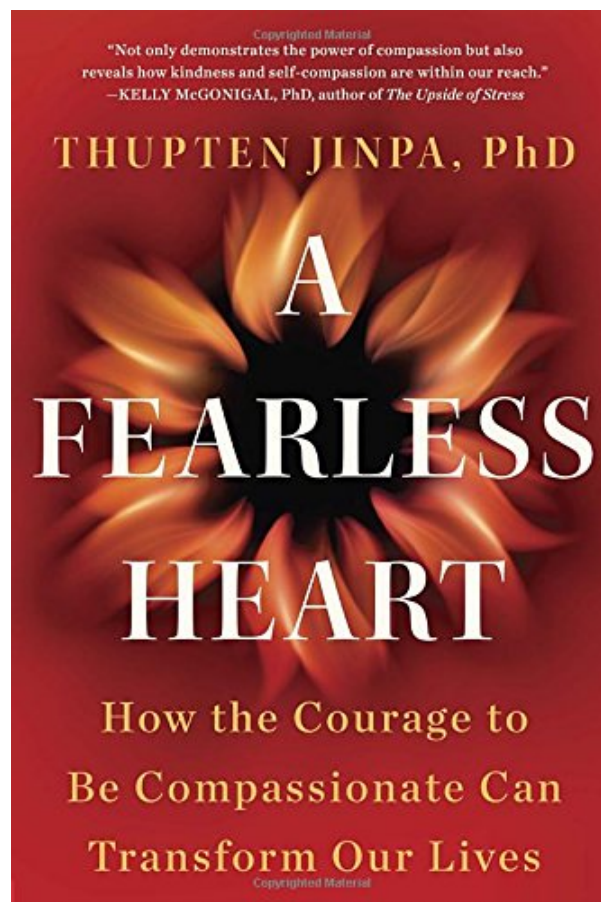


A FEARLESS HEART: HOW THE COURAGE TO BE COMPASSIONATE CAN TRANSFORM OUR LIVES BY THUPTEN JINPA PHD



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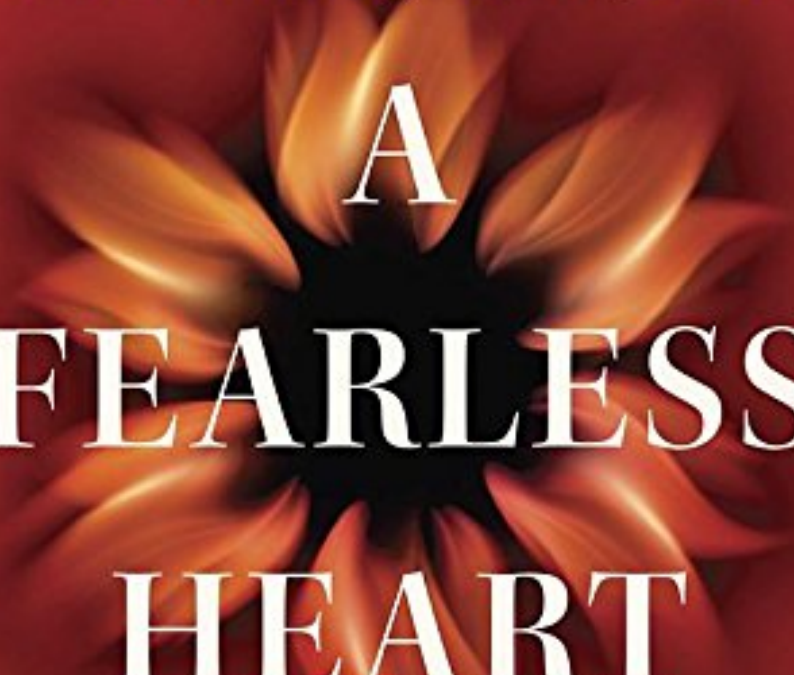


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"Not only demonstrates the power of compassion but also reveals how kindness and self-compassion are within our reach."

—KELLY McGONIGAL, PhD, author of *The Upside of Stress*

THUPTEN JINPA, PhD



A
FEARLESS
HEART

How the Courage to
Be Compassionate Can
Transform Our Lives

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Review

“An inspirational read that not only demonstrates the power of compassion, but also reveals how kindness and self-compassion are within our reach.”

—Kelly McGonigal, author, *The Upside of Stress and The Willpower Instinct*

“Embracing compassion enables us to step into our own natural capacity for creativity and empathy. I highly recommend this extraordinary book and this path to anyone who seeks to have more meaningful connections to people and the world.”

—David Kelley, Founder of IDEO, co-author, *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*

“A Fearless Heart is a rare book that shows how the meeting of contemplative insights and practices with modern science can lead to offerings that are beneficial for everyone interested in deeper personal spiritual transformation. The book shows how such practices can have positive impact in our daily lives. I applaud my long-time English translator Thupten Jinpa for writing this timely book on compassion and its cultivation.”

—His Holiness the Dalai Lama

“I love Jinpa’s sense of the practical, of bringing compassion down from the pedestal of high ideals and into the messy reality that is every day human life. A Fearless Heart may prove to be one of the important books of these difficult times.”

—Richard Gere

“Brilliantly clear and heartfelt, a potentially life changing work offering inspiring training. A Fearless Heart is personally moving, eminently practical and visionary in scope.”

—Jack Kornfield, author, *The Wise Heart*

“Jinpa shows why compassion is not a given within some yet not possible for others, but rather is a quality of the heart that we all can cultivate and expand. If we do that, our lives transform, our families and relationships transform, and our world transforms.”

—Sharon Salzberg, author of *Loving Kindness and Real Happiness*

“Firmly grounded in the latest scientific studies, and hugely invitational and convincing in its inspiration, its reasoning, its heartfulness, and its guidance in a broad range of powerful practices, *A Fearless Heart* is the bravest, clearest, and most engaging book I know on why we need to cultivate compassion, and on how to bring it more widely and deeply into our lives and into the world.” —Jon Kabat-Zinn Founder of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction; Author of *Full Catastrophe Living*

“Thupten Jinpa speaks from his expertise as a monk turned family man, and a topflight scholar, who draws on his remarkable background and range of knowledge to offer each one of us a practical tool kit for becoming a better human being. *A Fearless Heart* can help anyone nurture the compassion that lies within every heart.”

—Daniel Goleman, author, *Emotional Intelligence*

“Part autobiography, part a training manual for a wholesome life and part a beautiful tapestry woven between ancient Buddhist thought and modern science, this book has something for everyone. At its fundamental core, it makes the case for why compassion is so essential for the modern world and offers detailed helpful advice on how it can be cultivated.”

—Richard J. Davidson, co-author, *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*, Founder, Center for Investigating Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin-Madison

About the Author

Thupten Jinpa is a former monk and holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University, where he also worked as a research fellow. Jinpa has been the principal English translator to H. H. the Dalai Lama for more than twenty-five years and has translated and edited numerous books by the Dalai Lama. Jinpa is an adjunct professor at the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University, Montreal, and Chairman of the Mind and Life Institute, which is dedicated to promoting dialogues and collaborations between the sciences and contemplative knowledge, especially Buddhism.

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INTRODUCTION

I remember walking excitedly next to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, holding his hand and trying to keep up with his pace. I must have been about six when the Dalai Lama visited the Stirling Castle Home for Tibetan Children in Shimla, northern India. I was one of more than two hundred children of Tibetan refugees resident there. The home was set up by the British charity Save the Children in 1962 in two former British colonial homes located on a small hill. We children had been busy preparing for the visit, rehearsing welcoming Tibetan songs while the grown-ups swept the road and decorated it with Tibetan symbols in white lime powder—lotus, infinite knot, vase, two goldfish (facing each other), eight-spoke wheel of dharma, victory banner, parasol, and conch. The day the Dalai Lama came, there were many Indian policemen around the school; I remember playing marbles with a few of them that morning while we waited. When the moment finally arrived it was magical. Thick smoke billowed from a whitewashed incense stove built especially for

the occasion. Dressed in our colorful best and holding kata, the traditional Tibetan white scarves of greeting, in our hands, we stood on both sides of the driveway leading up to the school and sang at the top of our lungs.

I had been chosen as one of the students to walk alongside the Dalai Lama as he toured the school. While we walked, I asked him if I could become a monk, to which he replied, “Study well and you can become a monk anytime you wish.” Looking back, I think the only reason I was so precociously attracted to being a monk was because there were two monk teachers at the children’s home. They were the kindest of the adults there and also seemed the most learned. They always looked happy and at peace, even radiant at times. Most important for us children, they told the most interesting stories.

So when the first opportunity came, at the age of eleven—and as it happened, on the first day of Tibetan New Year (toward the end of February, that year)—I became a monk and joined a monastery, despite my father’s protestations. He was upset that I was squandering the opportunity to become the family breadwinner—parents of his generation wished for their children to get an education and work in an office. For nearly a decade afterward, I lived, worked, meditated, chanted, and belonged in the small community of Dzongkar Choede monastery. It was there in the quiet evergreen hills of Dharamsala, northern India, that I practiced my rudimentary English with enlightenment-seeking hippies.

I developed friendships with John and Lars. John was not a hippie. He was an American recluse who lived alone in a nice bungalow he’d rented close to the meditation hut of a revered Tibetan master. I met with John once or twice a week. We would speak and I would read from a Tibetan text, which itself is a translation of an eighth-century Indian Buddhist classic. It was John who introduced me to pancakes and ham.

Lars was a Danish man who lived quite close to the monastery. Often I would visit him to chat and have toast with jam.

In the spring of 1972, the monastery moved to the scorching heat of southern India, where a Tibetan resettlement program had begun. There, like the other monks of my monastery, at the age of thirteen, I joined the resettlement workforce clearing forests, digging ditches, and working in the cornfields. For the first two years, while the settlement was being prepared, we were paid a daily wage of 0.75 Indian rupees, or roughly 1.5 cents.

There was very little formal education at Dzongkar Choede. It’s not the custom for young monks to go to regular secular schools either. By the time our community moved to South India, I had finished memorizing all the liturgical texts that were required. The day’s labor at the settlement finished by four in the afternoon, so I had some free time on my hands and I decided to pick up my English again. However, with no opportunities to practice conversation, I made do with reading comic books. One day, I obtained a cheap used transistor radio, and after that I listened to the BBC World Service and U.S.-based Voice of America every day. In those days, VOA had a unique program “broadcasting in special English,” in which the presenter spoke slowly and repeated every sentence twice. This was immensely helpful, as I had only a very basic grasp of the language at the time.

Since I was the only young boy at the monastery who could speak and read English, rudimentarily though it was at first, it was a source of pride and also a way of individuating myself from the others. Here was a world—figuratively and literally the whole world beyond the refugee community, beyond the monastery—that I alone from my monastic community could enter. Through English I learned to read the globe, which made all the great countries I was hearing about in the news come to life—England, America, Russia, and of course, our beloved Tibet, which had tragically fallen to Communist China.

Around 1976, when I was seventeen or eighteen, I met a remarkable woman who changed my karma with

English. Dr. Valentina Stache-Rosen was a German Indologist with expertise in Sanskrit and Chinese texts, living in Bangalore (where her husband headed the Max Muller Institute). Dr. Stache-Rosen took a keen interest in the progress of my English. She introduced me to Western literature and sent me books—Hermann Hesse and Agatha Christie, Edgar Snow’s *Red Star over China*, and, most helpfully, a large English dictionary with many examples of words used in sentences. And I first learned to use a knife and fork at Dr. Stache-Rosen’s home. We corresponded until her death in 1980. Without her kindness, I can’t imagine how my English would have escaped from where it remained back then, or for that matter, where my life would have taken me.

