

Compassion-Based Practices of Personal and Social Restoration

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ABSTRACT

After describing those components that encompass the essence of compassion, this article explores compassion-based methods of personal healing and restoration rooted in Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS) and contemplative practice; it describes the role and power of compassion in cultivating social restoration; and it outlines the essential features of the Compassion Practice—a contemplative practice that nurtures both compassion for one’s self and for others, even those with whom we are in enmity.

In January of 1995, a midnight telephone call awakened Azim Khamisa. His only child, Tariq, a twenty-year-old college student in San Diego, was delivering a pizza earlier that evening in a neighborhood known for occasional gang violence. As the young man sat in his car, another car pinned him from behind. Two teens got out. Tony Hicks, all of fourteen-years-old, was handed a gun by the older teen, the gang leader. Tony was ordered to “take down” the unknown delivery man. Tony obeyed. He shot Tariq one time, the bullet piercing Tariq’s heart. Within several minutes, Tariq suffocated in his own blood. The phone call awakening Azim Khamisawas to inform him that his son was found dead at the scene.

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In the months that followed, Azim struggled with emotions all too understandable—rage, helplessness, despair, even thoughts of vengeance. A devout Muslim, he also struggled with the Islamic invitation to resist being consumed by hatred and to find a way to forgive even the unforgiveable. He took care not to act out in his anger, but neither did he suppress it. He meditated prayerfully and sought therapy for his grief. Over time, the pain’s edge subsided, and he came to realize that there were victims on both sides of the gun. Not only was his son killed, but an African-American fourteen-year-old boy—raised fatherless in extreme poverty and ubiquitous racism—was being tried as an adult, to then be tossed into a prison cell for the unforeseeable future. Azim decided that the cycle of despair and violence must come to an end. He quit his job and created a foundation, named after his son, dedicated to eradicating the conditions of youth violence and teaching young people the peacemaker’s path of nonviolence, forgiveness, and restorative justice. He invited the teenaged killer’s grandfather to join him. Then he visited the killer in prison.

Though he already had felt forgiveness in his heart, Azim grew anxious as he waited in the jail’s grated visiting booth. He was unsure what he would feel when his son’s slayer sat across from him. He imagined looking into the gang member’s eyes and seeing the face of a cold-blooded killer. The boy entered the visiting booth; and Azim looked into Tony’s eyes. He did not see a killer. He saw a terrified child, beaten down by a world stacked against him. As Azim described it, he gazed straight into Tony’s soul and saw the boy’s humanity. In that moment of connection, both of their hearts broke open. Azim shared—without malice or accusation—the grief of losing a son. And he listened to Tony share the pain of growing up fatherless in a gang-ridden ghetto. He wept for Tony. Tony wept as well, expressing how sorry he was and how he ached for some way to make it all up. Azim offered Tony a way. Indeed, he did more; he offered Tony a job. Upon his release from prison, Tony could work as an advocate against youth violence... through the foundation named after the very boy Tony had killed.¹

Azim Khamisa embodies—in a rather dramatic fashion—the essence of compassion. Perhaps less dramatically, whispers of this same compassion are known in us all. A mother sees a child ravaged by fever and cradles the loved one in her rocking arms; a colleague loses her job and her co-worker is moved to offer support; a country is devastated by an earthquake or tsunami and from around the world people ache to provide relief. However faintly, the pulse of compassion beats within us all. Indeed, as most spiritual traditions suggest, this pulse of compassion embodies what is most noble and pure about us. We are most human when our hearts are moist with compassion.

Azim Khamisa embodies compassion; he also embodies practices of compassion that are both personally and socially restorative. Azim could have been consumed, most understandably, by anger, hatred, and the thirst for retribution. He knew, however, that such hardening of his heart would only make him yet another victim of the crime. Compassion—both inwardly toward his own reactivity and outwardly toward his son’s murderer—brought healing, deepened his soul, and uncovered capacities he never knew he possessed. In addition, it was Azim’s compassion for Tony that melted the boy into remorse and prompted Tony’s commitment to restitution. As sure

as demonizing and punitive retribution would only have calcified Tony's defiance and violence, Azim's compassion created the possibility for accountable reconciliation and the eventual restoration of Tony to society. This article explores the nature of such compassion, the role that it plays in personal and social restoration, and practices that nurture it both individually and interpersonally. It invites you to walk a few steps along the radical path Azim Khamisa chose to follow.

