So this is the last talk on compassion, the Buddhist concept of karuṇā, the word that often translated as compassion. In the early Buddhist tradition, the reference point for this karuṇā is meditation practice, meditation where we become free of the hindrances, where we become free of clinging and hatred, where we become free of preoccupation. And with that the free of obligation, free of idealism, free of all these things that keep us kind of locked in or limited or closed down or agitated. And so what is it that gets born out of that that has to do with caring for the suffering of oneself and the suffering of the world? With that reference point, what is the flavor and the character of compassion that has a quality of freedom within it?

And certainly, many of us can have the experience of being touched in a compassionate way, a caring way for others. And to feel in the very movement of compassion, a kind of something opens up, something different than self-concern or the usual reference points for me and you and self and other operate.

And I don't know if this story touches this for you, but it does for me. The story of, I don't know if it's a true story, but maybe that doesn't matter. It was in Washington, DC, on a very beautiful spring day with some of the great trees flowering big, white, beautiful white flowers, and beautiful blue sky and crisp and clear air. And everyone kind of delighted by the freshness of it all. And a person who goes to work every day walks by a man who sits on the sidewalk begging with a cup, a blind man hoping for some spare change. And on that day, the person who was walking by noticed that there was no money in the person's cup. And so the passerby asked, Can I make a sign for you? And the blind men said yes. So he wrote a sign and put it propped it up against the cup, and went on to work. And coming back at the end of the day, the man was still sitting there, and now there was money in the cup. And he stopped and said, How is it? You know, how's it going? And the blind man said, Oh, it's going great. I've never received so much before. What did you write on the sign? And the passerby said, I wrote, today is a beautiful day, and I'm blind.
And for some people our sense of common humanity or sense of empathy and understanding of what that means, that here many people who have sight are really enjoying something special and unique and vibrant and alive and something which is uplifting, a beautiful day. And a person who's blind maybe can smell the freshness of the day, but can't see the blue sky, the flowers that I can see. It touches something in us. And that in wanting to extend ourselves for such a person, to support such a person, to write a sign, to offer some support, money maybe. Something in about that movement is not, no longer about self. Especially if we're coming out of meditation and we're not so busy and self-preoccupied and caught up in ideas and thoughts which should be and shouldn't be. There's something that opens in us, that oh, of course, you know, I feel for this person or I have compassion or I'm with this person.

And that movement, I would like to propose, to care for this kind of situation, someone else like this, for it to be karunā, this coming out of kind of like out of meditation or the similar places that way is nourishing for the person that's offered to and it's nourishing for the person who gives it. That nourishing and being nourished are the same thing. And to have that as the reference point for compassion. And so we're looking for that, or we're being careful if it's not that. If we don't feel nourished, then we're probably operating under obligation, duty, a big should, a kind of maybe even a harshness inside you. Gil, you're supposed to be compassionate. Better do it now. And otherwise, you'll be, you know, somehow a bad person.

But to feel, to really recognize and know in oneself deeply what it's like to be nourished and nourishing. And that can be for oneself, but also in our relationship to the world around us, to be generous and that be a kind of a nourishment for ourselves. To have goodwill and have that be nourishing for ourselves. And to have compassion and that be nourishing for ourselves.

So this karunā then has a very close relationship to liberation or freedom in Buddhism. The more free we become in meditation or in other ways, the more we have a reference point for understanding the simplicity and the clarity, the beauty of compassion that helps us become happy, a certain kind of happiness. When happiness is not really appropriate or what, because the tragedies of the world is so big, there is a response to that tragedy. Maybe we don't feel happy, but there's a nourishment in it. There is a radiance of goodness that's there when we don't get caught up in the thoughts of horror or dismay, or anger or agitation or it lands on this place of self like oh, I have to do something and I'm confused and what should I do. It's simply this place that oh, today's a beautiful day, and I'm blind. Oh, that something in us opens. Oh, oh. Let me offer something here. Let me share something with this person.

