

**The Great Compassion – Donald Neal McKay – Copyright 2006-09**  
**Speech written for a Christian healthcare convention in Washington, DC. Topic:**  
**The Bird Flu.**

From 2 Kings, Chapter 4, verses 32 thru 36 – we have this accounting:

*“When Elisha came into the house, behold the lad was dead and laid on his bed. So he entered and shut the door behind them both, and prayed to the Lord. And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands and he stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child became warm. Then he returned and walked in the house once back and forth, and went up and stretched himself on him; and the lad sneezed seven times and the lad opened his eyes. And Elisha called Gehazi, his servant, and said, ‘Call this Shunammite.’ So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, ‘Take up your son.’ Then she went in and fell at his feet and bowed herself to the ground, and she took up her son and went out.”*

Moving on to the Gospel of John, Chapter 11, verses 32 thru 44 – we have the accounting of the two sisters, Mary and Martha and their dead brother, Lazarus:

*“When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’*

*“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?’ he asked. ‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied.*

*“Jesus wept.*

*“Then the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’ But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ‘Take away the stone,’ he said. ‘But, Lord,’ said Martha, the sister of the dead man, ‘by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.’*

*“Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’*

*“So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.’*

*“When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’  
(Λαζαρε, δευρο εξο).*

*The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen,  
and a cloth around his face.”*

I recount these two Biblical anecdotes because of their uniqueness. The Elisha incident provided evidence of God’s intercession through the mortal coil of Elisha to thwart death and bring back to life a child. But of the two accountings, the Jesus-Lazarus episode is the more important. In fact, as far as I am concerned, the Lazarus resurrection is second only to Jesus’ resurrection.

Why is this? It’s because of the subtle implication of the Jesus event. While it is true that Elisha brought the child back from the dead, by all Scriptural testimony, the prophet conducted himself in a dispassionate manner. He was made aware of the challenge, prayed to God for guidance and power, approached the dead child, did his workings, and brought the lad back from the netherworld. Throughout Elisha’s episode, I failed to find a sense of compassion and sorrow coming from the prophet.

It is specifically because of the obvious compassion coming from Jesus that I conclude the Lazarus episode to be so important. In that simple verse – actually the shortest verse in the entirety of Scripture – John, Chapter 11, verse 35: *‘Jesus wept.’*

Why this is so important, is that for the first time in Scripture, we have presented to us proof that God, as manifested in Jesus the Supreme Personality of the Creator God, actually cares for and loves his creatures... loves his children. Our God loves us... and we witnessed Jesus demonstrating that love – and compassion.

First with Lazarus... and then on Golgotha.

What the world witnessed during the Lazarus resurrection was God incarnate in Jesus using his creative powers to not only heal the sick and lame, but by the force of the Word bring back to life a dead man. God acted through the humanity of Jesus to effect a cure... to recapture a life.

A message was clearly imparted to the world: When we accept the Christ... when we allow God to come into our lives and take residence in our conscious being... from that moment on, whatever good we do, we do so in a symbiotic relationship with the Creator God. If we as a people effect a cure for the betterment of life, nature and our fellow humans, then we have done so with God,

our Creator and Lord, as our collaborator and partner. God acts through us, imbues us with great compassion and compels us to come out of ourselves and assist those in pain and dire straits. At least, that was the plan.

Co-habiting within the fabric of creation are two entities diametrically opposed to the other. Such oppositions are not uncommon in the Creation, for they sustain the equilibrium of existence. I refer to this as The Government of Existence – but that’s a lecture for another time. The ‘oppositions’ in particular are: arrogant self-centeredness versus honest, forthcoming compassion.

Prior the advent of cogent human beings, there was no such ‘opposition’. The ancient writings, scripture, advancing science, and logic all point to one inescapable conclusion: harmony prevailed throughout the ever-evolving creation before the arrival of the egocentric human intellect.

As the Creation evolves – as the human mind evolves – so, too, does the friction that exists between the created and the Creator. The arrogance of the human involvement and participation in this contest of wills is no more brilliantly framed than in the Hebrew Scriptures’ Book of Job, Chapter 38, verses 1 - 4:

*“Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind – “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding?”*

“Without knowledge” ... “Where were you?” A indictment followed by a question; the two coupled are profound in describing the status of the relationship between the Creator and the creature; a relationship that sets at odds the intents of both parties. The human error of assuming a position of sole independence, and exaggerated importance in the scheme of things is one born out of ignorance.