I also read Trevor Ling’s book *The Buddha*, a portrayal, written in English, of the life and teachings of the Buddha as a revolutionary, philosopher, and spiritual teacher. In this book in particular, the evocative power of the English language deeply impressed me. There was a liveliness and immediacy that I had never felt with written Tibetan; it was like someone speaking. (The gap between written and spoken language in Tibetan is huge.)

Around the same time, I met the Tibetan teacher who later became one of the most important influences on my classical Buddhist education. Famed for his erudition and poetry, Zemey Rinpoche was the gentlest person I have ever known. He was living a semiretired life then, dedicated to quiet meditative reflection, in another Tibetan settlement about an hour’s bus ride from my monastery. I was already familiar with Rinpoche’s name from the many Tibetan language school textbooks he had edited. Meeting him in person and speaking with him rekindled the enthusiasm for learning that had originally inspired me to become a monk. From our first meeting, Rinpoche recognized my restless intellect and took me under his wing. So, in the summer of 1978, I left my small monastery to join Ganden, a large academic monastery in another part of southern India, about a ten- to twelve-hour bus ride away.

In 1985, while on a visit to Dharamsala, North India, twenty years after I’d hurried to keep up with His Holiness as a small boy, I had the wonderful, if accidental, honor of being asked to interpret at a teaching given by the Dalai Lama when the scheduled English interpreter couldn’t make it on the first day. A few days into the teaching, the Dalai Lama’s office informed me that His Holiness wished to see me. At the appointed time, the secretary ushered me into the audience room that is part of the Dalai Lama’s office complex, a simple colonial-style bungalow of stone and wood with a green corrugated tin roof. As I entered, His Holiness said, “I know you; you are a good debater at Ganden monastery. But I did not know you spoke English.” Some Westerners who had heard my interpreting had told the Dalai Lama that my English was easy to listen to. His Holiness asked me if I could be available when he needed someone to interpret for him, especially on his travels. I was in tears. I had never, even in a dream, imagined that one day I would have the honor of serving the Dalai Lama so closely. Needless to say, I replied that this would be the greatest honor.

For a Tibetan who grew up as a refugee in India, serving the Dalai Lama—so deeply revered by the Tibetan people—is also a way to honor the sacrifices our parents had to make in their early years of exile.

So I began accompanying the Dalai Lama on his international travels, interpreting for him with English-speaking audiences and colleagues in the multidisciplinary field of contemplative studies, including at major scientific meetings like the *Mind and Life Dialogues*, and assisting him on his book projects. In these capacities, I have been the Dalai Lama’s principal English translator since 1985, serving this remarkable voice of compassion for nearly three decades now.

Right from the beginning His Holiness was clear that I would not join his permanent staff. He said that this would be a waste of my monastic education and talent. He advised me instead to concentrate on my studies and pursue an independent life dedicated to scholarship. This was truly compassionate.

Over time I came to recognize that my personal destiny might lie in serving as a medium for my own classical Tibetan Buddhist tradition in the contemporary world. Perhaps the strange background of my youth—growing up in a monastery yet with a fascination for the English language and things Western—had prepared me for this role. There weren't many people trained in the classical Buddhist tradition who also knew English then. As my facility with English improved, it dawned on me that I might have a special role to play at the interface of two cultures I loved.

The motivation to fulfill this destiny more efficiently took me to Cambridge University, in England, beginning a new phase in my life. Thanks to the kindness of so many people, I have been fortunate to be able to dedicate my professional life to being such a medium of cultural interchange, whether through serving the Dalai Lama or translating key Tibetan texts into English. My experiences have confirmed that early intuition that a lot of good could come from the meeting of classical Tibetan Buddhist tradition and contemporary thought and culture, including science. This book is part of this larger work of cross-cultural interpretation.

I have been interested in compassion my whole life. In my childhood, I was at the receiving end of other people's compassion. Thanks to thousands of ordinary British citizens who contributed to Save the Children, more than a thousand Tibetan children like me found a home to grow up in safely in the early 1960s, while our parents struggled to adjust as refugees in a land where they did not speak the language or know the customs. Thanks to individuals such as Dr. Valentina Stache-Rosen and Zemey Rinpoche, I found a purpose as I struggled through my very unconventional education. In my professional life, serving the Dalai Lama so closely, I have had the privilege of witnessing, from the front seat as it were, what it means for someone to live a life with complete conviction in this defining human quality we call compassion.

Today I am a husband and a father of two teenage daughters. I live in a North American city and lead a life very different from the one I was used to in a Tibetan monastery in India. On a daily basis, I struggle like most people with the typical challenges of a fast-paced modern life—balancing work, family, and relationships, paying the bills—while maintaining sanity, a sense of proportion, and basic optimism. Remarkably, it's in the teachings of my own Tibetan Buddhist tradition that I find many of the tools that help me navigate the challenges of everyday living in the contemporary world. I hope to share some of these in this book.

What is compassion? Most of us value compassion and agree that it is important both in our own lives as well as in society more generally. Undeniably, compassion is also part of our everyday experience of being human. We love and care for our children; confronted with someone in pain, we instinctively feel for that person; when someone reaches out to us in a time of distress we feel touched. Most of us would also agree that compassion has something to do with what it means to lead a good life. So it's no small coincidence that compassion turns out to be the common ground where the ethical teachings of all major traditions, religious and humanistic, come together. Even in the contested political arena, compassion is one value that both sides of the spectrum are eager to claim.

Despite our widely shared experience and beliefs about compassion, we fail to give it a central role in our lives and in our society. In our contemporary culture, we tend to have a rather confused relationship with values like kindness and compassion. In the secular West, we lack a coherent cultural framework for articulating what compassion is and how it works. To some people, it's a matter of religion and morality, a private concern of the individual with little or no societal relevance. Others question the very possibility of selflessness for human beings, and are suspicious of sentiments like compassion that have other people's welfare as the primary concern. A well-known scientist once remarked, "Scratch an altruist and watch a hypocrite bleed." At the other extreme, some people elevate these qualities to such heights that they are out of reach for most of us, possible only for exceptional individuals like Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, and the Dalai Lama. Compassion then becomes something to be admired at a distance in great beings, but not

relevant to our everyday lives.

Broadly defined, compassion is a sense of concern that arises when we are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to see that suffering relieved. The English word compassion, from its Latin root, literally means "to suffer with." According to religious historian Karen Armstrong, the word for compassion in Semitic languages—*rahamanut* in Hebrew and *rahman* in Arabic—is etymologically related to the word for womb, evoking the mother's love for her child as an archetypal expression of our compassion. At its core, compassion is a response to the inevitable reality of our human condition—our experience of pain and sorrow.

Compassion offers the possibility of responding to suffering with understanding, patience, and kindness rather than, say, fear and repulsion. As such, compassion lets us open ourselves to the reality of suffering and seek its alleviation. Compassion is what connects the feeling of empathy to acts of kindness, generosity, and other expressions of our altruistic tendencies.

When compassion arises in us in the face of need or suffering, three things happen almost instantaneously: We perceive the other's suffering or need; we emotionally connect with that need or suffering; and we respond instinctively by wishing to see that situation relieved. Compassion may lead to action; it is a readiness to help or wanting to do something ourselves about another person's situation. Today, scientists are beginning to map the neurobiological basis of compassion and explore its deep evolutionary roots.

As a society, we have long ignored the fundamental role our compassion instinct plays in defining our nature and behavior. We have bought into a popular narrative that seeks to explain all our behavior through the prism of competition and self-interest. This is the story we have been telling about ourselves.

The thing about a story like this is that it tends to be self-fulfilling. When our story says that we are at heart selfish and aggressive creatures, we assume that every man is for himself. In this "dog eat dog world" it is only logical, then, to see others as a source of rivalry and antagonism. And so we relate to others with apprehension, fear, and suspicion, instead of fellow feeling and a sense of connection. By contrast, if our story says that we are social creatures endowed with instincts for compassion and kindness, and that as deeply interdependent beings our welfare is intertwined, this totally changes the way we view—and behave in—the world. So the stories we tell about ourselves do matter, quite profoundly so.

Why Compassion Now?

Today several forces are converging that indicate that compassion's time has come. As our world becomes smaller—with our population rapidly increasing against finite natural resources; environmental problems that affect us all; and the proximity of peoples, cultures, and religions brought about by technology, demographic changes, and a global economy—we are being urgently called to foster the spirit of coexistence and cooperation. We actually are in this together. This reality of the oneness of humankind is what compassion is all about. If, for example, the world's believers collectively reaffirmed compassion as the foundation of their teachings, there would be a robust common ground on which millions of people could come together and respect each other. In a series of moving dialogues with the Dalai Lama, the noted emotion scientist Paul Ekman makes a powerful case that what he calls "global compassion" is the most important challenge of our time. If we, as individuals and together as a global society, can take the compassionate part of our nature seriously, we have a real chance of making a more humane world.

Findings from diverse fields—primate studies, child development psychology, neuroscience, new economics—show that we are not just self-seeking and competitive creatures, but we are caring and cooperative beings as well. This gives us hope. Furthermore, thanks to new brain imaging technologies and the discovery of brain plasticity—how our brain physically changes in response to our environment and

experiences throughout our lives—researchers are also beginning to understand how conscious mental training such as meditation affects our brain. Brain imaging studies on long-term meditators by the noted psychologist and neuroscientist Richard Davidson and others have opened new avenues for exploring the effects of meditation at the neuronal level. These developments in science have led to an entire new field called contemplative science, which studies the effects of contemplative practice like meditation on health, cognitive development, emotion regulation, and more. By training our mind, this new field of science tells us, we can literally change our brain.

I remember years ago, at one of the Mind and Life Dialogues at his residence in India, the Dalai Lama threw a challenge to the scientists who were present. “You scientists,” he said, “have done a remarkable job mapping the pathologies of the human mind. But you have done little or no work on the positive qualities like compassion, let alone their potential for cultivation. Contemplative traditions, on the other hand, have developed techniques to train our mind and enhance the positive qualities like compassion. So why not use your powerful tools now to study the effects of these contemplative practices? Once we have better scientific understanding of the effects of these trainings we can then offer some of them to the wider world, not as spiritual practices but as techniques for mental and emotional well-being.”

Those were prophetic words, as the remarkable story of mindfulness demonstrates. Mindfulness in the West began with Buddhist meditations—especially of a type developed for lay practice in Burma at the turn of the twentieth century—which some pioneering Buddhist Americans such as Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein brought back to America in the 1970s after spending years in monasteries in Southeast Asia. The influences of the Burmese-Indian teacher S. N. Goenka and the Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh were also key in this movement. In 1979, Jon Kabat-Zinn opened a clinic at University of Massachusetts medical school for people with chronic pain, using a specially developed mindfulness practice. This came to be known as MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction). Based on the success of this treatment, Kabat-Zinn wrote *Full Catastrophe Living*, which presented the program and practice with guided meditations on CDs. By the time his second book, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, came out, the clinical world had taken on mindfulness, trying out its therapeutic potential for all sorts of problems, including stress, chronic pain, and attention deficit.

In the past decade or so, NIH grants related to mindfulness-based intervention studies have increased exponentially, to the tune of tens of millions of dollars. The Dalai Lama’s explicit advocacy for adapting Buddhist-based mental training practices for the secular world has also played a significant part in raising awareness of the benefits of mindfulness. Today mindfulness turns up in therapy, in management and leadership training, in schools, and in competitive sports. Phrases such as “mindful parenting,” “mindful leadership,” “mindful schools,” and “mindfulness for stress management” are mainstream. And searching for “mindfulness” in book titles on Amazon calls up more than three thousand books.