The Essential Components of Compassion

Though compassion has been studied for centuries by Buddhist scholars and practitioners, it has only recently captured the attention of Western scientists and researchers.² Within the debate that remains about precisely what compassion is, I offer the following working definition.³ Compassion involves "being moved in one's depths by the pain or bliss of another and responding in ways that intend to either ease their suffering or promote their flourishing."⁴ As such, compassion includes the following five essential components:

1) Contemplative Awareness: A precondition for compassion is a particular perceptual apprehension of another. Usually, when persons relate to one another, we do so through instinctive reactivities conditioned by our own needs, desires, prejudices, and conditionings. We do not so much 'see' other persons on their own terms; rather, we perceive them through the lenses of our own various agendas. Others are objectified pawns in our personal projects, not multi-dimensional subjects with depth and uniqueness. Contemplative awareness, as Walter Burghardt has classically defined it, entails "a long loving look at the real."⁵ It is the non-reactive, non-projective apprehension of another in the mystery of their particularity. Azim 'sees' contemplatively, not when Tony is demonized as a cold-blooded killer, but when Azim peers into the very soul of Tony and glimpses the terrified boy battered down by life. The recipient knows the difference. Compassion engenders the sense of truly being 'seen.'

2) Empathic Care: Compassion entails 'being moved' by another's experience. In Arabic, Hebrew, and Greek, the etymological roots for the word 'compassion' are linked to a person's vital organs—specifically the womb, bowels, belly, and entrails.⁶ In essence, when one is moved to compassion, one's depths are stirred—often viscerally. One is 'gut-wrenched' before suffering, 'sickened to the stomach,' or one's very womb contracts. In contrast to the indifference, coldness, and rational detachment of the unmoved, the compassionate person allows another's pain or joy to reverberate within one's deepest core such that they are moved to pathos before the other's suffering or stirred to delight before their flourishing. Once more, the recipient knows the difference. In attachment language, the recipient feels 'felt;' they feel 'got;' they feel like someone gets what they feel, and gets it to the point of caring.⁷

3) All-Accepting Presence: At the core of compassion is a quality of presence that is non-judgmental, all-embracing, and sympathetically understanding about the conditions and causes that give rise to the recipient's experience. Like the mother cradling her child, the 'womb-like' love of compassion carries no hint of shame, critique, aversion, or belittlement. When he sees into the soul of the boy who killed his son, Azim has seemingly infinite understanding about the wounds and oppressions that gave rise to Tony's behavior. In turn, when softened to receive it, Tony feels accepted, forgiven, known, and graciously held. Azim's soothing balm of presence moistens Tony until he is able to grieve the pain he has caused and ache to be restored to his own humanity.

4) Desire for Flourishing: Compassion not only grieves with the wounded in pain; it yearns that suffering be transformed into joy. Like the womb that receives and incubates with protective care, holding another's pain is in service of birthing life.⁸ Compassion is not possessive; tenderly receiving another's experience gives rise to the yearning that the other flourishes with the fullness of life. Azim feels sorrow in the face of Tony's suffering, but also that sorrow swells into the aching desire that Tony would know healing and step into wholeness.

5) Restorative Action: The receptive empathy of compassion does not close in on itself. It does not soak in a moment of tender pathos then simply walk away. Compassion is responsive. It takes some step toward easing another's suffering and nurturing their flourishing. The mother cradles the sick child and searches for the medicine that will heal; television images of a hurricane's destruction give rise to relief trips delivering supplies and repairing the damage; and Azim, before an imprisoned boy, is moved to participate in the boy's rehabilitation. Compassion includes restorative action; without it, compassion degenerates into sentimentality.

These five components encapsulate the essence of compassion. Compassion is eclipsed to the extent that any one of them is absent. This suggests that compassion is not simply an emotion (merely being moved by another is not compassion if it is without the impulse to respond); it is not simply a perceptual awareness (contemplative detachment in and of itself is not compassion); nor is it simply a human behavior (one can act to ease suffering without being compassionate). Rather, compassion is an experiential gestalt, a holistic complex that involves and integrates the full range of human capacities—perception, emotion, cognition, physiology, intention, motivation, and behavior. Metaphorically, it is a movement of the heart; once broken open, it beats to the pulse of receiving another's pain or bliss for what it is, replenishing it with an all-embracing care, then pulsating back out into the world with restorative acts of kindness, healing, and justice. This, I suggest, is the three-fold heartbeat of embodied compassion.