Many great minds – those with special insight – have come through the ages, repeatedly telling humankind that it is not separate from, but part of that which is known as God, the Unborn, Brahman, the Self, the Supreme Consciousness. Yet, in the main, the messages have been ignored at best, rebelled against at worst.

Sri Krishna, the Hindu manifestation of the Personality of the Supreme Consciousness, tells us that not only are we associated with the Creator, but are actually part of the Creator. Buddha has endeavored to explain that humans are part-and-parcel members and creative agents of the Unborn – a euphemism used

by Buddha to characterize the Supreme Consciousness. Jesus, by virtue of his teachings and ultimate sacrifice, reemphasized the Unity of Creation and the compassion God has for it.

‘The Unity of Creation and the Proximity of the Creator.’ The Unity is profoundly illustrated in the Hebrew Scriptures’ Psalms; a most remarkable expose’ revealing the special relationship between the Creator and the created. Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, along with others manifesting over the ages, and in locations spanning the globe, have not only revealed the unity of the creation, but have stressed the main purpose of the unity: To accept the fact that the entire creation is inter-related, inter-feeling, inter-dependent and because the rest of the creation is a ‘brother and sister’ to the individual, compassion for the ‘other’ is one of the two main underlying themes for all of existence – life not to be denied, coupled with the creation’s compassion for its membership.

Christ, being the latest of the epochal epiphanies presently understood to be God, materialized to us not only as a savior, but *mainly* as our brother out of compassion for us. The theological purpose of the Christ can be, and still is, debated among those who revel in such gamesmanship. What cannot be denied is Jesus’ underlying message of compassion of one creature for another; demonstrated and substantiated with his sacrifice.

From Christ to Clara Barton, during the American War Between the States, to the contemporary Mother Theresa, what has been brought forth are clear examples for the rest of us where one human being has put aside their personal needs, cravings, self-importance and safety, and placed before themselves the needs of others, and the elimination of suffering in others.

Therein is the Great Compassion. It exists. It is invisible to the self-centered, material and arrogant, but obvious to the compassionately enlightened. Those who understand this have come to know that no single entity of the Creation stands independent as a self-centered autocracy. Those enlightened among us *know* that if the Great Compassion exists, it exists as a unity with all of its component parts.

Those who believe in hoped-for longings... to be saved by a divine and miraculous intervention in providing solutions to problems, eliminating suffering, removing threats and, overall, making life easier and more pleasant, exist in a vacuum of ignorance. They see a world where they are a person independent of other persons. They may mouth utterances proclaiming unity and brotherhood, but deep in their hearts and minds, these persons believe themselves to be outside of, and often above, the rules and regulations of creation – separate and special from their fellow humans – and thus entitled to a generous share of God’s remediation for their problems and cravings. Instead of doing for

themselves, instead of participating in their own cure – instead of getting up off their lazy behinds and getting to work... the ignorant petition God and wait for divine intervention.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Century Persian Sufi poet, Rumi, captured this feeling in his “Mathnawi” with these words, *“You see throngs of afflicted feeble folk seated at the door in ardent hope. O you who are crushed, your pleas have been heard. Hark! Rush toward the mercy of God and be delivered of pain. How often has your disease been cured? How often has your soul been delivered of grief?”*

This is the great battle of existence: universal compassion for the other, versus self-centeredness and the absence of compassion for anything else.

A mother, seeing her child trapped inside a burning building, throws aside the importance of her own life and charges into the fire to save her child’s life. There are no second thoughts of personal safety on the part of the mother. Instead, what arises from the mother, is an active force from within that compels her to run to her child’s aid and do whatever humanly possible to end the child’s distress, fears and eventual pain from burning to death. The mother instinctively embraced the concept of the Great Compassion.

Or, the dear heart who, in soldierly manner, accepts the voluntary surrender of many years of their life in order to take care of a terminally-ill patient. This is the greatest of compassion.

The Great Compassion is that feeling which permeates the entirety of creation, and to the enlightened among us, is understood to be our caring feelings and actions toward our fellow creatures; not only at the conscious level, but also at the deepest level of the sub-conscious. To empathize with others is the purest harmonic of creation.