The stage is now set for compassion to make the next big impact in our world. There is a growing scientific movement to redefine the place of compassion in our understanding of human nature and behavior. Therapies based on compassion training are showing promise for mental health conditions ranging from social phobia to excessive negative self-judgment, and from post-traumatic stress disorder to eating disorders. Educators are exploring ways to bring kindness and compassion into schools as part of our children’s social, emotional, and ethical development. In this context, an opportunity came to me to design a standardized program for secular compassion training known today as compassion cultivation training (CCT).

Compassion Cultivation Training at Stanford

The story of CCT began in the winter of 2007 when I met Jim Doty, a neurosurgeon with an entrepreneurial

spirit. Jim wanted to create a forum for professionals of all stripes to scientifically explore altruistic behavior and its underlying motivations, especially compassion. He asked me if I was interested. Was I ever. The result was CCARE, the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, at Stanford University, which has helped place the study of compassion squarely within established science. As a visiting scholar at Stanford, I helped develop compassion cultivation training.

CCT started as an eight-week program, a weekly two-hour interactive class covering introductory psychology and guided meditation practices to help develop greater awareness and understanding of the dynamics of our thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Participants do “homework” between classes: prerecorded guided meditations lasting about fifteen minutes at first and increasing to half an hour. In addition, they do informal practices, using the opportunities of everyday life to work with the lessons of that particular week.

You might ask: How effective can meditation practices drawn from traditional Buddhist techniques be once you strip them of their religious elements? My views on this question are straightforward. As a professional translator I have long admired what Ralph Waldo Emerson said about translatability across languages. In a memorable passage in *Society and Solitude*, Emerson wrote, “What is really best in any book is translatable—any real insight or human sentiment.” I believe that this principle holds true not just for translation across languages but also for other forms of communication we use to transmit insights into the human condition. If traditional Buddhist compassion practices touch us in fundamental ways that help nurture and develop our better self, clearly these traditional techniques can be translated into forms that we can all understand, no matter our race, religion, or culture. In other words, the deepest and best truths are universal.

Initially, CCT was offered to Stanford undergraduates and the general public living nearby, and we fine-tuned the program based on this early experience. For example, I recognized that the first version of the program relied too heavily on meditation practice, which didn’t work so well for people who were not temperamentally inclined to the silent, reflective approach typical of formal sitting. For these people, more active or interactive exercises proved more effective in evoking the mental and emotional states we aimed to cultivate. So, I incorporated non-meditative techniques. Interactive exercises—two people engaging nonjudgmentally, practicing understanding and empathy, for example—and class discussions were especially helpful here.

To make the training more comprehensive I sought the help of several colleagues, especially three remarkable teachers—Kelly McGonigal, a lecturer at Stanford and well-known yoga and meditation teacher; Margaret Cullen, a marriage and family therapist and certified mindfulness trainer; and Erika Rosenberg, an emotion researcher and meditation teacher. These three colleagues became the first senior teachers of CCT, later joined by Monica Hanson and Leah Weiss. (Leah worked also as the director of compassion education at CCARE.) It was Kelly and Leah who, in consultation with the team, designed a comprehensive teacher training course on CCT. To date, more than a hundred instructors have been formally trained to teach this course. Through them CCT has been offered to a wide range of participants—from Stanford undergraduates to the general public in Palo Alto and the Bay Area; from cancer support networks to VA residential treatment centers for PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder); and from a major private health care group in San Diego to the engineers of Google and students at Stanford Business School. I share in this book some of the stories from the field. For those who are interested, I provide, in the endnotes, the sources I have used, including the scientific studies cited in the book.

The Dalai Lama once said that he envisions a time when, just as today we accept good diet and exercise as key to physical health, the world will come to recognize the importance of mental care and training for mental health and human flourishing. That time may not be so far away.

About This Book

Here is what I'm trying to say: Compassion is fundamental to our basic nature as human beings. Connecting with our compassionate part, nurturing it, and relating to ourselves, others, and the world around us from this place is the key to our happiness as individuals and our societal well-being. Each one of us can take steps to make compassion a central reality of our own lives and our shared world. In Part II of this book, I will show you those steps.

The aim of this book is thus simple and ambitious: to redefine compassion as something we can all grasp, and to reposition it in our lives and in our society as something we want to do—not just something we should do. I hope to bring compassion down from the pedestal of a high ideal and make it an active force in the messy reality that is everyday human life. By presenting a systematic training of our mind and heart, this book maps the way to making compassion our basic stance, the very anchor of a happier, less stressful, more fulfilling life and a more stable and peaceful world.

For it's a paradox of compassion that we ourselves are one of its greatest beneficiaries. As we will see in Part I, compassion makes us happier. It gets us out of our usual head full of disappointments, regrets, and worries about ourselves and focused on something bigger. Perhaps counterintuitively, compassion makes us more optimistic, because although it is focused on suffering, it is an energized state concerned with the ultimately positive wish for the end of suffering as well as the possibility of doing something about it. Compassion gives us a sense of purpose beyond our habitual petty obsessions. It lightens our heart and lifts our stress. It makes us more patient with and understanding of ourselves and others. It gives our minds an alternative to anger and other reactive states, which has been shown to be particularly helpful for veterans with PTSD. And compassion makes us less lonely and less afraid. Also, in a nice twist, compassion makes us benefit more from other people's kindness toward us.

One CCT participant, a thirty-two-year-old physician at a busy outpatient clinic, described how compassion helped her:

I sometimes see thirty-five patients a day. I stopped feeling connected with my patients. They seemed to have become just numbers. I was feeling totally burned out and overwhelmed. I was even thinking of quitting medicine. After I took CCT and began compassion practice, things began to change for me. I changed. I started using the three deep breaths before entering the exam room and in my head I did not take the last patient into the room with me. Somehow I could pay attention to just the person in the room. The suffering of the patient before me began to matter again. More important I realized I could give that person my caring besides writing them a prescription. My workday is still too busy and there are too many demands, but I feel less stressed. It feels like what I do has meaning again and I feel more balanced. I intend to keep practicing medicine and compassion.

I celebrate the fact that, as humans, we are never quite free from the dictates of compassion. We were born at the mercy of someone else's care. We grew up and survived into adulthood because we received care from others. Even at the height of our autonomy as adults, the presence or absence of others' affection powerfully defines our happiness or misery. This is human nature—we're vulnerable, and it's a good thing. A fearless heart embraces this fundamental truth of our human condition. We can develop the courage to see and be more compassionately in the world, to live our lives with our hearts wide open to the pain—and joy—of being human on this planet. As utterly social and moral creatures, we each yearn to be recognized and valued. We long to matter, especially in the lives of those whom we love. We like to believe that our existence serves a purpose. We are "meaning-seeking" creatures. It's through connecting with other people, actually making a difference to others, and bringing joy into their lives that we make our own lives matter, that we bring worth and purpose to our lives. This is the power of compassion.

PART I

Why Compassion Matters

1

The Best Kept Secret of Happiness

COMPASSION

What is that one thing, which when you possess, you have all other virtues? It's compassion.

—ATTRIBUTED TO THE BUDDHA

What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness?

—JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712–1778)

My mother died when I was nine. I was then at a Tibetan refugee boarding school in Shimla. My parents were part of a large number of refugees—more than eighty thousand—who fled Tibet in the wake of the Dalai Lama's escape to India in 1959. Many of the Tibetans, including my parents, ended up in road construction camps in northern India. With Tibet now annexed by the People's Republic of China, India suddenly needed to defend an international border more than two thousand miles long. Hence the urgent need for new roads. The refugees newly arrived from Tibet were the perfect labor force to take on this challenge of high-altitude road building. My parents worked on the road from the picturesque hill station of Shimla, a town that sits at an altitude above sixty-five hundred feet, to the mountainous Tibetan border. Despite the physical hardships, moving camp every few months as the road progressed, and being separated from their children much of the time, my parents succeeded in creating fond memories of early childhood for me. I still feel warm and grateful recalling those years.

I later found out that my mother had died from a totally preventable cause. While giving birth to my sister at the construction camp, she had suffered from bleeding complicated by the road dust and lack of medical care. Then she hazarded the six-hour bus ride from Shimla to Dharamsala to visit my father, who had been gravely ill and was at the Tibetan medical clinic there. A few days after her arrival in Dharamsala, my mother passed away. By then my younger brother was already boarding at the Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala. With no one to look after my infant sister, she too was left in the care of the Children's Village. I remember visiting the "baby room," the bungalow with a green tin roof and neat rows of cribs, where my sister lived among the other small children, many of them orphans. I waited at the edge of the veranda with some candies I would give her, and one of the house mothers brought her to me.

Soon after, when my father recovered, he became a monk and joined a monastery.

Thank goodness for my uncle Penpa. My mother's brother was a tall, thin man with high cheekbones and a hint of a limp from a weak knee. Unlike my father, who had worn his hair in the traditional style of two long, red-tassled braids wrapped around his head, Uncle Penpa kept his hair short and "modern," complemented by a thin mustache. Being an ex-monk, he was literate and had also taught himself enough English to read the signs on the buses and trains. At a time when I felt like an orphan, my uncle Penpa treated me as if I was his own child. Two of his daughters attended my boarding school, and every time Uncle Penpa came to see them, or took them for a vacation to the road construction camp, he included me as well. At the end of these weeklong sojourns, he would give each of us exactly the same amount of pocket money: two Indian rupees,

about five cents. As I grew up and understood more fully the hardships my uncle and my parents experienced in those early days of refugee life in India, I came to appreciate his compassion and kindness even more. They were strangers in a new country, living in makeshift roadside tents, in the relentless rain of the Indian monsoon. Money was scarce, but my uncle shared with me what little he had. Uncle Penpa became one of the most important people in my life and I remained close to him until his death, despite all the changes that took me so far away from his familiar world.

Born to Connect

As TV newscasters reminded us in their coverage of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, the American educator and television host Fred Rogers once said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’” We saw them in Boston: onlookers spontaneously rushing into a terrifying scene to help the victims. If we look, we will always find people who are helping, in big ways or small, because it’s one of the things we humans were born to do.

A FEARLESS HEART: HOW THE COURAGE TO BE COMPASSIONATE CAN TRANSFORM OUR LIVES BY THUPTEN JINPA PHD PDF

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A FEARLESS HEART: HOW THE COURAGE TO BE COMPASSIONATE CAN TRANSFORM OUR LIVES BY THUPTEN JINPA PHD PDF

The highly acclaimed thought leader and English translator of the Dalai Lama shows us how compassion works as a powerful inner resource that can yield surprising and compelling benefits—not just for others, but for ourselves.

The Buddhist practice of mindfulness first caught on in the West when we began to understand its many practical benefits. Now Thupten Jinpa, Ph.D., introduces a practice with even greater life-changing power: compassion. Based on the revolutionary course in Compassion Cultivation Training at Stanford that Jinpa helped to create, *A Fearless Heart* shows us that compassion can be a path through suffering, a key to robust health, and even an effective way to reach our goals.

Yet we fear compassion. We worry that if we are too compassionate with others, they will take advantage of us, and too much self-compassion will make us slackers. Pulling from the latest Western research as well as traditional Buddhist psychology, Jinpa offers simple daily practices that will help readers train their compassion muscle for a greater meaning, connection, and fulfillment.

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Review

“An inspirational read that not only demonstrates the power of compassion, but also reveals how kindness and self-compassion are within our reach.”

—Kelly McGonigal, author, *The Upside of Stress* and *The Willpower Instinct*

“Embracing compassion enables us to step into our own natural capacity for creativity and empathy. I highly recommend this extraordinary book and this path to anyone who seeks to have more meaningful connections to people and the world.”

