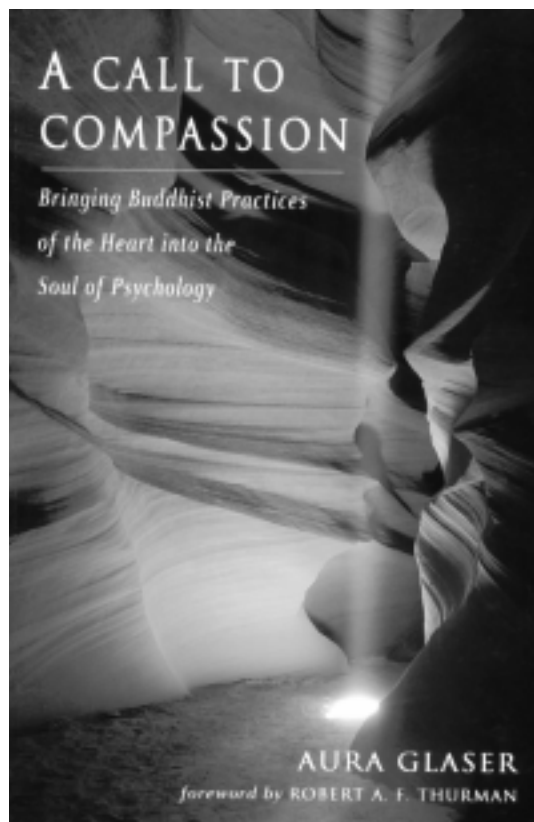


A Call To Compassion ~ Bringing Buddhist Practices of the Heart into the Soul of Psychology

An Excerpt from the New Book by Local Author Aura Glaser, Co-founder of Jewel Heart Tibetan Buddhist Center

(Editor's Note: What follows are two excerpts from a newly published book by transpersonal psychologist and Tibetan Buddhist teacher Aura Glaser – we have excerpted the Introduction, and a sub-chapter on the Shadow. The book is a beautifully written interweaving of depth psychology and Tibetan Buddhism. It is also a highly original and evocative exploration of the importance of bringing the Buddhist practice of compassion into Western psychology. Aura Glaser is a co-founder of Jewel Heart, the Ann Arbor-based Tibetan Buddhist organization. Glaser was also the original owner of Crazy Wisdom Bookstore, from 1982 to 1989. We are delighted to be able to publish these excerpts from Aura's book in The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal.)



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Introduction

This book is about bringing heart into the soul of psychology. It is about connecting a psychology of soul with a psychology of compassion. Though much of psychology circles the vale of compassion, nowhere does it make compassion central to the foundation, process, or goal of psychological health and wholeness. Nowhere is compassion the principal context and focus of psychological work. On the contrary, the paradigm of scientific objectivism influenced the field, from its earliest beginnings, to adopt a stance of *dis*-passion. It is time to call compassion out of the shadows and margins and bring it openly into view.

Whereas dispassion suggests a detachment born of distance, compassion suggests a caring born of closeness. Compassion moves toward; dispassion moves away. Compassion connects, dispassion divides. Dispassion separates the observer from the observed; it separates self from world, me from you, and us from them. Such distancing fragments feeling, leaving us capable of only superficial emotion and nostalgic sentimentality. Rather than promoting ease or freedom, this attitude breeds estrangement from others and self-alienation, which, not surprisingly, are among the most pressing problems of our times. Looking to the roots of the word “alien,” we find it is related to the word “unlinked.” Unlinked and disconnected, we experience ourselves as spectators living on the sidelines of our world.

Our modern perspective as bystanders and spectators has become so extreme that we are

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now “a species whose condition of distance can allow it to contemplate the nuclear destruction of possibly the entire planet, and in the face of that possibility still continue to program the planet for destruction.” In the process of distancing, we have plundered and “de-souled” our bodies, our planet, and, in fact, the entire cosmos. It is no wonder we despair.

The origins of psychology reveal a precarious allegiance to dispassion and distance. Caught in the paradigm of their day, early psychoanalysts embraced the widespread belief that intellectual rigor and critical insight depend upon a singularly objective, dispassionate eye. From this perspective, inter-subjectivity and relatedness defile the pure methods of science. If psychology was to be accepted as a science, it had to promote a dispassionate perspective. Ironically, the field of psychology is itself a response to a *dis*-passionate distancing that had actually severed the connection between the most intimate of companions—mind and body. The mind, in its growing orbits, took flight away from matter. And the body, condemned to silence, retreated to the shadows.