The Role of Compassion in Personal and Social Restoration

Compassion is more than simply a seemingly lofty spiritual state to which only saints and holy ones ever aspire. Compassion plays a central role in personal healing and social reconciliation. As such, the cultivation of compassion involves less the rigor of straining toward an impossible ideal, and more the life-giving invitation to nurture one's own flourishing while participating in a radically transforming process of healing social conflict. Indeed, the twin processes of compassion-based personal restoration and compassion-based social reconciliation are intimately intertwined. Practices that nurture compassion, therefore, will oscillate around the rhythm of extending restorative compassion toward one's self and extending such compassion toward others.

COMPASSION-BASED PERSONAL RESTORATION

In a world where violence is rampant, where children kill strangers for status in their gang, it seems counter-intuitive, even indulgent, to focus first on personal restoration. Yet, as Desmond Tutu observed fighting apartheid in South Africa, social transformation begins with personal transformation.⁹ Until compassion takes root within ourselves, our inner violence will sabotage any social healing we seek to promote. And if Richard Schwartz is right, inner violence precisely describes the usual state of our psyches.¹⁰ Schwartz, the architect of the compassion-based therapeutic model known as Internal Family Systems (IFS), observes that in the same way that our social world is ripped apart by war and conflict, we are at war within ourselves. We embody a bickering cacophony of competing impulses, secret shames, unhealed wounds, obsessive drives, self-castigating voices, and unsatisfied yearnings—each one battling another in a veritable barroom brawl of an inner world.

To illustrate, consider the following somewhat hypothetical example. My brother telephones me one Thursday evening and tells me he is travelling to southern California the next day to visit me for the weekend. Without thinking, I hear myself saying, "Great! I can't wait to see you." Even as I am saying this, however, I hear a voice groaning within me, "Noooo. You have an article due on Monday. You need to spend the weekend writing." Obviously, a *part* of me is eager to hang out with my brother, while another *part* of me wants to bear down and work. As these two parts debate one another, something deep in my belly starts feeling unsettled—the thought of an entire weekend with my brother is causing me to be sick. Fantasies flood me, hoping some horrific accident would befall him preventing him from coming at all—a flat tire, a car accident, a gastro-intestinal virus, anything. Then, a screaming voice shames me with self-castigation—"What a horrible way to feel about your brother! What kind of a person are you? What kind of a *Christian* are you?" Within mo-

ments, my inner world has taken on the contentious chaos of a Senate sub-committee—yearnings to enjoy a weekend with my brother, nagging pressures to work responsibly, dark fantasies veiling some murky shame in the depths, and voices of self-pummeling all kick and scream, push and pull in a last-ditch battle to win supremacy until it all becomes overwhelming and the impulse erupts to numb myself by binging on ice cream and television reruns. What in the world is going on in me?

IFS sheds light on such internal conflicts, conflicts that usually resolve themselves rather unsatisfactorily with one internal voice seizing the day while suppressing, only temporarily, all of the others. Relievedly, this is not symptomology for Multiple Personality Disorder. IFS suggests that each person's inner world is similarly constructed. And the clue for healing is hidden within. The model is composed of the following principles:

1) Multiplicity is fundamental to personality: Personalities, Schwartz argues, are more multiple than singular. We are not composed of a single self; we have multiple selves. Drawing from the way his patients naturally refer to them, Schwartz simply calls these 'parts.' A *part* of me is a hospitable big brother; a *part* of me is a working professional; a *part* of me carries some secret familial shame; a *part* of me is a self-critical moralist; and a *part* of me is attracted to anesthetizing self-medication. Each of these 'parts' is an energy system all to itself—with its own values, beliefs, emotional valences, and accompanying bodily sensations. Jung called them complexes; Freud called them ego-states; Assagioli called them sub-personalities; Thich Nhat Hanh has called them mental-states. And each part intrudes into our experience in some distinct fashion—as an emotion; a bodily sensation; an image or fantasy; a voice or thought; or an impulse or behavior.

2) Personality 'parts' compose an internal system: These energy systems within us, these 'parts,' exist in relationship to one another. The hospitable big brother and the working professional within me are in a veritable tug-of-war vying for dominance. When feelings of shame overwhelm the system, a self-regulating anesthetist rushes in to suppress and stabilize.