—David Kelley, Founder of IDEO, co-author, *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*

“*A Fearless Heart* is a rare book that shows how the meeting of contemplative insights and practices with modern science can lead to offerings that are beneficial for everyone interested in deeper personal spiritual transformation. The book shows how such practices can have positive impact in our daily lives. I applaud my long-time English translator Thupten Jinpa for writing this timely book on compassion and its cultivation.”

—His Holiness the Dalai Lama

“I love Jinpa’s sense of the practical, of bringing compassion down from the pedestal of high ideals and into the messy reality that is every day human life. *A Fearless Heart* may prove to be one of the important books of these difficult times.”

—Richard Gere

“Brilliantly clear and heartfelt, a potentially life changing work offering inspiring training. *A Fearless Heart* is personally moving, eminently practical and visionary in scope.”

—Jack Kornfield, author, *The Wise Heart*

“Jinpa shows why compassion is not a given within some yet not possible for others, but rather is a quality of the heart that we all can cultivate and expand. If we do that, our lives transform, our families and relationships transform, and our world transforms.”

—Sharon Salzberg, author of *Loving Kindness and Real Happiness*

“Firmly grounded in the latest scientific studies, and hugely invitational and convincing in its inspiration, its reasoning, its heartfulness, and its guidance in a broad range of powerful practices, *A Fearless Heart* is the bravest, clearest, and most engaging book I know on why we need to cultivate compassion, and on how to bring it more widely and deeply into our lives and into the world.” —Jon Kabat-Zinn Founder of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction; Author of *Full Catastrophe Living*

“Thupten Jinpa speaks from his expertise as a monk turned family man, and a topflight scholar, who draws on his remarkable background and range of knowledge to offer each one of us a practical tool kit for becoming a better human being. *A Fearless Heart* can help anyone nurture the compassion that lies within every heart.”

—Daniel Goleman, author, *Emotional Intelligence*

“Part autobiography, part a training manual for a wholesome life and part a beautiful tapestry woven between ancient Buddhist thought and modern science, this book has something for everyone. At its fundamental core, it makes the case for why compassion is so essential for the modern world and offers detailed helpful advice on how it can be cultivated.”

—Richard J. Davidson, co-author, *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*, Founder, Center for Investigating Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin-Madison

About the Author

Thupten Jinpa is a former monk and holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University, where he also worked as a research fellow. Jinpa has been the principal English translator to H. H. the Dalai Lama for more than twenty-five years and has translated and edited numerous books by the Dalai Lama. Jinpa is an adjunct professor at the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University, Montreal, and Chairman of the Mind and Life Institute, which is dedicated to promoting dialogues and collaborations between the sciences and contemplative knowledge, especially Buddhism.

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INTRODUCTION

I remember walking excitedly next to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, holding his hand and trying to keep up with his pace. I must have been about six when the Dalai Lama visited the Stirling Castle Home for Tibetan Children in Shimla, northern India. I was one of more than two hundred children of Tibetan refugees resident there. The home was set up by the British charity Save the Children in 1962 in two former British colonial homes located on a small hill. We children had been busy preparing for the visit, rehearsing welcoming Tibetan songs while the grown-ups swept the road and decorated it with Tibetan symbols in white lime powder—lotus, infinite knot, vase, two goldfish (facing each other), eight-spoke wheel of dharma, victory banner, parasol, and conch. The day the Dalai Lama came, there were many Indian policemen around the school; I remember playing marbles with a few of them that morning while we waited. When the moment finally arrived it was magical. Thick smoke billowed from a whitewashed incense stove built especially for the occasion. Dressed in our colorful best and holding kata, the traditional Tibetan white scarves of greeting, in our hands, we stood on both sides of the driveway leading up to the school and sang at the top of our lungs.

I had been chosen as one of the students to walk alongside the Dalai Lama as he toured the school. While we walked, I asked him if I could become a monk, to which he replied, “Study well and you can become a monk anytime you wish.” Looking back, I think the only reason I was so precociously attracted to being a monk was because there were two monk teachers at the children’s home. They were the kindest of the adults there and also seemed the most learned. They always looked happy and at peace, even radiant at times. Most important for us children, they told the most interesting stories.

So when the first opportunity came, at the age of eleven—and as it happened, on the first day of Tibetan New Year (toward the end of February, that year)—I became a monk and joined a monastery, despite my father’s protestations. He was upset that I was squandering the opportunity to become the family breadwinner—parents of his generation wished for their children to get an education and work in an office. For nearly a decade afterward, I lived, worked, meditated, chanted, and belonged in the small community of Dzongkar Choede monastery. It was there in the quiet evergreen hills of Dharamsala, northern India, that I practiced my rudimentary English with enlightenment-seeking hippies.

I developed friendships with John and Lars. John was not a hippie. He was an American recluse who lived alone in a nice bungalow he’d rented close to the meditation hut of a revered Tibetan master. I met with John once or twice a week. We would speak and I would read from a Tibetan text, which itself is a translation of an eighth-century Indian Buddhist classic. It was John who introduced me to pancakes and ham.

Lars was a Danish man who lived quite close to the monastery. Often I would visit him to chat and have toast with jam.

In the spring of 1972, the monastery moved to the scorching heat of southern India, where a Tibetan resettlement program had begun. There, like the other monks of my monastery, at the age of thirteen, I joined the resettlement workforce clearing forests, digging ditches, and working in the cornfields. For the first two years, while the settlement was being prepared, we were paid a daily wage of 0.75 Indian rupees, or roughly 1.5 cents.

There was very little formal education at Dzongkar Choede. It’s not the custom for young monks to go to regular secular schools either. By the time our community moved to South India, I had finished memorizing all the liturgical texts that were required. The day’s labor at the settlement finished by four in the afternoon, so I had some free time on my hands and I decided to pick up my English again. However, with no opportunities to practice conversation, I made do with reading comic books. One day, I obtained a cheap used transistor radio, and after that I listened to the BBC World Service and U.S.-based Voice of America every day. In those days, VOA had a unique program “broadcasting in special English,” in which the

presenter spoke slowly and repeated every sentence twice. This was immensely helpful, as I had only a very basic grasp of the language at the time.

Since I was the only young boy at the monastery who could speak and read English, rudimentarily though it was at first, it was a source of pride and also a way of individuating myself from the others. Here was a world—figuratively and literally the whole world beyond the refugee community, beyond the monastery—that I alone from my monastic community could enter. Through English I learned to read the globe, which made all the great countries I was hearing about in the news come to life—England, America, Russia, and of course, our beloved Tibet, which had tragically fallen to Communist China.

Around 1976, when I was seventeen or eighteen, I met a remarkable woman who changed my karma with English. Dr. Valentina Stache-Rosen was a German Indologist with expertise in Sanskrit and Chinese texts, living in Bangalore (where her husband headed the Max Muller Institute). Dr. Stache-Rosen took a keen interest in the progress of my English. She introduced me to Western literature and sent me books—Hermann Hesse and Agatha Christie, Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China*, and, most helpfully, a large English dictionary with many examples of words used in sentences. And I first learned to use a knife and fork at Dr. Stache-Rosen's home. We corresponded until her death in 1980. Without her kindness, I can't imagine how my English would have escaped from where it remained back then, or for that matter, where my life would have taken me.

I also read Trevor Ling's book *The Buddha*, a portrayal, written in English, of the life and teachings of the Buddha as a revolutionary, philosopher, and spiritual teacher. In this book in particular, the evocative power of the English language deeply impressed me. There was a liveliness and immediacy that I had never felt with written Tibetan; it was like someone speaking. (The gap between written and spoken language in Tibetan is huge.)

Around the same time, I met the Tibetan teacher who later became one of the most important influences on my classical Buddhist education. Famed for his erudition and poetry, Zemey Rinpoche was the gentlest person I have ever known. He was living a semiretired life then, dedicated to quiet meditative reflection, in another Tibetan settlement about an hour's bus ride from my monastery. I was already familiar with Rinpoche's name from the many Tibetan language school textbooks he had edited. Meeting him in person and speaking with him rekindled the enthusiasm for learning that had originally inspired me to become a monk. From our first meeting, Rinpoche recognized my restless intellect and took me under his wing. So, in the summer of 1978, I left my small monastery to join Ganden, a large academic monastery in another part of southern India, about a ten- to twelve-hour bus ride away.

In 1985, while on a visit to Dharamsala, North India, twenty years after I'd hurried to keep up with His Holiness as a small boy, I had the wonderful, if accidental, honor of being asked to interpret at a teaching given by the Dalai Lama when the scheduled English interpreter couldn't make it on the first day. A few days into the teaching, the Dalai Lama's office informed me that His Holiness wished to see me. At the appointed time, the secretary ushered me into the audience room that is part of the Dalai Lama's office complex, a simple colonial-style bungalow of stone and wood with a green corrugated tin roof. As I entered, His Holiness said, "I know you; you are a good debater at Ganden monastery. But I did not know you spoke English." Some Westerners who had heard my interpreting had told the Dalai Lama that my English was easy to listen to. His Holiness asked me if I could be available when he needed someone to interpret for him, especially on his travels. I was in tears. I had never, even in a dream, imagined that one day I would have the honor of serving the Dalai Lama so closely. Needless to say, I replied that this would be the greatest honor.

For a Tibetan who grew up as a refugee in India, serving the Dalai Lama—so deeply revered by the Tibetan people—is also a way to honor the sacrifices our parents had to make in their early years of exile.

So I began accompanying the Dalai Lama on his international travels, interpreting for him with English-speaking audiences and colleagues in the multidisciplinary field of contemplative studies, including at major scientific meetings like the Mind and Life Dialogues, and assisting him on his book projects. In these capacities, I have been the Dalai Lama's principal English translator since 1985, serving this remarkable voice of compassion for nearly three decades now.

Right from the beginning His Holiness was clear that I would not join his permanent staff. He said that this would be a waste of my monastic education and talent. He advised me instead to concentrate on my studies and pursue an independent life dedicated to scholarship. This was truly compassionate.

Over time I came to recognize that my personal destiny might lie in serving as a medium for my own classical Tibetan Buddhist tradition in the contemporary world. Perhaps the strange background of my youth—growing up in a monastery yet with a fascination for the English language and things Western—had prepared me for this role. There weren't many people trained in the classical Buddhist tradition who also knew English then. As my facility with English improved, it dawned on me that I might have a special role to play at the interface of two cultures I loved.

The motivation to fulfill this destiny more efficiently took me to Cambridge University, in England, beginning a new phase in my life. Thanks to the kindness of so many people, I have been fortunate to be able to dedicate my professional life to being such a medium of cultural interchange, whether through serving the Dalai Lama or translating key Tibetan texts into English. My experiences have confirmed that early intuition that a lot of good could come from the meeting of classical Tibetan Buddhist tradition and contemporary thought and culture, including science. This book is part of this larger work of cross-cultural interpretation.

I have been interested in compassion my whole life. In my childhood, I was at the receiving end of other people's compassion. Thanks to thousands of ordinary British citizens who contributed to Save the Children, more than a thousand Tibetan children like me found a home to grow up in safely in the early 1960s, while our parents struggled to adjust as refugees in a land where they did not speak the language or know the customs. Thanks to individuals such as Dr. Valentina Stache-Rosen and Zemey Rinpoche, I found a purpose as I struggled through my very unconventional education. In my professional life, serving the Dalai Lama so closely, I have had the privilege of witnessing, from the front seat as it were, what it means for someone to live a life with complete conviction in this defining human quality we call compassion.

Today I am a husband and a father of two teenage daughters. I live in a North American city and lead a life very different from the one I was used to in a Tibetan monastery in India. On a daily basis, I struggle like most people with the typical challenges of a fast-paced modern life—balancing work, family, and relationships, paying the bills—while maintaining sanity, a sense of proportion, and basic optimism. Remarkably, it's in the teachings of my own Tibetan Buddhist tradition that I find many of the tools that help me navigate the challenges of everyday living in the contemporary world. I hope to share some of these in this book.

