

The Strong Heart: Combining Kindness and Assertiveness In Important Relationships



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Overview of This Workshop

Presentations, experiential practices, Q&A

Moving along; focus on generally useful ideas, skills, and inner strengths; access to recordings and slides

Not psychotherapy or treatment of any condition

Take care of yourself; it's fine to disengage, and come back later if at all.

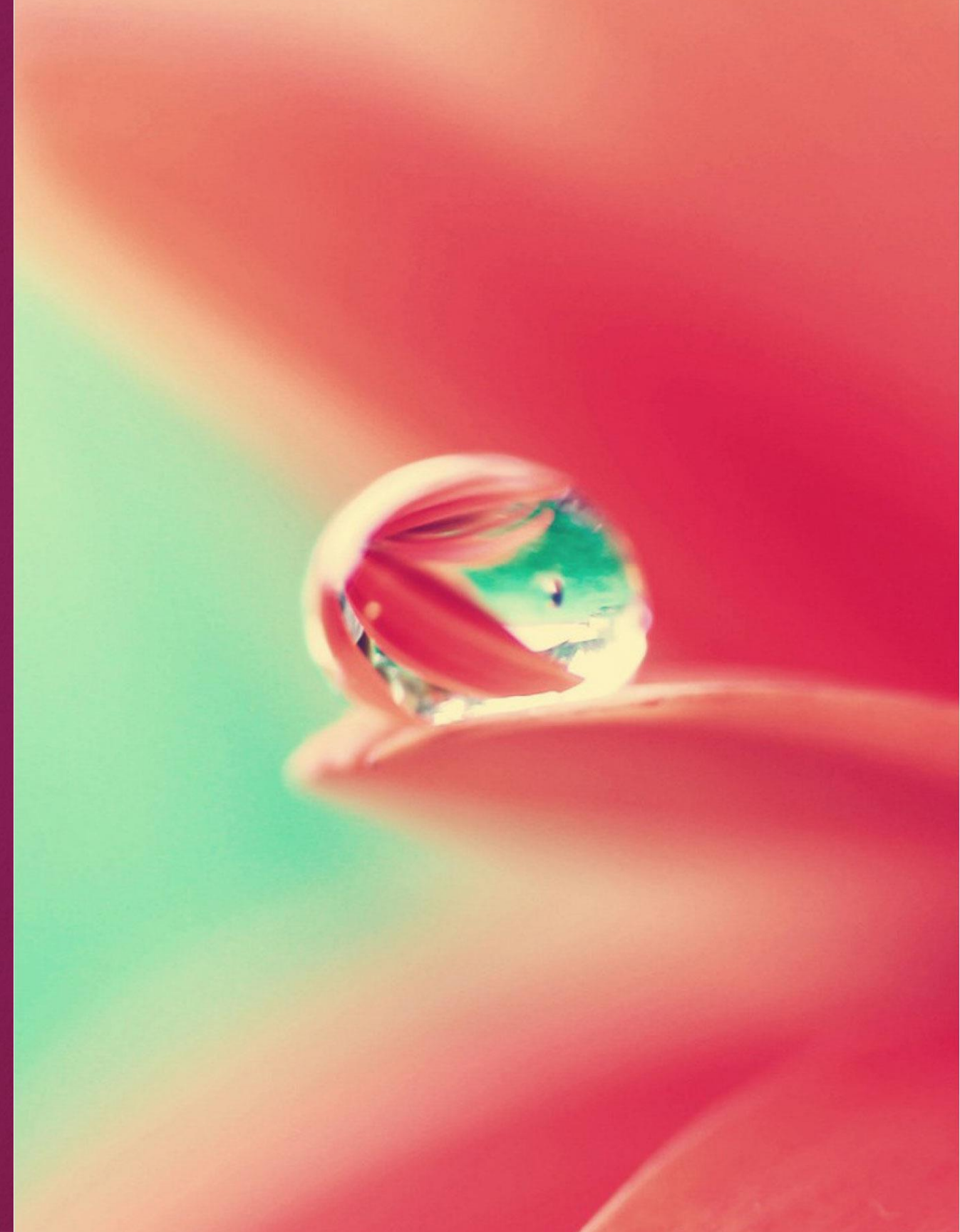
Focus on what is useful for you; and help it sink in.

*Think not lightly of good, saying,
“It will not come to me.”*

*Drop by drop is
the water pot filled.*

*Likewise, the wise one,
Gathering it little by little,
Fills oneself with good.*

Dhammapada 9.122



Introduction

Two Wolves in the Heart



Conflicts are normal.

What are some of your own?