The abandoned body stepped out of the shadows and entered Freud's consulting room, expressing itself in the symptoms of hysteria. The hysteric's symptoms mystified. Hysteria resisted comfortable reduction, because it could not be explained as either a physical malady or a psychiatric illness. Its disquieting emergence directly challenged the prevailing belief that body and mind were fundamentally unrelated. The symptoms of hysteria

were neither strictly physical nor exclusively mental, leaving open a third possibility: that body and mind were not separate, independently existing phenomena. Body as machine could never be symbolically symptomatic. Nor could mind separated from matter produce physical symptoms. The symptoms of hysteria were a symbolic communication, “the word ‘symbol’ being taken to mean the best possible expression for a complex fact not yet clearly apprehended by consciousness.” To Freud's credit, he had both the curiosity and the daring to explore the symbolic terrain of body-mind language.

Through probing the subtle inter-relationship of body and mind in symptom and dream, psychology began to emerge from the shadow of the dispassionate mind, but without actually escaping its iron grip. We find the imprint of a dispassionate science throughout the literature, dating back to Freud's injunction that psychoanalysts model themselves upon surgeons, putting aside all feelings, “even human sympathy.” Unfortunately, such one-sidedness is just that—one-sided. Dispassion without compassion is like light without warmth, or head without heart. It simply is not enough.

We need to talk about compassion and teach about compassion, because compassion awakens the heart. Compassion educates the heart. The word “education” derives from the

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Latin *educare*, meaning “to draw forth.” No one's education can truly be considered complete without this drawing-forth of the heart, yet well-educated people throughout the world, including those in psychology, receive diplomas, credentials, and all manner of recognition, without ever having studied the value of compassion or how to develop it. Psychologists are expected to diagnose and treat psychic pain, but they are not expected to study or talk about compassion. In a field devoted to working with the suffering soul, we have left the practice of compassion to the winds of chance. To say it may sound unbelievable and absurd, but it is true.

The insight conveyed in consulting rooms, classrooms, books, and training programs needs to draw on a great deal more than a keen intellect, or a wealth of stimulating theories and concepts. It must also call forth the intelligence of the heart. Compassion is key to this intelligence, yet the cultivation of compassion is rarely discussed, and then only timidly and fleetingly at best. As Lewin aptly notes, “Our silence about compassion is a silence about the central possibilities of our own natures.” This silence is not golden.

Compassion must be central to a therapy that calls itself a “talking cure,” because communication is, at the core, a matter of heart. Paracelsus spoke to this hundreds of years ago when he remarked, “Speech is not of the tongue, but of the heart. The tongue is merely the instrument with which one speaks.” Moreover, the heart is the seat of the soul. Depth psychology has grown out of a deep reverence for soul and its searchings, its making, and musings. Soul has persistently and unfailingly goaded analysts to explore the improbable, the unknown, the perplexing, and the difficult. Yet, as I look around, I find soul still searching for its heart, not unlike Psyche searching and longing for Eros. We must bring heart into the soul of psychology.

My own call to compassion grew, as such things often do, in the ground of my personal experience. Born into a family of Holocaust survivors, I experienced the Holocaust as a silent witness to the redemptive miracle of existence. Always hovering in the atmosphere of our home, it seemed for a long time that silence was the only space vast enough to contain the Holocaust's inconceivable landscape of grief and horror. Language faltered in the face of speaking the unspeakable. But no words were needed for me to see the scars of indifference, cruelty, and brutality, and of efficiency wedded to loathing. The numbers tattooed on the arms of those close to me, the screams in the nights, were among innumerable, ever-present reminders.

Questions concerning human nature were never far from my mind. As a child, I wondered about evil—my own and others' capacity for it. I couldn't find a sure and impassable line separating myself from others who were capable of perpetrating or passively permitting such atrocity. These perpetrators of genocide were not an alien species; they were all human beings like me. No matter how much I wished it to be otherwise, I could see that this was true. This awareness had a powerful impact on me, intensifying my desire to understand what it means to be human.

Simultaneously present was the miracle of love in the ruins; love that was stronger than every cruelty; love that bears all things and will not die. My great-uncle Joe often came to visit when I was very young. On one such occasion, as I sat on his lap, he asked me to name the people I loved the most. After pausing for a moment, I responded with confidence, “I love everyone!” My father was present for the exchange, and anyone who has heard him telling stories over the years has certainly heard him recount this one. The light in his eyes, the sparkle of delight as he recalled this moment, seemed to reflect his delight at the sovereignty of love. Perhaps more powerful than the miracle of his own survival was witnessing his child seeing the world with eyes of love.