What is compassion? Most of us value compassion and agree that it is important both in our own lives as well as in society more generally. Undeniably, compassion is also part of our everyday experience of being human. We love and care for our children; confronted with someone in pain, we instinctively feel for that person; when someone reaches out to us in a time of distress we feel touched. Most of us would also agree that compassion has something to do with what it means to lead a good life. So it's no small coincidence that compassion turns out to be the common ground where the ethical teachings of all major traditions, religious and humanistic, come together. Even in the contested political arena, compassion is one value that both sides of the spectrum are eager to claim.

Despite our widely shared experience and beliefs about compassion, we fail to give it a central role in our lives and in our society. In our contemporary culture, we tend to have a rather confused relationship with values like kindness and compassion. In the secular West, we lack a coherent cultural framework for articulating what compassion is and how it works. To some people, it's a matter of religion and morality, a private concern of the individual with little or no societal relevance. Others question the very possibility of selflessness for human beings, and are suspicious of sentiments like compassion that have other people's welfare as the primary concern. A well-known scientist once remarked, "Scratch an altruist and watch a hypocrite bleed." At the other extreme, some people elevate these qualities to such heights that they are out of reach for most of us, possible only for exceptional individuals like Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, and the Dalai Lama. Compassion then becomes something to be admired at a distance in great beings, but not relevant to our everyday lives.

Broadly defined, compassion is a sense of concern that arises when we are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to see that suffering relieved. The English word compassion, from its Latin root, literally means "to suffer with." According to religious historian Karen Armstrong, the word for compassion in Semitic languages—*rahamanut* in Hebrew and *rahman* in Arabic—is etymologically related to the word for womb, evoking the mother's love for her child as an archetypal expression of our compassion. At its core, compassion is a response to the inevitable reality of our human condition—our experience of pain and sorrow.

Compassion offers the possibility of responding to suffering with understanding, patience, and kindness rather than, say, fear and repulsion. As such, compassion lets us open ourselves to the reality of suffering and seek its alleviation. Compassion is what connects the feeling of empathy to acts of kindness, generosity, and other expressions of our altruistic tendencies.

When compassion arises in us in the face of need or suffering, three things happen almost instantaneously: We perceive the other's suffering or need; we emotionally connect with that need or suffering; and we respond instinctively by wishing to see that situation relieved. Compassion may lead to action; it is a readiness to help or wanting to do something ourselves about another person's situation. Today, scientists are beginning to map the neurobiological basis of compassion and explore its deep evolutionary roots.

As a society, we have long ignored the fundamental role our compassion instinct plays in defining our nature and behavior. We have bought into a popular narrative that seeks to explain all our behavior through the prism of competition and self-interest. This is the story we have been telling about ourselves.

The thing about a story like this is that it tends to be self-fulfilling. When our story says that we are at heart selfish and aggressive creatures, we assume that every man is for himself. In this "dog eat dog world" it is only logical, then, to see others as a source of rivalry and antagonism. And so we relate to others with apprehension, fear, and suspicion, instead of fellow feeling and a sense of connection. By contrast, if our story says that we are social creatures endowed with instincts for compassion and kindness, and that as deeply interdependent beings our welfare is intertwined, this totally changes the way we view—and behave in—the world. So the stories we tell about ourselves do matter, quite profoundly so.

Why Compassion Now?

Today several forces are converging that indicate that compassion's time has come. As our world becomes smaller—with our population rapidly increasing against finite natural resources; environmental problems that affect us all; and the proximity of peoples, cultures, and religions brought about by technology, demographic changes, and a global economy—we are being urgently called to foster the spirit of coexistence and cooperation. We actually are in this together. This reality of the oneness of humankind is what compassion is

all about. If, for example, the world's believers collectively reaffirmed compassion as the foundation of their teachings, there would be a robust common ground on which millions of people could come together and respect each other. In a series of moving dialogues with the Dalai Lama, the noted emotion scientist Paul Ekman makes a powerful case that what he calls "global compassion" is the most important challenge of our time. If we, as individuals and together as a global society, can take the compassionate part of our nature seriously, we have a real chance of making a more humane world.

Findings from diverse fields—primate studies, child development psychology, neuroscience, new economics—show that we are not just self-seeking and competitive creatures, but we are caring and cooperative beings as well. This gives us hope. Furthermore, thanks to new brain imaging technologies and the discovery of brain plasticity—how our brain physically changes in response to our environment and experiences throughout our lives—researchers are also beginning to understand how conscious mental training such as meditation affects our brain. Brain imaging studies on long-term meditators by the noted psychologist and neuroscientist Richard Davidson and others have opened new avenues for exploring the effects of meditation at the neuronal level. These developments in science have led to an entire new field called contemplative science, which studies the effects of contemplative practice like meditation on health, cognitive development, emotion regulation, and more. By training our mind, this new field of science tells us, we can literally change our brain.

I remember years ago, at one of the Mind and Life Dialogues at his residence in India, the Dalai Lama threw a challenge to the scientists who were present. "You scientists," he said, "have done a remarkable job mapping the pathologies of the human mind. But you have done little or no work on the positive qualities like compassion, let alone their potential for cultivation. Contemplative traditions, on the other hand, have developed techniques to train our mind and enhance the positive qualities like compassion. So why not use your powerful tools now to study the effects of these contemplative practices? Once we have better scientific understanding of the effects of these trainings we can then offer some of them to the wider world, not as spiritual practices but as techniques for mental and emotional well-being."

Those were prophetic words, as the remarkable story of mindfulness demonstrates. Mindfulness in the West began with Buddhist meditations—especially of a type developed for lay practice in Burma at the turn of the twentieth century—which some pioneering Buddhist Americans such as Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein brought back to America in the 1970s after spending years in monasteries in Southeast Asia. The influences of the Burmese-Indian teacher S. N. Goenka and the Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh were also key in this movement. In 1979, Jon Kabat-Zinn opened a clinic at University of Massachusetts medical school for people with chronic pain, using a specially developed mindfulness practice. This came to be known as MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction). Based on the success of this treatment, Kabat-Zinn wrote *Full Catastrophe Living*, which presented the program and practice with guided meditations on CDs. By the time his second book, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, came out, the clinical world had taken on mindfulness, trying out its therapeutic potential for all sorts of problems, including stress, chronic pain, and attention deficit.

In the past decade or so, NIH grants related to mindfulness-based intervention studies have increased exponentially, to the tune of tens of millions of dollars. The Dalai Lama's explicit advocacy for adapting Buddhist-based mental training practices for the secular world has also played a significant part in raising awareness of the benefits of mindfulness. Today mindfulness turns up in therapy, in management and leadership training, in schools, and in competitive sports. Phrases such as "mindful parenting," "mindful leadership," "mindful schools," and "mindfulness for stress management" are mainstream. And searching for "mindfulness" in book titles on Amazon calls up more than three thousand books.

The stage is now set for compassion to make the next big impact in our world. There is a growing scientific

movement to redefine the place of compassion in our understanding of human nature and behavior. Therapies based on compassion training are showing promise for mental health conditions ranging from social phobia to excessive negative self-judgment, and from post-traumatic stress disorder to eating disorders. Educators are exploring ways to bring kindness and compassion into schools as part of our children's social, emotional, and ethical development. In this context, an opportunity came to me to design a standardized program for secular compassion training known today as compassion cultivation training (CCT).

Compassion Cultivation Training at Stanford

The story of CCT began in the winter of 2007 when I met Jim Doty, a neurosurgeon with an entrepreneurial spirit. Jim wanted to create a forum for professionals of all stripes to scientifically explore altruistic behavior and its underlying motivations, especially compassion. He asked me if I was interested. Was I ever. The result was CCARE, the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, at Stanford University, which has helped place the study of compassion squarely within established science. As a visiting scholar at Stanford, I helped develop compassion cultivation training.

CCT started as an eight-week program, a weekly two-hour interactive class covering introductory psychology and guided meditation practices to help develop greater awareness and understanding of the dynamics of our thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Participants do "homework" between classes: prerecorded guided meditations lasting about fifteen minutes at first and increasing to half an hour. In addition, they do informal practices, using the opportunities of everyday life to work with the lessons of that particular week.

You might ask: How effective can meditation practices drawn from traditional Buddhist techniques be once you strip them of their religious elements? My views on this question are straightforward. As a professional translator I have long admired what Ralph Waldo Emerson said about translatability across languages. In a memorable passage in *Society and Solitude*, Emerson wrote, "What is really best in any book is translatable—any real insight or human sentiment." I believe that this principle holds true not just for translation across languages but also for other forms of communication we use to transmit insights into the human condition. If traditional Buddhist compassion practices touch us in fundamental ways that help nurture and develop our better self, clearly these traditional techniques can be translated into forms that we can all understand, no matter our race, religion, or culture. In other words, the deepest and best truths are universal.

Initially, CCT was offered to Stanford undergraduates and the general public living nearby, and we fine-tuned the program based on this early experience. For example, I recognized that the first version of the program relied too heavily on meditation practice, which didn't work so well for people who were not temperamentally inclined to the silent, reflective approach typical of formal sitting. For these people, more active or interactive exercises proved more effective in evoking the mental and emotional states we aimed to cultivate. So, I incorporated non-meditative techniques. Interactive exercises—two people engaging nonjudgmentally, practicing understanding and empathy, for example—and class discussions were especially helpful here.

To make the training more comprehensive I sought the help of several colleagues, especially three remarkable teachers—Kelly McGonigal, a lecturer at Stanford and well-known yoga and meditation teacher; Margaret Cullen, a marriage and family therapist and certified mindfulness trainer; and Erika Rosenberg, an emotion researcher and meditation teacher. These three colleagues became the first senior teachers of CCT, later joined by Monica Hanson and Leah Weiss. (Leah worked also as the director of compassion education at CCARE.) It was Kelly and Leah who, in consultation with the team, designed a comprehensive teacher

training course on CCT. To date, more than a hundred instructors have been formally trained to teach this course. Through them CCT has been offered to a wide range of participants—from Stanford undergraduates to the general public in Palo Alto and the Bay Area; from cancer support networks to VA residential treatment centers for PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder); and from a major private health care group in San Diego to the engineers of Google and students at Stanford Business School. I share in this book some of the stories from the field. For those who are interested, I provide, in the endnotes, the sources I have used, including the scientific studies cited in the book.

The Dalai Lama once said that he envisions a time when, just as today we accept good diet and exercise as key to physical health, the world will come to recognize the importance of mental care and training for mental health and human flourishing. That time may not be so far away.

About This Book

Here is what I'm trying to say: Compassion is fundamental to our basic nature as human beings. Connecting with our compassionate part, nurturing it, and relating to ourselves, others, and the world around us from this place is the key to our happiness as individuals and our societal well-being. Each one of us can take steps to make compassion a central reality of our own lives and our shared world. In Part II of this book, I will show you those steps.

The aim of this book is thus simple and ambitious: to redefine compassion as something we can all grasp, and to reposition it in our lives and in our society as something we want to do—not just something we should do. I hope to bring compassion down from the pedestal of a high ideal and make it an active force in the messy reality that is everyday human life. By presenting a systematic training of our mind and heart, this book maps the way to making compassion our basic stance, the very anchor of a happier, less stressful, more fulfilling life and a more stable and peaceful world.