3) The goal of the personality is harmony: As in classical systems thinking, the internal personality system moves toward equilibrium. The most efficient system is one in which each part calmly plays its appropriate role—balanced, integrated, and in cooperative, rather than conflictual, relationship with the other parts of the system. Schwartz uses the analogy of an orchestra. Each part is like a distinct musician with its own instrument. A well-orchestrated personality system is one where each part plays in harmony with the whole—one's life bearing the melody of peace, compassion, and grounded personal power. All too often, however, our lives feel like cacophonies, the trumpets of moralism blaring out of control, the drumbeats of busyness pounding relentlessly on in a death march of their own, and the strings of playfulness all too quiet, if not silenced altogether. The melody of peace and compassion degenerates into a riot of internal violence or the whimpering elegies of despair. Harmony occurs as each cacophonous part is re-tuned to its proper pitch and role within the systemic symphony.

4) The non-extreme intention of every ‘part’ within us is good: The counter-intuitive claim Schwartz makes is that every energy system within us, every ‘part,’ is rooted in something fundamentally good. Every demon is an angel in disguise. No matter how destructive a part may be acting out—a dark obsession, a crippling self-loathing, a calcified violence—it is seeking to meet, however distortedly, some fundamental life-need it experiences as being threatened. Extreme and destructive parts emerge as survival strategies in the midst of violation and trauma. Though veiled, they bear a plea for healing and integration. Marshall Rosenberg, the developer of Non-Violent Communication, concurs—every extreme emotion and behavior is but the “tragic cry of an unmet need.”¹¹ Even the gang activity of fourteen-year-old Tony Hicks emerged out of a cry for belonging, for personal power, for dignity and respect. The grossly distorted form that cry took was rooted in the unhealed wounds of child abandonment and societal dehumanization.

5) Within each person, a core Self resides: Schwartz observes that every person has a Self. In our deepest core, an integrative center resides. Each internal orchestra, metaphorically, has a conductor as it were—a source of internal leadership with the personal power, inner authority, healing care, and innate wisdom necessary to integrate the system. Contemplatives from various spiritual traditions recognize this core essence as well, and call it variously the witness, the observing ego, centered presence, or the true self. Essentially, there are two ways of being in the world—‘part’-enmeshment or Self-presence. Most often, we are ‘possessed’ by or enmeshed in one or another of our internal parts. At those times, we are reactive, projective, and unconsciously driven by the agenda of that particular internal energy system. Self-presence is a qualitatively different sphere of consciousness, one in which we are aware of our experience without being enmeshed within it. We are anchored in a deeper ground of Self energy from which we *have* emotions, for example, as opposed to being consumed by them. Like the still center at the bottom of the sea, the flurry of reactivities, drives, and impulses on the surface leaves us unruffled and clear-headed, open and understanding. Most notably, for Schwartz, the essence of such Self-presence is an unequivocal and all-inclusive compassion for all that stirs within the waters of our internal world.

6) The path to internal harmony and personal healing is Self-grounded compassion to each and every part of our experience: IFS offers an unlikely process by which to integrate the emotions, thoughts, and impulses that usually war within us. Typically, when beset by an internal stirring—an impulse to self-medicate, a passionate emotion, an unconscious absorption into work or busyness—we either act out, enmeshed in the power of that stirring, or we seek to suppress it, hence enmeshed in some managerial part of our personality that has deemed the stirring unacceptable and seeks to manhandle it away. Neither option is ultimately satisfying. Enmeshed acting out is a form of internal slavery—bobbing about at the mercy of various unconscious agendas. Suppression is but a temporary relief as the disturbing energy merely erupts with force in another place or time. IFS suggests a counter-intuitive alternative. It invites us to tame the internal stirring with

the healing presence of Self-grounded compassion. This process entails a) developing a contemplative distance from any internal stirring, a distance similar to mindful awareness; b) becoming grounded in the organic compassion of internal Self-presence; c) connecting with the essential life-need for which that stirring is fighting; and d) responding with the compassionate care that tends the need and soothes the stirring. Like a screaming child in search of its mother, the extreme energy of any internal stirring dissipates when it is ‘heard’ and held and its need is caringly satisfied. When such inner work is sustained over time, the connection to one’s Self-essence becomes solidified, deep wounds are healed, and cacophonous parts are harmonized into integration and wholeness. In short, personal restoration is secured.

