

Much like a bell that must be struck to ring, we cannot express compassion if we have not been treated compassionately. Compassion, like happiness, freedom, and peace are always attained by giving them to someone else.

Soul Sounds and Harmonies of the Heart

By Dr. John L. Hoff
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When you hear a bell ring or a singing bowl sing, you are experiencing resonance. And part of you—your ears—are made just to vibrate to sound. Your ears turn the vibrations of sound into experiences that your whole body senses and feels. And what we hear can also have great meaning. This past year of being joined with others in studying compassion, inside and out, has taught me that the metaphor of sound is very important to understanding compassion. Our ears are made for listening. And to really listen to another person is not only about the words they are saying but also about the meanings they are trying to communicate. Also, to listen for inflection and feeling is something that your ears train themselves to do. Your ears have learned to listen for words that ring true and sound right. Your ears long to hear sincerity, authentic feeling, and caring. That which the heart hears and the mind understands—which comes through the hearing of the ears—is food for the soul. Our hearts and minds are fed by what we hear. This is not a proper time to speak much of how our minds can also be dulled and our hearts poisoned by what we hear.

A year ago this past fall, the Goodenough Community Council chose *compassion* as our theme for the year and a focus for our Human Relations Laboratory last year. We were delighted when we learned His Holiness, The Dalai Lama was coming to Seattle and bringing his message of compassion. So at this event last year, we very informally lifted up our intention to study compassion together and invited people to sign-up for an experiment in performing one act of intentional compassion each week and to keep each other informed of what we were learning. About forty people signed up and I am especially aware of a variety of people who have shared some of their experiences, many of which are on our web site under the heading Compassion Project (www.goodenough.org). Our study has included reading from Buddhist materials, specifically Tibetan Buddhism and especially the writings of The Dalai Lama. We have also explored the works of Daniel Goleman who reminded us that we have other kinds of intelligence that have not been acknowledged enough. He has identified emotional intelligence and social intelligence as *kinds of smart* which make for successful living. Also we have been reminded from the communitarian movement that emotional and social intelligence were historically aspects of a cultural intelligence in which children and youth were schooled until modern times.

Dr. Goleman's work has been widely accepted and has been applied to organizations by Annie McKee and Richard Boyatzis. One of their books is called *Resonant Leadership* where they suggest the importance of leaders who know how to listen and to attend to the feelings present. Their emphasis on resonant leadership stresses the importance of people following their hearts and their conscience in the business world. They write much about the importance of attitudes and feelings in organizational life.

So the first thing I have learned about compassion this past year is that I know compassion when I hear it and that my body feels the difference when compassion is present.

I have learned that I do not register the absence of compassion so much as I notice and enjoy when compassion is present. Compassion turns me on and tunes me up, inviting me to relate and making it easy to sustain relationship.

A second thing I have learned this year is that I apparently believe that compassion is a human right. It is a basic human right. Somehow I need to know that people who are helping me truly care for me and that good is intended. I need to sense that we have some kind of relationship. Compassion is not created by *random* acts of kindness. Compassion involves a *sustained* relationship embodying the **intention** to help. Thus improving our relationships and improving patterns of mutual communication and care is a good starting place for becoming more compassionate. **The resonance that we hear in a bell that sounds is due to the sustained ring and compassion is experienced by the sustained energy we put into relationship.** I suppose this suggests that as human beings we could become more like a bell that rings true and sustains our influence on others because we have been tempered by experiences that give us endurance. Endurance and consistency are important in being more compassionate.

And then there is harmony—when different notes, at different places in the scale, sound especially good together, are pleasing to the ear, and full of “over-sounds,” such as the sound of bells ringing at the same time—*harmonics*. Harmony is always valued. When sounds go well together it is pleasing to the ear and when people work well together it is wonderful. Harmony has been described as a beautiful result of peaceful activity. This True Holidays event this year is being particularly offered by the friends we call The Goodenough Community, who have taken on the work of being more compassionate individuals and have also discovered it has brought more harmony to our lives. A year of increasing compassion has been rewarding indeed. And I can quite easily recommend to you the following practices that have come up again and again. I call them the ten suggestions for a life worth living:

1. Treat people as you like to be treated.
2. Intentionally do more than your fair share—it will create abundance.
3. Do not expect to be thanked, yet be happy when you are.
4. Intend to become skillful at being compassionate.
5. Ask others how you could be more helpful to them.
6. Take seriously the suggestions of others in order to be more compassionate.
7. Acknowledge that being more compassionate is good for you.
8. Provide encouragement to others for the compassion they render.
9. Speak well of compassionate people and appreciate their service.
10. Practice compassion with those who are least attractive and the most difficult.