For it's a paradox of compassion that we ourselves are one of its greatest beneficiaries. As we will see in Part I, compassion makes us happier. It gets us out of our usual head full of disappointments, regrets, and worries about ourselves and focused on something bigger. Perhaps counterintuitively, compassion makes us more optimistic, because although it is focused on suffering, it is an energized state concerned with the ultimately positive wish for the end of suffering as well as the possibility of doing something about it. Compassion gives us a sense of purpose beyond our habitual petty obsessions. It lightens our heart and lifts our stress. It makes us more patient with and understanding of ourselves and others. It gives our minds an alternative to anger and other reactive states, which has been shown to be particularly helpful for veterans with PTSD. And compassion makes us less lonely and less afraid. Also, in a nice twist, compassion makes us benefit more from other people's kindness toward us.

One CCT participant, a thirty-two-year-old physician at a busy outpatient clinic, described how compassion helped her:

I sometimes see thirty-five patients a day. I stopped feeling connected with my patients. They seemed to have become just numbers. I was feeling totally burned out and overwhelmed. I was even thinking of quitting medicine. After I took CCT and began compassion practice, things began to change for me. I changed. I started using the three deep breaths before entering the exam room and in my head I did not take the last patient into the room with me. Somehow I could pay attention to just the person in the room. The suffering of the patient before me began to matter again. More important I realized I could give that person my caring besides writing them a prescription. My workday is still too busy and there are too many demands, but I feel less stressed. It feels like what I do has meaning again and I feel more balanced. I intend to keep practicing medicine and compassion.

I celebrate the fact that, as humans, we are never quite free from the dictates of compassion. We were born at the mercy of someone else's care. We grew up and survived into adulthood because we received care from others. Even at the height of our autonomy as adults, the presence or absence of others' affection powerfully defines our happiness or misery. This is human nature—we're vulnerable, and it's a good thing. A fearless heart embraces this fundamental truth of our human condition. We can develop the courage to see and be more compassionately in the world, to live our lives with our hearts wide open to the pain—and joy—of being human on this planet. As utterly social and moral creatures, we each yearn to be recognized and valued. We long to matter, especially in the lives of those whom we love. We like to believe that our existence serves a purpose. We are “meaning-seeking” creatures. It's through connecting with other people, actually making a difference to others, and bringing joy into their lives that we make our own lives matter, that we bring worth and purpose to our lives. This is the power of compassion.

PART I

Why Compassion Matters

1

The Best Kept Secret of Happiness

COMPASSION

What is that one thing, which when you possess, you have all other virtues? It's compassion.

—ATTRIBUTED TO THE BUDDHA

What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness?

—JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712–1778)

My mother died when I was nine. I was then at a Tibetan refugee boarding school in Shimla. My parents were part of a large number of refugees—more than eighty thousand—who fled Tibet in the wake of the Dalai Lama's escape to India in 1959. Many of the Tibetans, including my parents, ended up in road construction camps in northern India. With Tibet now annexed by the People's Republic of China, India suddenly needed to defend an international border more than two thousand miles long. Hence the urgent need for new roads. The refugees newly arrived from Tibet were the perfect labor force to take on this challenge of high-altitude road building. My parents worked on the road from the picturesque hill station of Shimla, a town that sits at an altitude above sixty-five hundred feet, to the mountainous Tibetan border. Despite the physical hardships, moving camp every few months as the road progressed, and being separated from their children much of the time, my parents succeeded in creating fond memories of early childhood for me. I still feel warm and grateful recalling those years.

I later found out that my mother had died from a totally preventable cause. While giving birth to my sister at the construction camp, she had suffered from bleeding complicated by the road dust and lack of medical care. Then she hazarded the six-hour bus ride from Shimla to Dharamsala to visit my father, who had been gravely ill and was at the Tibetan medical clinic there. A few days after her arrival in Dharamsala, my mother passed away. By then my younger brother was already boarding at the Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala. With no one to look after my infant sister, she too was left in the care of the Children's Village.

I remember visiting the “baby room,” the bungalow with a green tin roof and neat rows of cribs, where my sister lived among the other small children, many of them orphans. I waited at the edge of the veranda with some candies I would give her, and one of the house mothers brought her to me.

Soon after, when my father recovered, he became a monk and joined a monastery.

Thank goodness for my uncle Penpa. My mother’s brother was a tall, thin man with high cheekbones and a hint of a limp from a weak knee. Unlike my father, who had worn his hair in the traditional style of two long, red-tassled braids wrapped around his head, Uncle Penpa kept his hair short and “modern,” complemented by a thin mustache. Being an ex-monk, he was literate and had also taught himself enough English to read the signs on the buses and trains. At a time when I felt like an orphan, my uncle Penpa treated me as if I was his own child. Two of his daughters attended my boarding school, and every time Uncle Penpa came to see them, or took them for a vacation to the road construction camp, he included me as well. At the end of these weeklong sojourns, he would give each of us exactly the same amount of pocket money: two Indian rupees, about five cents. As I grew up and understood more fully the hardships my uncle and my parents experienced in those early days of refugee life in India, I came to appreciate his compassion and kindness even more. They were strangers in a new country, living in makeshift roadside tents, in the relentless rain of the Indian monsoon. Money was scarce, but my uncle shared with me what little he had. Uncle Penpa became one of the most important people in my life and I remained close to him until his death, despite all the changes that took me so far away from his familiar world.

Born to Connect

As TV newscasters reminded us in their coverage of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, the American educator and television host Fred Rogers once said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’” We saw them in Boston: onlookers spontaneously rushing into a terrifying scene to help the victims. If we look, we will always find people who are helping, in big ways or small, because it’s one of the things we humans were born to do.

Most helpful customer reviews

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

This is the real deal

By Marfa Gladwell

Highly recommended if you're looking for the real deal. Written by the Dalai Lama's translator, so the author is knowledgeable about ancient practices and modern neuroscience. He's also clear and concise in his writing.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A FEARLESS HEART is a must read for meaningful transformation

By Manuel Garza

This is an excellent easy read of a book on how to become open to compassion and how that openness can transform your life for the better.

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A most profound book.

By Annika Bratt

Thupten Jinpa has here written a most profound book, that I gladly recommend.

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Review

“An inspirational read that not only demonstrates the power of compassion, but also reveals how kindness and self-compassion are within our reach.”

—Kelly McGonigal, author, *The Upside of Stress and The Willpower Instinct*

“Embracing compassion enables us to step into our own natural capacity for creativity and empathy. I highly recommend this extraordinary book and this path to anyone who seeks to have more meaningful connections to people and the world.”

—David Kelley, Founder of IDEO, co-author, *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*

“*A Fearless Heart* is a rare book that shows how the meeting of contemplative insights and practices with modern science can lead to offerings that are beneficial for everyone interested in deeper personal spiritual transformation. The book shows how such practices can have positive impact in our daily lives. I applaud my long-time English translator Thupten Jinpa for writing this timely book on compassion and its cultivation.”

—His Holiness the Dalai Lama

“I love Jinpa’s sense of the practical, of bringing compassion down from the pedestal of high ideals and into the messy reality that is every day human life. *A Fearless Heart* may prove to be one of the important books of these difficult times.”

—Richard Gere

“Brilliantly clear and heartfelt, a potentially life changing work offering inspiring training. *A Fearless Heart* is personally moving, eminently practical and visionary in scope.”

—Jack Kornfield, author, *The Wise Heart*

“Jinpa shows why compassion is not a given within some yet not possible for others, but rather is a quality of the heart that we all can cultivate and expand. If we do that, our lives transform, our families and relationships transform, and our world transforms.”

—Sharon Salzberg, author of *Loving Kindness and Real Happiness*

“Firmly grounded in the latest scientific studies, and hugely invitational and convincing in its inspiration, its reasoning, its heartfulness, and its guidance in a broad range of powerful practices, *A Fearless Heart* is the bravest, clearest, and most engaging book I know on why we need to cultivate compassion, and on how to bring it more widely and deeply into our lives and into the world.” —Jon Kabat-Zinn Founder of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction; Author of *Full Catastrophe Living*

“Thupten Jinpa speaks from his expertise as a monk turned family man, and a topflight scholar, who draws on his remarkable background and range of knowledge to offer each one of us a practical tool kit for becoming a better human being. *A Fearless Heart* can help anyone nurture the compassion that lies within every heart.”

—Daniel Goleman, author, *Emotional Intelligence*

“Part autobiography, part a training manual for a wholesome life and part a beautiful tapestry woven between ancient Buddhist thought and modern science, this book has something for everyone. At its fundamental core, it makes the case for why compassion is so essential for the modern world and offers detailed helpful advice on how it can be cultivated.”

—Richard J. Davidson, co-author, *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*, Founder, Center for Investigating Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin-Madison

About the Author

Thupten Jinpa is a former monk and holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University, where he also worked as a research fellow. Jinpa has been the principal English translator to H. H. the Dalai Lama for more than twenty-five years and has translated and edited numerous books by the Dalai Lama. Jinpa is an adjunct professor at the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University, Montreal, and Chairman of the Mind and Life Institute, which is dedicated to promoting dialogues and collaborations between the sciences and contemplative knowledge, especially Buddhism.

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INTRODUCTION

I remember walking excitedly next to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, holding his hand and trying to keep up with his pace. I must have been about six when the Dalai Lama visited the Stirling Castle Home for Tibetan Children in Shimla, northern India. I was one of more than two hundred children of Tibetan refugees resident there. The home was set up by the British charity Save the Children in 1962 in two former British colonial homes located on a small hill. We children had been busy preparing for the visit, rehearsing welcoming Tibetan songs while the grown-ups swept the road and decorated it with Tibetan symbols in white lime powder—lotus, infinite knot, vase, two goldfish (facing each other), eight-spoke wheel of dharma, victory banner, parasol, and conch. The day the Dalai Lama came, there were many Indian policemen around the school; I remember playing marbles with a few of them that morning while we waited. When the moment finally arrived it was magical. Thick smoke billowed from a whitewashed incense stove built especially for the occasion. Dressed in our colorful best and holding kata, the traditional Tibetan white scarves of greeting, in our hands, we stood on both sides of the driveway leading up to the school and sang at the top of our lungs.

I had been chosen as one of the students to walk alongside the Dalai Lama as he toured the school. While we walked, I asked him if I could become a monk, to which he replied, “Study well and you can become a monk

anytime you wish.” Looking back, I think the only reason I was so precociously attracted to being a monk was because there were two monk teachers at the children’s home. They were the kindest of the adults there and also seemed the most learned. They always looked happy and at peace, even radiant at times. Most important for us children, they told the most interesting stories.

So when the first opportunity came, at the age of eleven—and as it happened, on the first day of Tibetan New Year (toward the end of February, that year)—I became a monk and joined a monastery, despite my father’s protestations. He was upset that I was squandering the opportunity to become the family breadwinner—parents of his generation wished for their children to get an education and work in an office. For nearly a decade afterward, I lived, worked, meditated, chanted, and belonged in the small community of Dzongkar Choede monastery. It was there in the quiet evergreen hills of Dharamsala, northern India, that I practiced my rudimentary English with enlightenment-seeking hippies.

I developed friendships with John and Lars. John was not a hippie. He was an American recluse who lived alone in a nice bungalow he’d rented close to the meditation hut of a revered Tibetan master. I met with John once or twice a week. We would speak and I would read from a Tibetan text, which itself is a translation of an eighth-century Indian Buddhist classic. It was John who introduced me to pancakes and ham.

Lars was a Danish man who lived quite close to the monastery. Often I would visit him to chat and have toast with jam.

In the spring of 1972, the monastery moved to the scorching heat of southern India, where a Tibetan resettlement program had begun. There, like the other monks of my monastery, at the age of thirteen, I joined the resettlement workforce clearing forests, digging ditches, and working in the cornfields. For the first two years, while the settlement was being prepared, we were paid a daily wage of 0.75 Indian rupees, or roughly 1.5 cents.