Such restoration is facilitated and sustained by contemplative exercises such as the Compassion Practice detailed in the appendix below. In essence, the Compassion Practice nurtures the contemplative awareness of one’s internal stirrings that grounds a Self-presence no longer enmeshed in reactivity; it extends authentic compassion toward the yearnings and wounds at the root of such stirrings; and it grounds one in the empowered clarity that makes possible compassionate action toward others.

THE ROLE OF COMPASSION IN SOCIAL RESTORATION

Walter Wink argues that the way humanity responds to violence is the most pressing question facing the planet today.¹² Typically, when someone violates us—whether in an aggressive interpersonal interaction or through an attack on our country—we react in one of two instinctive ways --fight or flight. We either inflict violence in retaliation (be it physically, verbally, or emotionally), or we flee in submissive retreat. The latter leaves us smoldering in unresolved resentment while allowing the violation to remain unchecked. The former merely goads greater enmity, prompting further retaliation. A Russian folktale illustrates this familiar cycle of violence.

Two merchants have become bitter enemies. They spread malicious rumors about one another, they steal each other’s customers, they sabotage one another’s shops until, driven by their reciprocating rage, they square off in the middle of town. One shopkeeper bares his fists at the other. The second draws a knife. The first counters with a warrior’s sword. The second pulls out a pistol. The first comes back with a rifle. The second whisks out a dynamite stick. The first barrels forth with a dynamite bundle and defiantly lights the fuse. Finally an angel, grieving the depth of vengeance and alarmed at the escalating violence, intervenes. She snuffs out the fuse of the first man then parlays with him on the side. She tells him that she is prepared to grant him any wish in the world—extravagant riches, abundant children, a king’s palace, anything he desires at all... with one condition. Whatever he wishes for himself, she will also grant to his rival, twofold. The

shopkeeper muses over the dilemma, desiring wealth yet bitter at the prospect of his rival's double share. Finally, he knows what he wants. He turns to the angel and confirms,

“Whatever I wish for, my rival will receive twofold?” The angel nods. “Then what I want for myself is... one blind eye.”¹³

Compassion-based responses to violation offer a redemptive alternative—one that frees the victim from being consumed by resentment, powerlessness, or hate; and one that offers the perpetrator a space for dignified reconciliation. Azim Khamisa embodied such a redemptive alternative. After cultivating a freedom from the prison of his vengeance, he found a compassion for the person who wounded him, then offered that one a path toward restitution and restoration. Rooted in principles of non-violent communication, conflict transformation, and restorative justice, compassion-based processes of social restoration embody the following assumptions:

1) No one is irredeemable: No matter how destructive, unreasonable, or violent a person may become, a core of their essential Self still resides within them. However dimly, the pulse of humanity beats in us all.

2) Perpetration is a response to violation: No one is born a perpetrator of violence. Offensive and violent behavior develops in relation to personal woundedness (be it abuse, neglect, shunning, or shaming) and/or social oppression (be it poverty, racism, or structural dehumanization). Fundamental life-needs were withheld or violated, to which the perpetrator's extreme behavior was a distorted and grossly misled attempt to meet that need in another way. To paraphrase Marshall Rosenberg, every act of violence is a tragically veiled plea screaming, “I am in pain... please somebody see me.” While this does not condone violence, nor minimize its destructiveness, it offers a basis for understanding and eventual compassion.

3) Compassion has the power to disarm the perpetrator's defenses: Effective conflict transformation depends upon a human connection being restored between the alienated parties.¹⁴ For this to occur, each party must feel ‘heard’ and understood at the level of the basic life-need at stake in the conflict. Each party must find a way to settle into that non-reactive contemplative space where they might receive the other's point of view without conceding one's own. This same compassionate presence is necessary when there has been a clear victim and perpetrator. For healing, victims must be able to tell their stories and feel like their pain is understood. A victim who has been heard and healed enough can offer the radical space of hearing and understanding the suffering and obstacles that gave rise to the perpetrator's behavior, as Azim Khamisa so impressively demonstrated with Tony Hicks. Defusing one's own reactivity, maintaining a compassionate presence, and sensing the pain within the perpetrator have the power to disarm the perpetrator's shame-based defenses and create the possibility of restored human connection. In the same way that compassion is the balm that heals a victim's broken heart, compassion is the balm with the

potential of softening a perpetrator's hardened heart.