Disagreements at home or work, arguments, voices raised, chilly silences, being let down or hurt or mistreated, grievances and resentments, so much unsaid to keep a fragile peace? Or worse?

What matters is how we relate to them.

Do you dismiss your own needs, give up your rights, let yourself be bullied, or pretend everything is OK when it's not?

At the other extreme, do you bring bitterness, rancor, hostility, callousness, cruelty, grudges, or vengeance?

Take a moment to consider the costs of these, for yourself and others.

Or do you find a realistic middle path as best you can, with appropriate assertiveness and a strong heart?

We're going to focus on that middle path.

A key to which is compassion.



Autonomy and Intimacy

Balancing Autonomy and Intimacy

Two great themes in life: separating/joining, independence/dependence, autonomy/intimacy, me/we

Often framed in conflict with each other, but actually complementary: autonomy helps us feel safe in the depths of intimacy, and intimacy nurtures the self-worth and “secure base” that foster exploration and self-expression.

When we feel autonomous and strong inside, we are more able to pursue vulnerable needs and manage conflicts from within the “green zone” without going “red” into fear, immobilization, inadequacy, anger, or aggression.

Being For Yourself

A brief practice . . .

Bringing to mind the feeling of being for another person . . . A sense of their burdens . . . Feeling caring . . . Loyal . . . An ally . . . Not against others but for them . . . Standing up for them . . . Know what it feels like to be on their side . . .

Then apply this feeling, this stance, toward yourself . . . Aware of something you are dealing with . . . Finding a sense of being determined on your own behalf . . . Recognizing what is fair and good for you . . . Warmth for yourself . . . Support . . . Both tender and muscular . . . On your own side . . .



Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A's go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring this question:

TIP: If you're alone, reflect or journal.

What are some of the good facts in your life these days?

As the listener, keep finding a genuine gladness about the good facts in the life of our partner.

Warmhearted

Bringing to mind one or more beings you care about
Feelings of friendliness, kindness, compassion, love
Sensations of breathing in the area of the heart
Feeling openhearted . . . in a field of relationships
Feeling present and grounded, with an open heart

Resting in Compassion

Bring to mind someone you care about.

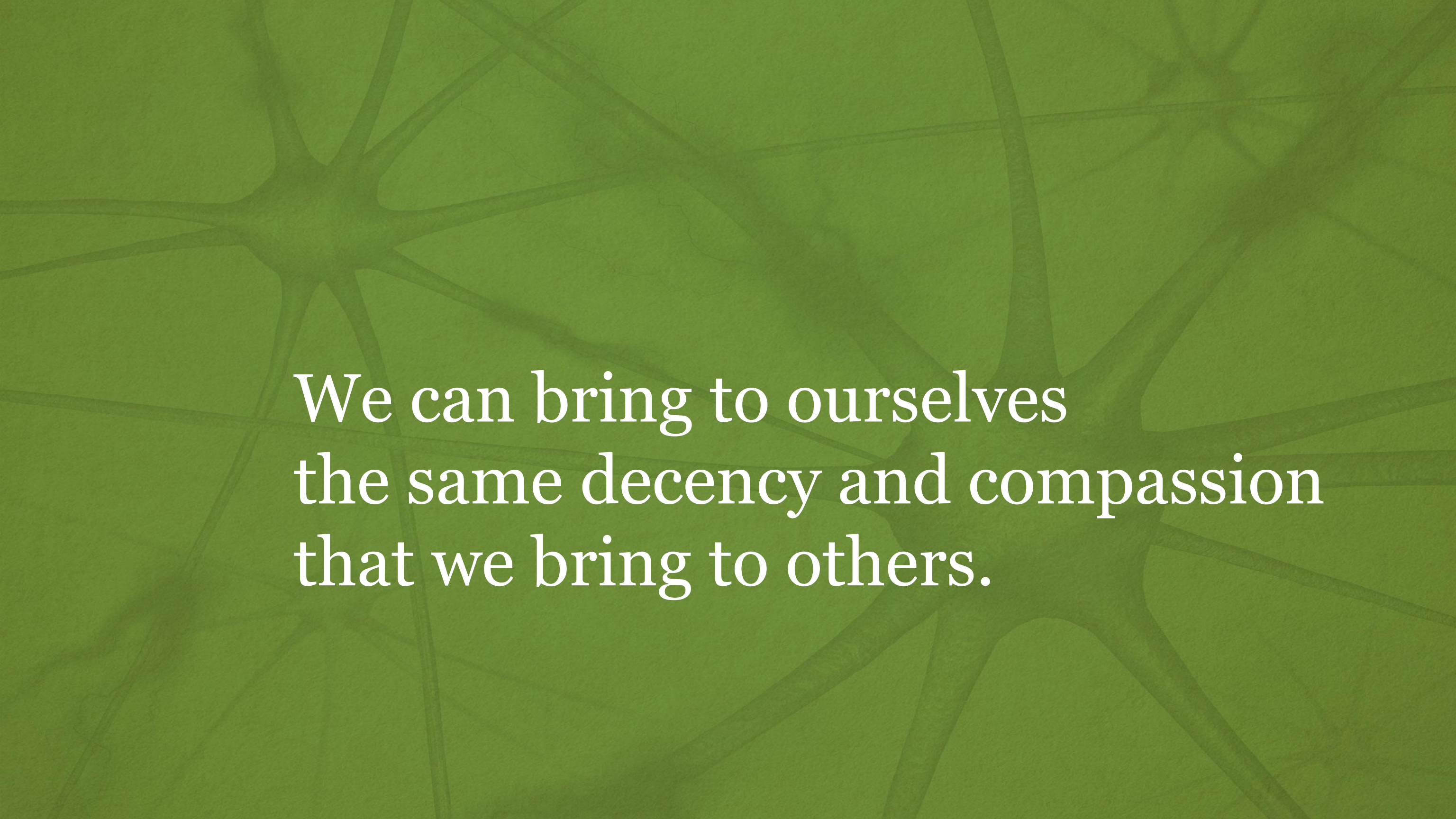
Be aware of how life is landing on them . . . aware of their weariness, stress, illness, loss . . . their suffering.