So compassion practices, I think Diana guided you, taught you yesterday, can be a formal meditation practice as well. So we don't leave the cultivation or our compassion to chance, we can actually cultivate and develop and let it grow. And it's been one of the great gifts of my life is to watch and develop my sense of compassion. I had no idea when I started meditation that it was such a fantastic thing to have compassion be awakened in me. So possible to do that intentionally and develop it.

It's also then one of the great important parts of that is the way in which compassion both becomes a form of freedom and it also teaches us more about freedom, freedom from self, freedom from clinging,
freedom from hatred, freedom from sensual desires and comfort, freedom from our opinions and stories, freedom from self-preoccupation, self-attachment.

And so this deeper we go with this meditation on compassion and being nourished by it, we're experiencing a nourishing alternative to the pursuit of sensual pleasure, a nourishing alternative to being caught in stories, whatever stories we have, opinions we have, an alternative to self-preoccupation. And it isn't that we can let go of self-preoccupation and have nothing, we have this place of tenderness and nourishment within.

So the deeper our compassion, stronger it becomes, the more concentrated we become, it then itself sets the stage for the deepest liberation that Buddhism offers or points to. And that is when the mind is really peaceful, at ease, settled on itself, then the experience that there can be insight into the nature of things including insight into the nature of compassion, the insight into even compassion is impermanent and inconstant and changing. Even compassion is something that arises out of the constructing forces of the mind, the heart. And there's something that is beyond the constructing forces of the heart and the mind, something which beyond, outside of, you know, kind of what's inconstant and impermanent.

And that which is beyond and outside of it is not a thing. But it's the absence of all clinging, the absence of all self-preoccupation. Such a radical, radical, radical absence that it really gets our attention. And really, wow, it's possible, it really is possible after all, to experience, to have, to live this life without any clinging, attachment whatsoever. It's a phenomenal thing to know that.

And that freedom from clinging itself clears the dust in a sense from our hearts, from the windows of our hearts that now it's so much easier to have compassion. It's so much easier to have love. Because there's no smudges. There's no dust. There's nothing in the way of that tenderness, that warmth, being touched by the world and the heart touching the world.

And so we find that there's a whole new level of what compassion can be after some really deep letting go happens. So compassion can be part of the path to letting go, because it really is supportive and helps us relax and can be very compelling to really kind of settle into a strong sense of compassion. And then it can also then be the stepping stone for a deep releasing that goes on.

And for the Buddha then, once a person has experienced deep release, and then the heart is open and compassion is awoken in a greater way, then the Buddha's instructions is go forth out into the world for the welfare of humans and gods, for the welfare and happiness of all beings. In other words, live caring for this world, live for the welfare of the world. And not because we should. I feel it's because that's what the heart wants to do. And that acting on the compassion is an extremely important thing to do. To not act on our compassion impulses is a kind of restriction, is a kind of closing down. It's a kind of diminishing or even, sometimes even a kind of a wounding of ourselves. That if we have an impulse for compassion, act on it. It's a feedback loop there too, that the more we act on compassion, and this pure compassion as we can, the more that compassion then feeds back to us and supports us. And just the idea of compassion and the thought that I am compassionate, just that only the meditation and compassion, it really shortchanges us. It's in the enactment of compassion that compassion really comes to fulfillment, to completion.
So and sometimes the practice of compassion is to practice acting as if you have compassion, knowing very well you're acting as if. But sometimes acting as if evokes and wakens up and clears the space for an innate capacity of compassion to grow and develop and catch up to what we're actually acting out.

So the brahmavihāra of compassion, one of the great gifts and treasures of this tradition of practice, of Buddhism. And may it be that you treasure whatever capacity for compassion, karuṇā, that you have hints of, that you've touched into. Treasure it, value it, make room for it. May it have a strong place in your life, and may you benefit from that and may you benefit all beings from that. Thank you.