4) Compassionate connection creates the freedom to discern the conditions of reconciliation: A victim's compassion for a perpetrator may enable forgiveness, but it alone is insufficient for restored social reconciliation. Violent actions create wounds, and the perpetrators should be held accountable. Compassion is not sentimental. Authentic reconciliation necessitates that the social wound be repaired. In short, justice needs to be secured. Justice, however, can be either retributive or restorative. Retributive justice metes out punishment for acts of wrongdoing. A person kills an innocent delivery man, and he or she goes to prison for life. The problems with such a justice system are several—racial and economic inequities are built into the structures that dispense it; the convicted are offered little chance for rehabilitation, as prisons more often intensify violent propensities; and the victims, while assuaging a sense of justice, are denied an opportunity at healing or restitution. Restorative justice tends to the needs neglected by retributive justice. Perpetrators of violence are invited to hear the stories of their victims, to express remorse, to commit to a path of rehabilitation that addresses the root causes of their behavior—joblessness, for example, or a fatherless void—and to make steps toward reparations. Albeit a life cannot be restored in the case of a killing, but other actions can be performed—practices of grief and remembrance, a commitment to causes and projects that honor the victim and nurture life in others who might otherwise be disadvantaged. Azim's compassion for Tony created the space for precisely such restoration. Tony now has a mentor, a healing path, and a chance to reclaim his dignity and return to society with meaning and purpose. In short, Tony has hope.

Practices that Cultivate Compassion for Both Self and Others

Compassion-based personal and social restoration, as radical as it is within contemporary cultures of violence, can be cultivated through contemplative and relational practices. Such cultivation takes place in three layers. First, we are invited to nurture our own personal healing through reconnecting with the compassionate Self-presence within us. To the extent that our deepest essence is fundamentally compassionate, personal restoration entails healing and restoring anything within us that obstructs us from our innate compassion. Such restoration is nurtured through practices that help us a) attend to the inner stirrings and reactivities within us (our 'parts,' if you will), b) nurture a mindful or contemplative awareness of our inner stirrings that defuses their power and separates us from our enmeshment within them, c) grounds us in our compassionate Self-essence, and d) extends this compassion to our various stirrings such that their hidden needs are tended and their harmonious integration secured. Azim Khamisa tended the internal stirrings of his rage, helplessness, and despair and nurtured a Self-presence grounded in a soothed grief and a renewed

sense of personal power. The Compassion Practice summarized in the appendix is designed for precisely such personal healing.

Second, we are invited, from the ground of a centered and compassionate Self-presence, to nurture a compassionate connection with others, including our loved ones, neighbors, strangers, and enemies. Such compassion is nurtured through practices that help us ‘see’ others with contemplative awareness; connect with the deeper yearnings, wounds, and needs alive within them; and enable us to discern appropriate acts of kindness, healing, justice, and celebration. The Compassion Practice nurtures such external compassion in precisely the same way it nurtures internal compassion. As embodied in Azim Khamisa, the Compassion Practice invites one to gaze upon another and ‘see’ without reactivity their behaviors, feelings, and words; to recognize the human essence hidden beneath any destructive behaviors exhibited; and to connect with the yearnings and wounds lodged within that person. Such compassionate connection is also nurtured in Buddhist contemplative practices such as Tonglen and Metta meditations.¹⁵

Third, we are invited to move beyond a mere compassionate sense of connection with others toward enacting compassionate behavior in relation to them. Imagining a sea voyage from the comfort of one’s living room is a far cry from the crashing waves of the high seas themselves. Practices that nurture such behavior help us to sustain a compassionate center while interacting with others even when they are reactive. Such empowered compassionate behavior includes speaking from a compassionate center in ways that are truthful yet not triggering to the other; hearing the other contemplatively even when they are speaking from reactivity; defusing their reactivity by connecting them to the deeper life-needs at stake for them; mediating competing needs with mutual respect and sensitivity; establishing appropriate conditions for authentic and accountable reconciliation when there has been an injury; and discerning creative, empowered, yet compassionate ways of engaging non-repentant perpetrators even when their oppression continues. The practices of non-violent communication, conflict transformation, restorative justice, and non-violent social resistance are aimed at such radically compassionate means of social restoration.

Conclusion

To this day, Azim Khamisa works with young people in communities ravaged by gang violence. He also works tirelessly for Tony Hick’s release from prison. Tony, for his part, has earned advanced degrees, written hundreds of letters to marginalized young people much like himself, and determinedly advocates for alternatives to the ways of violence and despair. Together, they bear testimony that compassion is not only possible, it is restorative, even in the most tragic of circumstances. In contexts where victims lie on both sides of the gun, Azim and Tony point us to the hope that healing is possible on both sides of the wound.

