So, these days that I'm giving talks about compassion, I feel a little cautious or want to be careful here in talking about it because I don't want to assume that there's compassion is only one thing, and that whatever way I talk about it, that's the true compassion or the right compassion. I think that maybe, I think, because compassion is such an integral part to many people's lives, it is something that's very important and sometimes lays at the center of, you know, what's most valuable for them. I think each person will experience it very personally and in their own way.

And, so we certainly want to be careful. And one way to do that is to appreciate that may be compassion, whatever it might be for you or for anybody, maybe it's not a singular thing. But rather, it's a kind of a compound thing. It's made up from different aspects of it. And it's possible maybe to tease apart and look at some of the particularly important component parts of compassion. And maybe that helps us to look at it more carefully and find our own way with this important topic.

And so one of the elements of compassion, I believe, is that it involves contact with suffering. And that can be, the word suffering sometimes in English seems like it's a really big word, only big things count as suffering. But in Buddhism, dukkah, can also be very small forms of discomfort or stress that we might feel. And so, compassion has something to do with being in the presence of suffering. And that's one of the component parts, that for some people that's an important part of it. And I say sometimes, because there might be an exception to this, as you'll see as we go along.

And so to be willing to know, to be wise about how we are in the presence of suffering, our own and other people's suffering. And one of the component parts of I think, compassion, at least the karuṇā that comes out of Buddhist meditation practice, is having no resistance to suffering. It doesn't mean we don't have a strong protest to the suffering of the world, or strong idea that this shouldn't be there or things have to happen, but in the heart, in our inner life, that there's no resistance to experiencing and feeling that suffering.
And this is what happens as a consequence of meditation practice. That we learn in meditation practice that the contraction of resistance, the hardness of it, the closedness of it is itself a form of suffering. And that it's kind of unfortunate to do it, and we want to be able to relax it and let go of it. And, to be able to let go of all the different ways that we cling, and just to be present in an open way for the suffering. It's one of the great gifts.

And this is one of the things that I learned in my first early years of Buddhist practice when I had a lot of suffering. The meditation practice was a lot about just sitting in the middle of it, and just allowing it to be there, but just being open to it, and not being reactive to it in any kind of way or caught in any kind of way. Just present. It was kind of an unconditional acceptance of the present moment with the suffering.

And that was transformational for me. It was hard. But it was kind of like the meditation practice was a tenderizer for hard meat and my heart just softened and softened by just this showing up and showing up to suffer without reacting to it or closing down to it. And it might seem counterintuitive to do this because it hurts. You know, it's kind of painful. But it allows something to soften and open. And the idea of having the suffering we experience be something that touches us and rather than contracting us or closing us down or making us hard, it actually expands something inside of us. Something becomes more open or something kind of suffuses us.

So I often think of this as being tenderness myself, tenderness, softness, words that I like for this kind of inner feeling. And that the tenderness has no boundaries. It has no walls or sharp lines where the tender is. And to experience suffering and have this openness suffuse, pervade, without boundaries. This feeling of tenderness somewhere in the chest, somewhere inside, is a beautiful feeling, wonderful feeling, even though the suffering kind of hurts at the same time. So to meet suffering without resistance. This is, if we meet it with resistance, then it's easy to be distressed, to be upset, dismayed, frightened, angry, all kinds of other things. But to learn the capacity to receive it without resistance.

And again, the reference point for this is meditation practice where you're not expected to act on the suffering. You're not expected to go help someone. You're expected to just learn how to sit and be really present. And in that kind of context, to discover in that process, this place of freedom inside, this place of softness and tenderness that gets evoked in the context of suffering.

It's a very strange idea for people who've never experienced it, because suffering is, you know, feels awful. And why should I feel awful and bad. I've known people who've gotten angry when I suggested they should sit in mindfulness and open to their pain or open to their suffering, and really feel it and know it, because their whole life was about getting away from it and fixing it and doing something. So part of compassion is this place that's touched inside that when there's no resistance, kind of an opening, a tenderness.

And then the second part of compassion that I think of is caring for whatever that suffering is, even the suffering itself or caring for the person who's suffering or the being that's suffering. And the word care is a kind of a special word. It doesn't necessarily mean that you are going to act to help them alleviate their suffering, that you're responsible for their suffering. It means that in some contexts it's enough just that we have the capacity to just care. Oh, I care about your suffering. It's important for me and that you're suffering, it's important for me because I care about you. I want to let you know that I care, I
sympathize, I'm with you. I'm your companion, I'm your ally, I'm your support. I'm here with you in your suffering.