The educated among us understand that the solutions to contemporary life-threatening problems and outright assaults to human existence will come from a collaborative effort of the collective human knowledge and wisdom, the applications of discovered and empirical science, and a faith that a challenge can be surmounted and answers found and implemented. Gone are the blissful days of ignorance when we humans would do nothing about our plights and woes other than to sit around, pray, and wait for our god(s) to deliver salvation and cures.

The solution to our societal problems and threats will result as the partnership between the enlightened, educated human mind is coupled with the realization that we cohabit a physical body with that Supreme Consciousness

which created us. If we come to understand that the Creator is of us as a human being, shares in our suffering, emotions, experiences, and, in our happiness – and that such a state is not unique to ourselves alone – then we arrive at the undeniably logical point where, when looking out over the billions of our fellow humans, we see and empathize with our genuinely connected relations. They are us. We are they. We are connected, and when we hurt, we feel compassion for the other. This Great Compassion extends not only across the human strata, but moves across all planes of existence wherein the Creator resides.

Wars, famine, and, diseases will arise to challenge humanity. Disease, especially, oftentimes borne out of our own neglect for human cleanliness, seems to have profound marching orders: destroy humanity. Why this should be, and why suffering exists, seems to be the by-product of the continual struggle of existence versus non-existence. As Buddha summarized in postulating his first Noble Truth, “Now this, monks, is the noble truth of pain: birth is painful, old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, sorrow, lamentation, dejection, and despair are painful. Contact with unpleasant things is painful, not getting what one wishes is painful.” Later in his Sutras, Buddha clearly stated that he had no idea why suffering was instituted by Creation, but he also made it clear that much of our suffering can be done away with a change in our life styles and outlook regarding the interrelatedness of creation, self-conduct and human relations.

The Great Compassion mandates that we, as human beings, formally recognize the suffering that exists in others, and we are compelled to eliminate it. The current Dali Lama came forth with a wonderfully crystal clear statement that expresses our human call to action: “Adopting an attitude of universal responsibility is essentially a personal matter. The real test of compassion is not what we say in abstract discussion but how we conduct ourselves in daily life.” It is not a matter, only, of our reacting to a situation, but to learn from experience and apply our wisdom to acting beforehand to prevent a bad situation. This is known as responsible compassion.

The Great Compassion is real only if the partnership of Creator and created is acknowledged and forms into a unified instrument of action to combat and vanquish suffering and disease threatening not only the human factor, but the creation as a whole. Tolstoy, in his ‘War and Peace’ asked, “What is the purpose of life?” Answering his own question at the same time the reader usually arrives at the answer, we see that the purpose of life is to enjoy it. This cannot fully be done if suffering exists. Or, there are those among us who are hungry, or sense no redemptive purpose in their lives... enjoyment of life cannot be realized if want and suffering exist.

Human existence and development are continually challenged by disease. In ancient times, we accepted the inevitable and, overall, sat by to allow the ‘devastation *du jur*’ to run its course and move on. In contemporary times, looming on the horizon of human events is the threat of ‘Bird Flu’, a virus pregnant with the promise of mass destruction should it be unleashed within the human population. The compassionate among us will institute measures, and promote scientific research, to prepare for the threat and, hopefully not, have to combat the organism itself. The dispassionate, non-caring among us, will think only of themselves and may actually do more damage as the result of their self-centered protectiveness to ensure their sole survival, than the Bird Flu itself does.

The compassionate will attempt to maintain order, while simultaneously persevering to alleviate the suffering and needs of a stricken community. The ignorant, non-compassionate, self-centered will destroy property, lives and government in their quest for protection and survival of self.

Should the Bird Flu break out and cause pandemic among the human population, victory over this disease will come about only as a result of two factors - a caring for others so as to *want* to combat the pathological enemy, and, a unified coupling of human courage, spirituality, intelligence and the urgent need for the species to survive. This is the state of the Great Compassion as it exists amongst the human element today: we must feel humankind’s suffering; we must find solutions to eliminate the suffering; we must prove victorious over the causes of suffering. We must become the Great Compassion itself – we must unite in the exquisite partnership with the Supreme Consciousness, that not only created us, but resides in us to form a dynamic power of unity that cares and is driven to action. Then, and only then, will humanity not only survive, but will prevail.

-- Donald Neal McKay