Appendix

The Compassion Practice

(*Anchoring and Interior Preparation*: Breathe gently and deeply into an interior quiet. When your mind wanders, emotions stir, or your body becomes reactive, return to this gentle rhythmic breathing.)

1. ***Beholding the Real with Contemplative Presence***: Notice the energetic movements within you—active emotions, persistent thoughts, body sensations, urges, fantasies, images, a behavior that nags you. These movements may be stirring right now, or were stirred within you in the recent past but still remain unresolved. Resist suppressing them, becoming carried away by them, or judging yourself for experiencing them. Rather, cultivate a non-reactive, non-judgmental awareness that these movements are present within you. Allow one of them to emerge as the focus for the rest of this prayer. If you are experiencing something that is irresistibly interfering with a non-reactive, non-judgmental awareness, notice *that*, and allow whatever that is to become the focus for the rest of your prayer.

SUGGESTED TECHNIQUES:

- Refer to the movement in the third person: Say to yourself, ‘Anger is within me,’ for example, as opposed to ‘I am angry.’
- Greet the movement with an accepting attitude: Say to yourself, ‘Welcome obsession with surfing the Internet, I accept your presence within me.’
- Imagine the movement as held in your hand some distance away from you: ‘I sense this critical voice and I hold you before me.’
- Locate the movement in your body and hold that: ‘I am aware of a shortness of breath within me.’
- Affirm its presence: Say to yourself, ‘I trust you are within me for a good reason, that you have some invitation for me. I do not know what it is but I want to find out.’

2. ***Connecting Compassionately with a ‘Contemplative Symbol’***: As you contemplatively behold a specific movement within you, invite it to express precisely how it feels with a ‘contemplative symbol’—some image, memory, inner child or being, gesture, or sound that captures its experience. Test any symbol that comes to you against the movement within you and allow the symbol to adjust until a sense of rightness rings within you. Engage the symbol and ask it to reveal

its deep feelings, yearnings, wounds, or hopes, and the good it intends for you—until you feel a sense of compassionate connection with the symbol and its experience. If a sense of compassion eludes you, notice that, and begin the prayer again with beholding what has now arisen.

SUGGESTED TECHNIQUES:

- Do not force or manufacture the contemplative symbol; allow it to come to you.
- The symbol may take a variety of forms: an image, a personified part of you, a memory, a bodily gesture, an internal sound.
- Often the contemplative symbol comes as a metaphor: ‘this anxiety feels like a thousand buzzing bees.’
- Notice if your body has an instinctive reaction to your movement, for example, crossing your arms or legs, a nervous twitch, tears. This reaction may be your contemplative symbol.
- Often the movement comes from either a wound that still needs to be healed, a shame that yearns for grace to hold it, or a budding gift or power that has yet to fully emerge.
- Enhance the symbol with sensory detail: what it looks, smells, tastes, sounds, or feels like.
- When engaging the contemplative symbol, have an interior dialogue with it by asking it its ache, its yearning, its fear, its hope, and the good it is trying to do within you.
- For seemingly destructive movements, ask the symbol to express what it is protecting, what it needs, or what it does ‘not want’ to happen.

3. *Dwelling with the Compassionate Source*: Invite the sacred Source to engage your contemplative symbol in whatever way that Source appears for you in this prayer—a light, a healing energy, a sacred image, a sacred person, a sacred place. The Source may engage your symbol by coming to the symbol; or the symbol may travel to the sacred Source. Allow the sacred Source to be with the symbol in whatever way that feels healing, renewing, or restoring. As the sense of the sacred grows in Presence, allow yourself to rest in and be soothed by this sacred Source of compassion for as long as you are able.

SUGGESTED TECHNIQUES:

- The sacred may appear in a variety of forms: a radiant light; a healing energy; an image like cradling hands or an embracing blanket; a sacred person like Jesus, Buddha, a kind-hearted grandmother, or Mary; a soothing sound or encouraging voice.