The trajectory of my life has been deeply influenced by an early and intimate awareness of the pain and suffering we humans can both endure and inflict. Equally influential has been my experience that human beings, even when stripped of all we consider human dignity, even in the wake of a world mercilessly destroyed and left in wreaths of smoke, even when deeply wounded and scarred, can access the greater power of love.



Transpersonal psychologist and Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Aura Glaser

In the teachings of Buddhism I found a path resonant with heart and soul, and an invitation to explore deeply the power of the human heart and the evolutionary possibilities of human life. The practices of the heart introduced in this book come from the soul of this timeless tradition.

Exiling, Retrieving, and Redeeming the Shadow

Shadows, shadows everywhere! The shadow of evil empires and holy war, the shadow of bright desire, the shadow of lost love and of love that is found, the long shadow of ashes in my mother's eyes and in my father's voice when he speaks wistfully of his childhood village, the shadow of my womb both empty and full, the shadow of the righteous condemning others in the

name of God, the shadow of dogma and vengeance disguised as justice, the shadow of angry gangs on the streets, and of prisons bursting with young lives. The shadow of the reasonable mind in the tangled and tortured body of the hysteric. The shadow, in this moment, on the wall behind me. The shadows dancing and playing beneath my fingers as I type away on my keyboard.

Left in the margins, on the periphery, and in the deeps, the shadow grows, gathers, rests beneath, below, behind, under, within, circling round events, thoughts, words, and flesh. The shadow, if sent off to a netherworld to brood, ruthlessly severs bone from blood. This is why, against all odds, Jung believed humanity was ethically bound to unite the seemingly irreconcilable opposites of light and shadow, bringing them face to face and finding on the distant shore of their worlds the inseparability from which they arise. Such an undertaking is difficult but necessary, because only a journey into our own darkness can bring the spark of consciousness to the lowest, most unredeemed elements of nature and deliver the uncommon jewel of life—wholeness.

It is easy to understand the lure of freedom from the burden of shadow and the reluctance to enter a realm we imagine so distant that it leaves only the faintest trace of scent and print. It took a Herculean effort to escape the dominance of unconscious life, to slay the dragon and abandon the weighty body with its endless gravity. This evolutionary achievement, according to Jung, is celebrated metaphorically in the many myths of the hero's journey that have fascinated humanity. Throughout Western history, the shadow has been imagined as monster, dragon, alien, Frankenstein, or Gorgon. The hero bravely battles with the monster of collective slumber, finally killing it—free at last—free from the tenacious claw of unconscious life, and soaring victoriously to spirit.

In Jung's three stages of individuation, the first, *unio mentalis*, is just this. The soul leaves the body and joins spirit, freeing itself from the yoke of earthly desire and longing. As a unity, soul and spirit rise above the torpor and turpitude of flesh, bringing forth the accomplishments of culture. This stage became confused with the goal itself, and a brazen enthusiasm for mastering nature and separating light from dark and heaven from earth has become the lauded hallmark of modern society. There lurks a menacing hubris in this declaration of victory over matter. It invites collision with the tooth and fang of the unconscious, making us unwitting slaves of its darkness. When the abandoned body of the hysteric entered Freud's consulting room, sending out the clarion call that constellated the entire field of depth psychology, this shadow made its presence known.

Assimilation of the shadow connects us to our animal body; it connects us to the paws and claws, the long tail and wild, soft, flesh of animal life; it connects us to the archaic in our nature; it connects us to the rejected and split-off parts of ourselves. Tending the shadow brings us into contact with pain and darkness; it is like tending a festering, neurotic sore. This festering sore is not only present in the obvious suffering and difficul-

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ties of life. As Jung suggests, "even our purest and holiest beliefs can be traced to the crudest origins." And despite our reluctance to acknowledge this, Jung is unequivocal that transformation is not possible unless we become much better acquainted with our own nature.

Jung's psychology centered on his conviction that an innate impulse to wholeness exists as an *a priori* human birthright, and that fulfilling this call is "the goal of life." The question for Jung was not, as it was for Freud, whether or not the impulse to wholeness exists, but whether or not one consciously activates it. The experience of wholeness is the equivalent of becoming oneself. Individuation, or wholeness, comes about by means of integrating conscious and unconscious processes, beginning with the shadow. Incorporating the shadow establishes a dynamic, magnetic, gravitational, erotic field—an ensouled body.

The Sufis tell of a man who was so virtuous that the angels offered him the gift of miracles.

