grief), and SBCC extension programs "Awakening Kindness", as well as the Psychology Conference "Courageous Conversations" about being with end of life issues.