

## **Round Table Discussion 5 - Compassion**

### **Questions to Cover**

**All religions claim to be compassionate - but how compassionate are they in practice?**

- Is compassion rooted in faith, in religion,
- or is it a natural human response?
- What does our faith demand of us individually and as a community?

**Does there need to be a 'reason' for suffering and pain?**

- whether we believe God causes suffering, tolerates it, is unaffected by it or hates it ... how does that help the person that is suffering? Does it help to tell someone who is suffering what we believe?

**What is the attitude of faith communities towards inclusion?**

- How inclusive are our communities on sexual orientation?
- How inclusive are we on disability?
- How inclusive are we on race and ethnicity?
- Is there scope for better inclusion?
- Should we be inclusive regardless of our opinions?

**How do our faith communities view disability?**

- In particular, how do we view mental health issues and hidden disabilities?

**What happens when a compassionate response is at odds with a faith teaching?**

- is there ever a time for withholding compassion?
- Should faith teachings be informed by compassion?

### **Quotes**

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.  
*The Dalai Lama*

I would rather feel compassion than know the meaning of it. *Thomas Aquinas:*

There is no question that many people do good things in the name of their faith — but there are better reasons to help the poor, feed the hungry and defend the weak than the belief that an Imaginary Friend wants you to do it. Compassion is deeper than religion. As is ecstasy. It is time that we acknowledge that human beings can be profoundly ethical — and even spiritual — without pretending to know things they do not know.  
*Sam Harris LA Times*

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

*Article 1 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*

## ***Definition of Compassion***

Sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others

## ***On Compassion ...***

Compassion is indeed central to every one of the major world religions -- but sometimes you would never know it. Increasingly religion is associated with violence and intolerance; it seems preoccupied with dogma, belief, getting to heaven, or enforcing correct sexual behavior. There are magnificent exceptions, of course, but it is rare to hear religious leaders speaking of the primary importance of compassion. People don't even seem to know what it means. It is often assumed to mean "pity" or "feeling sorry" for somebody. But the root of this Greco-Latin word is "to experience with;" compassion compels us to dethrone the egotism, self-preoccupation and selfishness that hold us back from the divine and put ourselves in the place of another.

All the great religious sages insist that compassion is the chief religious duty. The first person to do so was Confucius, who, five hundred years before Christ, was the first to formulate the Golden Rule: "Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you." It was the central "thread" that ran through all his teaching and should be practised "all day and every day." Every single faith has evolved its own version of the Golden Rule, which requires us to look into our own hearts, discover what gives us pain and refuse, under any circumstance whatsoever to inflict that pain on anybody else.

"My religion is kindness," said the Dalai Lama; you can have faith that moves mountains, says St Paul, but it is worthless without charity; Rabbi Hillel said that the Golden Rule was the essence of Torah: everything else was "only commentary." Muslims begin every reading of the Qur'an by invoking the compassion of God. But the religions also insist that you cannot confine your compassion to your own kind; you have to have "concern for everybody," love your enemies, and honour the stranger.

The major task of our generation is to build a global community where people of all persuasions can live together in mutual respect. If we do not achieve this, we will not have a viable world to hand on to our children. We must implement the Golden Rule globally, treating other peoples ~ whoever they may be ~ as we would wish to be treated ourselves. Any ideology ~ religious or secular ~ that breeds hatred or disdain will fail the test of our time. The religions should be making a major contribution to this essential task ~ and that is why it is important to sign on to the Charter of Compassion, change the conversation, and make it cool to be compassionate.

We hope that hundreds of thousands of people ~ Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Confucians and atheists all over the world will contribute their insights on line on our multi-lingual website. The world will help to write this Charter to return religion to the spirit of the Golden Rule. Can we make a difference? "Yes We Can!"

*Karen Armstrong*