Find compassion . . . wishing that they not suffer . . . caring and support . . . tender concern.

Perhaps soft thoughts like: “May you not suffer. May your life ease. May you be at peace with this pain.”

Know what compassion is like. Rest in compassion.

Find Your Footing



We can bring to ourselves
the same decency and compassion
that we bring to others.

Self-Compassion in a Conflict

What has happened – and its effects? The suffering? The deeper layers that have gotten stirred up?

Recognize common humanity, understandable impacts.

Bring compassion to yourself. Focus on it distinct from events, anger at others, regret, or remorse.

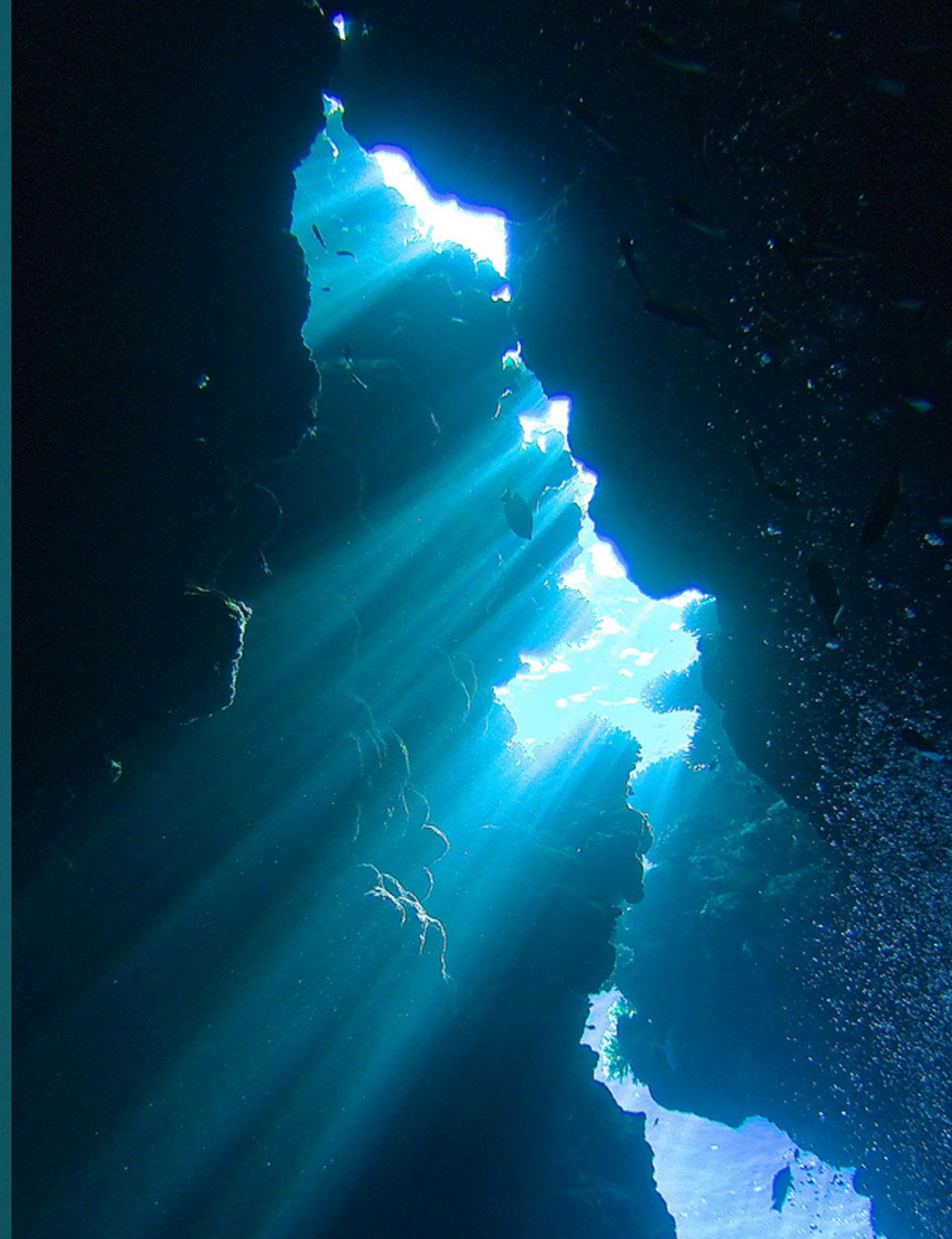
Perhaps also understanding, support, forgiveness