There was very little formal education at Dzongkar Choede. It’s not the custom for young monks to go to regular secular schools either. By the time our community moved to South India, I had finished memorizing all the liturgical texts that were required. The day’s labor at the settlement finished by four in the afternoon, so I had some free time on my hands and I decided to pick up my English again. However, with no opportunities to practice conversation, I made do with reading comic books. One day, I obtained a cheap used transistor radio, and after that I listened to the BBC World Service and U.S.-based Voice of America every day. In those days, VOA had a unique program “broadcasting in special English,” in which the presenter spoke slowly and repeated every sentence twice. This was immensely helpful, as I had only a very basic grasp of the language at the time.

Since I was the only young boy at the monastery who could speak and read English, rudimentarily though it was at first, it was a source of pride and also a way of individuating myself from the others. Here was a world—figuratively and literally the whole world beyond the refugee community, beyond the monastery—that I alone from my monastic community could enter. Through English I learned to read the globe, which made all the great countries I was hearing about in the news come to life—England, America, Russia, and of course, our beloved Tibet, which had tragically fallen to Communist China.

Around 1976, when I was seventeen or eighteen, I met a remarkable woman who changed my karma with English. Dr. Valentina Stache-Rosen was a German Indologist with expertise in Sanskrit and Chinese texts, living in Bangalore (where her husband headed the Max Muller Institute). Dr. Stache-Rosen took a keen interest in the progress of my English. She introduced me to Western literature and sent me books—Hermann Hesse and Agatha Christie, Edgar Snow’s *Red Star over China*, and, most helpfully, a large English dictionary with many examples of words used in sentences. And I first learned to use a knife

and fork at Dr. Stache-Rosen's home. We corresponded until her death in 1980. Without her kindness, I can't imagine how my English would have escaped from where it remained back then, or for that matter, where my life would have taken me.

I also read Trevor Ling's book *The Buddha*, a portrayal, written in English, of the life and teachings of the Buddha as a revolutionary, philosopher, and spiritual teacher. In this book in particular, the evocative power of the English language deeply impressed me. There was a liveliness and immediacy that I had never felt with written Tibetan; it was like someone speaking. (The gap between written and spoken language in Tibetan is huge.)

Around the same time, I met the Tibetan teacher who later became one of the most important influences on my classical Buddhist education. Famed for his erudition and poetry, Zemey Rinpoche was the gentlest person I have ever known. He was living a semiretired life then, dedicated to quiet meditative reflection, in another Tibetan settlement about an hour's bus ride from my monastery. I was already familiar with Rinpoche's name from the many Tibetan language school textbooks he had edited. Meeting him in person and speaking with him rekindled the enthusiasm for learning that had originally inspired me to become a monk. From our first meeting, Rinpoche recognized my restless intellect and took me under his wing. So, in the summer of 1978, I left my small monastery to join Ganden, a large academic monastery in another part of southern India, about a ten- to twelve-hour bus ride away.

In 1985, while on a visit to Dharamsala, North India, twenty years after I'd hurried to keep up with His Holiness as a small boy, I had the wonderful, if accidental, honor of being asked to interpret at a teaching given by the Dalai Lama when the scheduled English interpreter couldn't make it on the first day. A few days into the teaching, the Dalai Lama's office informed me that His Holiness wished to see me. At the appointed time, the secretary ushered me into the audience room that is part of the Dalai Lama's office complex, a simple colonial-style bungalow of stone and wood with a green corrugated tin roof. As I entered, His Holiness said, "I know you; you are a good debater at Ganden monastery. But I did not know you spoke English." Some Westerners who had heard my interpreting had told the Dalai Lama that my English was easy to listen to. His Holiness asked me if I could be available when he needed someone to interpret for him, especially on his travels. I was in tears. I had never, even in a dream, imagined that one day I would have the honor of serving the Dalai Lama so closely. Needless to say, I replied that this would be the greatest honor.

For a Tibetan who grew up as a refugee in India, serving the Dalai Lama—so deeply revered by the Tibetan people—is also a way to honor the sacrifices our parents had to make in their early years of exile.

So I began accompanying the Dalai Lama on his international travels, interpreting for him with English-speaking audiences and colleagues in the multidisciplinary field of contemplative studies, including at major scientific meetings like the *Mind and Life Dialogues*, and assisting him on his book projects. In these capacities, I have been the Dalai Lama's principal English translator since 1985, serving this remarkable voice of compassion for nearly three decades now.

Right from the beginning His Holiness was clear that I would not join his permanent staff. He said that this would be a waste of my monastic education and talent. He advised me instead to concentrate on my studies and pursue an independent life dedicated to scholarship. This was truly compassionate.

Over time I came to recognize that my personal destiny might lie in serving as a medium for my own classical Tibetan Buddhist tradition in the contemporary world. Perhaps the strange background of my youth—growing up in a monastery yet with a fascination for the English language and things Western—had prepared me for this role. There weren't many people trained in the classical Buddhist tradition who also knew English then. As my facility with English improved, it dawned on me that I might have a special role

to play at the interface of two cultures I loved.

The motivation to fulfill this destiny more efficiently took me to Cambridge University, in England, beginning a new phase in my life. Thanks to the kindness of so many people, I have been fortunate to be able to dedicate my professional life to being such a medium of cultural interchange, whether through serving the Dalai Lama or translating key Tibetan texts into English. My experiences have confirmed that early intuition that a lot of good could come from the meeting of classical Tibetan Buddhist tradition and contemporary thought and culture, including science. This book is part of this larger work of cross-cultural interpretation.

I have been interested in compassion my whole life. In my childhood, I was at the receiving end of other people's compassion. Thanks to thousands of ordinary British citizens who contributed to Save the Children, more than a thousand Tibetan children like me found a home to grow up in safely in the early 1960s, while our parents struggled to adjust as refugees in a land where they did not speak the language or know the customs. Thanks to individuals such as Dr. Valentina Stache-Rosen and Zemey Rinpoche, I found a purpose as I struggled through my very unconventional education. In my professional life, serving the Dalai Lama so closely, I have had the privilege of witnessing, from the front seat as it were, what it means for someone to live a life with complete conviction in this defining human quality we call compassion.

Today I am a husband and a father of two teenage daughters. I live in a North American city and lead a life very different from the one I was used to in a Tibetan monastery in India. On a daily basis, I struggle like most people with the typical challenges of a fast-paced modern life—balancing work, family, and relationships, paying the bills—while maintaining sanity, a sense of proportion, and basic optimism. Remarkably, it's in the teachings of my own Tibetan Buddhist tradition that I find many of the tools that help me navigate the challenges of everyday living in the contemporary world. I hope to share some of these in this book.

What is compassion? Most of us value compassion and agree that it is important both in our own lives as well as in society more generally. Undeniably, compassion is also part of our everyday experience of being human. We love and care for our children; confronted with someone in pain, we instinctively feel for that person; when someone reaches out to us in a time of distress we feel touched. Most of us would also agree that compassion has something to do with what it means to lead a good life. So it's no small coincidence that compassion turns out to be the common ground where the ethical teachings of all major traditions, religious and humanistic, come together. Even in the contested political arena, compassion is one value that both sides of the spectrum are eager to claim.

Despite our widely shared experience and beliefs about compassion, we fail to give it a central role in our lives and in our society. In our contemporary culture, we tend to have a rather confused relationship with values like kindness and compassion. In the secular West, we lack a coherent cultural framework for articulating what compassion is and how it works. To some people, it's a matter of religion and morality, a private concern of the individual with little or no societal relevance. Others question the very possibility of selflessness for human beings, and are suspicious of sentiments like compassion that have other people's welfare as the primary concern. A well-known scientist once remarked, "Scratch an altruist and watch a hypocrite bleed." At the other extreme, some people elevate these qualities to such heights that they are out of reach for most of us, possible only for exceptional individuals like Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, and the Dalai Lama. Compassion then becomes something to be admired at a distance in great beings, but not relevant to our everyday lives.

Broadly defined, compassion is a sense of concern that arises when we are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to see that suffering relieved. The English word compassion, from its Latin root, literally means "to suffer with." According to religious historian Karen Armstrong, the word for compassion

in Semitic languages—rahmanut in Hebrew and rahman in Arabic—is etymologically related to the word for womb, evoking the mother's love for her child as an archetypal expression of our compassion. At its core, compassion is a response to the inevitable reality of our human condition—our experience of pain and sorrow.

Compassion offers the possibility of responding to suffering with understanding, patience, and kindness rather than, say, fear and repulsion. As such, compassion lets us open ourselves to the reality of suffering and seek its alleviation. Compassion is what connects the feeling of empathy to acts of kindness, generosity, and other expressions of our altruistic tendencies.

When compassion arises in us in the face of need or suffering, three things happen almost instantaneously: We perceive the other's suffering or need; we emotionally connect with that need or suffering; and we respond instinctively by wishing to see that situation relieved. Compassion may lead to action; it is a readiness to help or wanting to do something ourselves about another person's situation. Today, scientists are beginning to map the neurobiological basis of compassion and explore its deep evolutionary roots.

As a society, we have long ignored the fundamental role our compassion instinct plays in defining our nature and behavior. We have bought into a popular narrative that seeks to explain all our behavior through the prism of competition and self-interest. This is the story we have been telling about ourselves.

The thing about a story like this is that it tends to be self-fulfilling. When our story says that we are at heart selfish and aggressive creatures, we assume that every man is for himself. In this “dog eat dog world” it is only logical, then, to see others as a source of rivalry and antagonism. And so we relate to others with apprehension, fear, and suspicion, instead of fellow feeling and a sense of connection. By contrast, if our story says that we are social creatures endowed with instincts for compassion and kindness, and that as deeply interdependent beings our welfare is intertwined, this totally changes the way we view—and behave in—the world. So the stories we tell about ourselves do matter, quite profoundly so.

Why Compassion Now?

Today several forces are converging that indicate that compassion's time has come. As our world becomes smaller—with our population rapidly increasing against finite natural resources; environmental problems that affect us all; and the proximity of peoples, cultures, and religions brought about by technology, demographic changes, and a global economy—we are being urgently called to foster the spirit of coexistence and cooperation. We actually are in this together. This reality of the oneness of humankind is what compassion is all about. If, for example, the world's believers collectively reaffirmed compassion as the foundation of their teachings, there would be a robust common ground on which millions of people could come together and respect each other. In a series of moving dialogues with the Dalai Lama, the noted emotion scientist Paul Ekman makes a powerful case that what he calls “global compassion” is the most important challenge of our time. If we, as individuals and together as a global society, can take the compassionate part of our nature seriously, we have a real chance of making a more humane world.

Findings from diverse fields—primate studies, child development psychology, neuroscience, new economics—show that we are not just self-seeking and competitive creatures, but we are caring and cooperative beings as well. This gives us hope. Furthermore, thanks to new brain imaging technologies and the discovery of brain plasticity—how our brain physically changes in response to our environment and experiences throughout our lives—researchers are also beginning to understand how conscious mental training such as meditation affects our brain. Brain imaging studies on long-term meditators by the noted psychologist and neuroscientist Richard Davidson and others have opened new avenues for exploring the effects of meditation at the neuronal level. These developments in science have led to an entire new field

called contemplative science, which studies the effects of contemplative practice like meditation on health, cognitive development, emotion regulation, and more. By training our mind, this new field of science tells us, we can literally change our brain.

I remember years ago, at one of the Mind and Life Dialogues at his residence in India, the Dalai Lama threw a challenge to the scientists who were present. “You scientists,” he said, “have done a remarkable job mapping the pathologies of the human mind. But you have done little or no work on the positive qualities like compassion, let alone their potential for cultivation. Contemplative traditions, on the other hand, have developed techniques to train our mind and enhance the positive qualities like compassion. So why not use your powerful tools now to study the effects of these contemplative practices? Once we have better scientific understanding of the effects of these trainings we can then offer some of them to the wider world, not as spiritual practices but as techniques for mental and emotional well-being.”