- Sometimes the invitation is to imaginatively take your symbol to a scene where the sacred is awaiting for you: a sacred story where Jesus is present; a sacred dwelling like a temple or mosque; a sacred place of your own like a beach that held a sacred experience for you or a warmly remembered family cabin. Be honest about how the contemplative symbol feels in the presence of the sacred. It is not always warm and joyous. For example, an inner child may be angry with the sacred or mistrusting. Allow the symbol to express its honest feelings to the sacred, and allow the sacred to respond and interact.

4. ***Embracing your Restored Self***: Before you surface from this prayer, notice what grace you are receiving within it. This grace may be a sense of healing, a gift budding within you, a power being kindled, or even an awareness of a longing that aches to be satisfied. Allow this grace to soak into you, seeping into your every tissue. Claim this grace as something that is now a living part of you.

SUGGESTED TECHNIQUES:

- Identify and name in a single word the grace that you are receiving.
- Perhaps the grace is only the awareness that you have a wounded part of you still in need of healing. Allow that awareness to be the gift of the prayer.
- Ask yourself, ‘What is the one thing I want to take with me from this prayer?’

5. ***Freely Discerning Compassionate Action***: Still soaking in this sense of sacred Presence, and with this grace living within you, look at the original situation that prompted the inner movement with which you began the prayer. Behold the situation and the people within it with empowered compassion. Sense within you the sacred Source’s invitation for one way you may be in that situation while embodying the sense of grace and compassion you have received from this prayer.

SUGGESTED TECHNIQUES:

- Do not anticipate or manufacture the invitation. Allow it to come to you from within or from the sacred Source.
- Test the invitation against the sense of freedom and compassion you experience when in the presence of the sacred Source.
- Recognize that personal power and appropriate self-protection from dangerous persons may be part of the invitation.
- Imagine yourself being in the original situation from a posture of empowered compassion.

- Make the invitation concrete with a single specific action.
- The action may take the form of a symbolic gesture like placing an object on your desk or in your prayer space.

(Endnotes)

1 Azim Khamisa, *Azim's Bardo: From Murder to Forgiveness: A Father's Journey* (LaJolla, CA: ANK Publishing Inc., 2005). For information on the Tariq Khamisa Foundation, see www.tkf.org (accessed March 22, 2012).

2 See, for example, Beverley Fehr, Susan Sprecher, and Lynn Underwood, eds., *The Science of Compassionate Love: Theory, Research, and Applications* (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009); and Paul Gilbert, ed., *Compassion: Conceptualizations, Research and Use in Psychotherapy* (East Essex, UK: Routledge, 2005).

3 Unresolved issues include: is compassion an emotion or a cognitive state; does compassion necessarily include action; how is compassion distinct from empathy, sympathy, and altruism; does compassion extend to the self or is it an 'other'-oriented experience; is compassion a 'self-less' act or a 'self-empowered' act; and does compassion extend beyond being moved by *suffering* to include being moved by *joy*, for example?

4 For discussions on the definition of compassion, see Fehr, et. al., *Science of Compassionate Love*; Gilbert, *Compassion*; Jennifer Goetz, Dacher Keltner, and Emiliana Simon-Thomas, "Compassion: An Evolutionary Analysis and Empirical Review," *Psychological Bulletin* 136, no. 3 (2010): 351-374; and Daniel Goldman, *Destructive Emotions: How Can We Overcome Them?: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama* (New York: Bantam Books, 2003).

5 Walter Burghardt, "Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real," *Church* (Winter 1989): 15-19.

6 See, for example, Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 31-59; and Geoffrey Bromiley, trans. and ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume VII* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 553-557.

7 See David Wallin, *Attachment in Psychotherapy* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2007), 106; and Daniel Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001).

8 Triple *God and Rhetoric*, 33.

9 Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Image, Doubleday, 1999).

10 Richard Schwartz, *Internal Family Systems Therapy* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995); *Introduction to the Internal Family Systems Model* (Oak Park, IL: Trailhead Publications, 2001); *The Mosaic Mind: Empowering the Tormented Selves of Child Abuse Survivors* (Oak Park, IL: Trailhead Publications, 2002).

11 Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (Encinitas, CA: Puddle Dancer Press, 2003), 16-66.

12 Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

13 For a variation on this tale, see Ed Brody et al., *Spinning Tales, Weaving Hope* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1992), 137-139.

14 See Ronald Kraybill with Robert Evans and Alice Frazer Evans, *Peace Skills: A Manual for Community Mediators* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 2001).

15 See, for example, Pema Chodron, *Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2003); and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Cultivating Compassion: A Buddhist Perspective* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001).