Let all this sink in . . . imagine dealing with the conflict from this place of self-compassion.

“Anthem”

*Ring the bells that can still ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in
That's how the light gets in*

Leonard Cohen



Healthy Assertiveness

Healthy Assertiveness

What it is:

Speaking your truth
and pursuing your aims
in the context of relationships.

Compassion is not agreement, approval, or liking.

Compassion is an inner freedom of the heart.

Compassion for them can coexist with your intensity, moral outrage, fierce protections of others and yourself, effective opposition, assertiveness, and pursuit of justice.

Compassion for people who have wronged you or others . . . is up to you.

Sometime we're so angry, so mistreated, so morally appalled that compassion for them is impossible at the time.

Then the choice is about not harming, not pouring salt on wounds or gas on fires.

*If we could read the secret history
of our enemies,
we should find in each [person's] life
sorrow and suffering enough
to disarm any hostility.*

~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Imagine radiating a field of unconditional decency, goodwill, and compassion.

People move through it and you respond appropriately – perhaps asserting yourself, perhaps stepping back from them – but the field is not contingent on what they do.

This outflowing from the heart – which might seem draining – is actually very nurturing, replenishing, and protective of you.

Healthy Assertiveness

What supports it:

- Being on your own side
- Self-compassion
- Naming the truth to yourself
- Refuges: Three Jewels, reason, love, nature, transcendental, awareness, practice
- Taking care of the big things so you don't grumble about the little ones
- Health and vitality

Right Speech

- Well-intended
- True
- Beneficial
- Timely
- Expressed without harshness
- And - ideally - wanted

What Are You Going to Do?

What do you see? Events, patterns, consequences, predictions? Not overestimating or underestimating.

Why does it matter? Values, principles, scale? What are your real stakes here? Your long-term goals?

What is your plan? “Unilateral virtue?” Getting info, advice, support? Communicating with them – and others? Resizing the relationship? Treating yourself?

What ground of being do you want to rest in?

Healthy Assertiveness: How to Do It - 1

- Know your aims; stay focused on the prize; concede small points to gain on large ones
- Ground in empathy, compassion, and love
- Practice unilateral virtue

Healthy Assertiveness: How to Do It - 2

- Communicate for yourself, not to change others
- Wise Speech; be especially mindful of tone
- NVC: “When X happens, I feel Y because I need Z.”
- Dignity and gravity
- Distinguish empathy building (“Y”) from policy-making

Healthy Assertiveness: How to Do It - 3

- If appropriate, negotiate solutions.
- Establish facts as best you can (“X”)
- Find the deepest wants (“Z”)
- Focus mainly on “from now on”
- Make clear plans, agreements
- Scale relationships to their actual foundations

Feeding the Wolf of Love

Us and Them

- Within-group cooperation, and between-group aggression.
- Our biological nature is much more inclined toward cooperative sociability than toward aggression and indifference or cruelty. We are just very reactive to social distinctions and threats.
- That reactivity is intensified and often exploited by economic, cultural, and religious factors.
- Two wolves in your heart:
 - Love sees a vast circle in which all beings are “us.”
 - Hate sees a small circle of “us,” even only the self.

Which one will you feed?

Finding a sense of an open heart

Goodwill and compassion radiating outward

Including those you care about . . . those who
are neutral . . . those who are difficult

Widening expanding including . . .

Resting in, enjoying the heart . . .

Thank You!