And I've been the recipient of that from people where I really felt that in some ways they cared for me and my suffering. And that I didn't feel like they were asking anything, or doing anything or expecting anything from me. And it wasn't like they're actively involved in trying to fix or take away my suffering. But just knowing that they sympathize, that there was this wonderful care, and warmth and love and recognition and appreciation of me as I had my suffering. It kind of helped things relax and soften and feeling the human warmth and connection to someone else. So part of suffering is just simply the caring for someone, the kindness, the openness, the sense of shared humanity independent of wanting to do something to alleviate it.

But another aspect of compassion is that motivation to do something about the suffering. And this is where we have to be a little bit careful because what kind of motivation. And I like to think of this, when we're in the contact of suffering, there's two Dharma motivations that can arise out of it. One is, in fact, wishing and wanting to help the person so they don't suffer anymore, hoping for them not to suffer, and in offering something, offering help and support and being a compassionate, it's a compassionate action.

The other action, response to suffering, is when it doesn't make sense for us to act on the suffering, to help them out or to do something to change it or give a helping hand. The experience of suffering in the world and our own suffering can motivate us to practice more diligently, to be inspired to practice and really get to the bottom of our own suffering, really find a deep peace, find a deep place of nonresistance and wisdom and deeper compassion to go on the path of practice. And this is a very important part for me because there's lots of suffering in the world that breaks my heart. But I'm not going to do anything about that particular kind of suffering, not directly just. It's only limited what I can do.

But so I put my energy into another direction. One way is I devote myself more to my practice. And now that I'm a teacher, I also devote myself more to teaching, because I'm not necessarily helping somewhere else in the world. But I'll just put more inspired effort into making a difference where I can make a difference.

And so to have the contact with suffering give birth to motivation of different kinds, I think sometimes it's very respectful for our own hearts. There's something about acting and being motivated by something that moves us a lot that actually keeps freeing the heart or developing the heart. Not acting sometimes is kind of causing more suffering, causing more harm to ourselves.

But, the more the bigger the suffering is that we experience like in the world, the more important it is for us to respond and to act and to do something. But remember, it doesn't have to be we respond directly to that thing. It might be we do something different.

So for example, 9/11 had a big impact on me. And when it happened, I felt I have to change, I have to be a different person, by that be changed by this experience. How do I want to be changed by it? And so I decided to start to train people to become Buddhist chaplains. So I acted in the world. I felt like I
had to do something different. And so I created this program that still exists that has been going on now for about getting close to 18 years or so, training in Buddhist chaplaincy. So the idea is, what can we do, and not be burdened by the idea we have to do something that's, you know, directly related to suffering if it doesn't make sense for us to be involved.

So the tenderness that comes from nonresistance, the simple care and caringness that doesn't really involve doing anything but to deep care. And the third is being motivated to do something, and being wise about what direction we go do there. But again, the reference point is deep meditation practice. And to have these component parts come forward, they come out of us without any obligation. And we can feel in meditation that any sense of obligation is a resistance or is a heaviness or is a burden, is a closing down, is not really healthy to do it out of a sense of duty, I'm obligated to be compassionate. You can't be obligated to be compassionate, because it's, by its very nature, it's something that's deeper than any obligation. You can't manufacture it and act it out. It's something deeper. And so just to not feel obligated to be compassionate, but to be motivated to be compassionate, to be motivated to develop our compassion, because something deep inside us wants us to be a different person, wants us to be someone who can respond to the world in effective and useful ways.

So no obligation to be compassion. And I think for some people, this is a maybe difficult lesson and a very important one to learn, I feel at least, because then the compassion can be clearer, stronger, and come from a deep-rooted place inside that hopefully makes it more effective and more meaningful for the people who we encounter and for ourselves.

So you might have different component parts of compassion. But because there's so many different kinds of compassion, different people experience in different ways, maybe just a principle that it's your compassion is made up of different parts can help you to look more deeply what goes on with you when you have compassion. And that's something I think sometimes very helpful to write about or talk to friends about, to kind of really start teasing apart what goes on for you when you feel or act with compassion. So thank you very much and I will see you in a couple of days.