Those were prophetic words, as the remarkable story of mindfulness demonstrates. Mindfulness in the West began with Buddhist meditations—especially of a type developed for lay practice in Burma at the turn of the twentieth century—which some pioneering Buddhist Americans such as Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein brought back to America in the 1970s after spending years in monasteries in Southeast Asia. The influences of the Burmese-Indian teacher S. N. Goenka and the Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh were also key in this movement. In 1979, Jon Kabat-Zinn opened a clinic at University of Massachusetts medical school for people with chronic pain, using a specially developed mindfulness practice. This came to be known as MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction). Based on the success of this treatment, Kabat-Zinn wrote *Full Catastrophe Living*, which presented the program and practice with guided meditations on CDs. By the time his second book, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, came out, the clinical world had taken on mindfulness, trying out its therapeutic potential for all sorts of problems, including stress, chronic pain, and attention deficit.

In the past decade or so, NIH grants related to mindfulness-based intervention studies have increased exponentially, to the tune of tens of millions of dollars. The Dalai Lama’s explicit advocacy for adapting Buddhist-based mental training practices for the secular world has also played a significant part in raising awareness of the benefits of mindfulness. Today mindfulness turns up in therapy, in management and leadership training, in schools, and in competitive sports. Phrases such as “mindful parenting,” “mindful leadership,” “mindful schools,” and “mindfulness for stress management” are mainstream. And searching for “mindfulness” in book titles on Amazon calls up more than three thousand books.

The stage is now set for compassion to make the next big impact in our world. There is a growing scientific movement to redefine the place of compassion in our understanding of human nature and behavior. Therapies based on compassion training are showing promise for mental health conditions ranging from social phobia to excessive negative self-judgment, and from post-traumatic stress disorder to eating disorders. Educators are exploring ways to bring kindness and compassion into schools as part of our children’s social, emotional, and ethical development. In this context, an opportunity came to me to design a standardized program for secular compassion training known today as compassion cultivation training (CCT).

Compassion Cultivation Training at Stanford

The story of CCT began in the winter of 2007 when I met Jim Doty, a neurosurgeon with an entrepreneurial spirit. Jim wanted to create a forum for professionals of all stripes to scientifically explore altruistic behavior and its underlying motivations, especially compassion. He asked me if I was interested. Was I ever. The result was CCARE, the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, at Stanford University, which has helped place the study of compassion squarely within established science. As a

visiting scholar at Stanford, I helped develop compassion cultivation training.

CCT started as an eight-week program, a weekly two-hour interactive class covering introductory psychology and guided meditation practices to help develop greater awareness and understanding of the dynamics of our thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Participants do “homework” between classes: prerecorded guided meditations lasting about fifteen minutes at first and increasing to half an hour. In addition, they do informal practices, using the opportunities of everyday life to work with the lessons of that particular week.

You might ask: How effective can meditation practices drawn from traditional Buddhist techniques be once you strip them of their religious elements? My views on this question are straightforward. As a professional translator I have long admired what Ralph Waldo Emerson said about translatability across languages. In a memorable passage in *Society and Solitude*, Emerson wrote, “What is really best in any book is translatable—any real insight or human sentiment.” I believe that this principle holds true not just for translation across languages but also for other forms of communication we use to transmit insights into the human condition. If traditional Buddhist compassion practices touch us in fundamental ways that help nurture and develop our better self, clearly these traditional techniques can be translated into forms that we can all understand, no matter our race, religion, or culture. In other words, the deepest and best truths are universal.

Initially, CCT was offered to Stanford undergraduates and the general public living nearby, and we fine-tuned the program based on this early experience. For example, I recognized that the first version of the program relied too heavily on meditation practice, which didn’t work so well for people who were not temperamentally inclined to the silent, reflective approach typical of formal sitting. For these people, more active or interactive exercises proved more effective in evoking the mental and emotional states we aimed to cultivate. So, I incorporated non-meditative techniques. Interactive exercises—two people engaging nonjudgmentally, practicing understanding and empathy, for example—and class discussions were especially helpful here.

To make the training more comprehensive I sought the help of several colleagues, especially three remarkable teachers—Kelly McGonigal, a lecturer at Stanford and well-known yoga and meditation teacher; Margaret Cullen, a marriage and family therapist and certified mindfulness trainer; and Erika Rosenberg, an emotion researcher and meditation teacher. These three colleagues became the first senior teachers of CCT, later joined by Monica Hanson and Leah Weiss. (Leah worked also as the director of compassion education at CCARE.) It was Kelly and Leah who, in consultation with the team, designed a comprehensive teacher training course on CCT. To date, more than a hundred instructors have been formally trained to teach this course. Through them CCT has been offered to a wide range of participants—from Stanford undergraduates to the general public in Palo Alto and the Bay Area; from cancer support networks to VA residential treatment centers for PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder); and from a major private health care group in San Diego to the engineers of Google and students at Stanford Business School. I share in this book some of the stories from the field. For those who are interested, I provide, in the endnotes, the sources I have used, including the scientific studies cited in the book.

The Dalai Lama once said that he envisions a time when, just as today we accept good diet and exercise as key to physical health, the world will come to recognize the importance of mental care and training for mental health and human flourishing. That time may not be so far away.

About This Book

Here is what I’m trying to say: Compassion is fundamental to our basic nature as human beings. Connecting

with our compassionate part, nurturing it, and relating to ourselves, others, and the world around us from this place is the key to our happiness as individuals and our societal well-being. Each one of us can take steps to make compassion a central reality of our own lives and our shared world. In Part II of this book, I will show you those steps.

The aim of this book is thus simple and ambitious: to redefine compassion as something we can all grasp, and to reposition it in our lives and in our society as something we want to do—not just something we should do. I hope to bring compassion down from the pedestal of a high ideal and make it an active force in the messy reality that is everyday human life. By presenting a systematic training of our mind and heart, this book maps the way to making compassion our basic stance, the very anchor of a happier, less stressful, more fulfilling life and a more stable and peaceful world.

For it's a paradox of compassion that we ourselves are one of its greatest beneficiaries. As we will see in Part I, compassion makes us happier. It gets us out of our usual head full of disappointments, regrets, and worries about ourselves and focused on something bigger. Perhaps counterintuitively, compassion makes us more optimistic, because although it is focused on suffering, it is an energized state concerned with the ultimately positive wish for the end of suffering as well as the possibility of doing something about it. Compassion gives us a sense of purpose beyond our habitual petty obsessions. It lightens our heart and lifts our stress. It makes us more patient with and understanding of ourselves and others. It gives our minds an alternative to anger and other reactive states, which has been shown to be particularly helpful for veterans with PTSD. And compassion makes us less lonely and less afraid. Also, in a nice twist, compassion makes us benefit more from other people's kindness toward us.

One CCT participant, a thirty-two-year-old physician at a busy outpatient clinic, described how compassion helped her:

I sometimes see thirty-five patients a day. I stopped feeling connected with my patients. They seemed to have become just numbers. I was feeling totally burned out and overwhelmed. I was even thinking of quitting medicine. After I took CCT and began compassion practice, things began to change for me. I changed. I started using the three deep breaths before entering the exam room and in my head I did not take the last patient into the room with me. Somehow I could pay attention to just the person in the room. The suffering of the patient before me began to matter again. More important I realized I could give that person my caring besides writing them a prescription. My workday is still too busy and there are too many demands, but I feel less stressed. It feels like what I do has meaning again and I feel more balanced. I intend to keep practicing medicine and compassion.

I celebrate the fact that, as humans, we are never quite free from the dictates of compassion. We were born at the mercy of someone else's care. We grew up and survived into adulthood because we received care from others. Even at the height of our autonomy as adults, the presence or absence of others' affection powerfully defines our happiness or misery. This is human nature—we're vulnerable, and it's a good thing. A fearless heart embraces this fundamental truth of our human condition. We can develop the courage to see and be more compassionately in the world, to live our lives with our hearts wide open to the pain—and joy—of being human on this planet. As utterly social and moral creatures, we each yearn to be recognized and valued. We long to matter, especially in the lives of those whom we love. We like to believe that our existence serves a purpose. We are "meaning-seeking" creatures. It's through connecting with other people, actually making a difference to others, and bringing joy into their lives that we make our own lives matter, that we bring worth and purpose to our lives. This is the power of compassion.

The Best Kept Secret of Happiness

COMPASSION

What is that one thing, which when you possess, you have all other virtues? It's compassion.

—ATTRIBUTED TO THE BUDDHA

What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness?

—JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1712–1778)

My mother died when I was nine. I was then at a Tibetan refugee boarding school in Shimla. My parents were part of a large number of refugees—more than eighty thousand—who fled Tibet in the wake of the Dalai Lama's escape to India in 1959. Many of the Tibetans, including my parents, ended up in road construction camps in northern India. With Tibet now annexed by the People's Republic of China, India suddenly needed to defend an international border more than two thousand miles long. Hence the urgent need for new roads. The refugees newly arrived from Tibet were the perfect labor force to take on this challenge of high-altitude road building. My parents worked on the road from the picturesque hill station of Shimla, a town that sits at an altitude above sixty-five hundred feet, to the mountainous Tibetan border. Despite the physical hardships, moving camp every few months as the road progressed, and being separated from their children much of the time, my parents succeeded in creating fond memories of early childhood for me. I still feel warm and grateful recalling those years.

I later found out that my mother had died from a totally preventable cause. While giving birth to my sister at the construction camp, she had suffered from bleeding complicated by the road dust and lack of medical care. Then she hazarded the six-hour bus ride from Shimla to Dharamsala to visit my father, who had been gravely ill and was at the Tibetan medical clinic there. A few days after her arrival in Dharamsala, my mother passed away. By then my younger brother was already boarding at the Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala. With no one to look after my infant sister, she too was left in the care of the Children's Village. I remember visiting the "baby room," the bungalow with a green tin roof and neat rows of cribs, where my sister lived among the other small children, many of them orphans. I waited at the edge of the veranda with some candies I would give her, and one of the house mothers brought her to me.

Soon after, when my father recovered, he became a monk and joined a monastery.

Thank goodness for my uncle Penpa. My mother's brother was a tall, thin man with high cheekbones and a hint of a limp from a weak knee. Unlike my father, who had worn his hair in the traditional style of two long, red-tassled braids wrapped around his head, Uncle Penpa kept his hair short and "modern," complemented by a thin mustache. Being an ex-monk, he was literate and had also taught himself enough English to read the signs on the buses and trains. At a time when I felt like an orphan, my uncle Penpa treated me as if I was his own child. Two of his daughters attended my boarding school, and every time Uncle Penpa came to see them, or took them for a vacation to the road construction camp, he included me as well. At the end of these weeklong sojourns, he would give each of us exactly the same amount of pocket money: two Indian rupees, about five cents. As I grew up and understood more fully the hardships my uncle and my parents experienced

in those early days of refugee life in India, I came to appreciate his compassion and kindness even more. They were strangers in a new country, living in makeshift roadside tents, in the relentless rain of the Indian monsoon. Money was scarce, but my uncle shared with me what little he had. Uncle Penpa became one of the most important people in my life and I remained close to him until his death, despite all the changes that took me so far away from his familiar world.

Born to Connect

As TV newscasters reminded us in their coverage of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, the American educator and television host Fred Rogers once said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’” We saw them in Boston: onlookers spontaneously rushing into a terrifying scene to help the victims. If we look, we will always find people who are helping, in big ways or small, because it’s one of the things we humans were born to do.

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