They offered him the gift of healing hands, the ability to read minds, the gift of flight, and many others. He refused them all. Finally, they insisted that he choose, or they would choose for him. "Very well," he replied. "I ask that I may be able to do great good in the world without myself or anyone else knowing it." The angels granted this request by deciding that every time the saint's shadow was cast behind him, it would have the power to heal illness, to comfort the inconsolable, and to bring joy in place of sorrow. Wherever he walked, his shadow caused dried rivers to flow, withered plants to flower, and brought gladness to the hearts of men, women, and children. The saint simply went about his life, and all this happened in his wake. After a time, his name was forgotten, and he was simply called the "Holy Shadow."

Although our conscious, reasonable minds are convinced nothing of value can possibly be found in the dung heap of our darkness, we need only recall the name of Ploutos, or Pluto, Lord of the Underworld and giver of wealth and bounty, to recall the fruitful nature of this darkness we fear. To retrieve the shadow is to retrieve our own treasury. The journey of individuation necessitates meeting the black shadow we carry, the *sol niger* of the alchemists, the inferior and hidden parts of the personality, the weak underbelly of our strength.

This process is so difficult, "it verges on the impossible." The shadow is "dangerous, disorderly, and forever in hiding, as if the light of consciousness would steal its very life." But this difficulty and danger must not stop us, for, unless we mine the silver of the unconscious, "the end remains as dark as the beginning." Life will be lived, but its essence will remain untapped, its fullness denied. Conversely, if we consciously embark on a journey to wholeness, willingly meeting the shadow, "so much darkness comes to light that the personality is permeated with light, and consciousness necessarily gains in scope and insight." The opus of individuation ends with the Self—a symbol of wholeness "that

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resolves all opposition and puts an end to conflict, or at least draws its sting." The *lapis*, or Philosopher's Stone, the once despised and reviled symbol of the Self, transforms into that which is valued above all else. So it is with the shadow and its illumination.

I find it compelling and instructive that Jung also used the image of the orphan to symbolize the wholeness he envisioned. The figure holding out the promise of wholeness is a denizen of margins and shadows. The Indo-European root of the word orphan, *orbh*, means to separate, to pull asunder. The image of the orphan reminds us that separation from comfortable and familiar ground takes us through the heart of darkness to the heart of wholeness. The one who is homeless and alone is, paradoxically, the one who guides us home.

The orphan lives in the uncharted wilderness of world and cosmos, embracing it as bride or groom. Cutting the navel string, not physically or literally, but imaginatively and psychologically, is the necessary condition that allows the orphan to commune with all of existence. Not bound by the familiar and limiting identification of tribe, nation, race, or religion, the orphan, in belonging to no one, belongs to all of life. Being nobody, the orphan is everybody.

The image of the orphan is timeless; it evokes the uniqueness and differentiation from collective values that characterize individuation. Resonating deeply within the collective, the orphan stirs in each one of us and reminds us that the cornerstone of our uniqueness is discovered in the shadow of our abandoned and rejected selves.

The projection of our individual shadow accelerates the already rampant spread of the collective shadow that we hear shouting from every corner newsstand and every evening telecast. This untethered, collective shadow is like a radio broadcast hailing the myrmidons of darkness. It perverts our systems of justice; it creates weapons of mass destruction; it fuels terrorism; it destroys rainforests and wipes out wilderness and wildlife; it steals from the poor and gives to the rich; it oppresses women and despises the "other"; it silences the voices of freedom; it shamelessly poisons our air, our food, and our water, bringing our planet and all its creatures to the brink of a great yawning abyss. The dangers of this split-off collective shadow are immense, and yet the opportunity for transformation is equally great. Jung commented on the razor's edge we walk: "In one sense this is a catastrophe and a retrogression without parallel, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that such an experience also has its positive aspects and might become the seed of a nobler culture in a regenerated age."

As we turn to face the shadow, it pulls us like an irresistible force field into its forbidding depths. It confronts us with our self-deceptions, our rationalizations and lies, and the countless ways we sacrifice others to satisfy our narrow selfish aims. Such realizations make us wince. We feel like jumping out of our skins and destroying this dark twin, this evidence of our horribly imperfect selves. But the shadow cannot be destroyed, and our efforts to do so only feed its dark belly. We come upon the perplexing and paradoxical truth that the transformation we seek can only come about through awareness and openness, and that "condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses."

Facing ourselves, as daunting a task as it may be, is only the beginning. We cannot stop there, because the shadow asks far more of us. It asks for a love that is strong enough to bear our every darkness.

There is no other way. Can we extend ourselves to the broken, the wounded, and the weak parts of ourselves? Can we enter the ruin and rubble, the perversions and holy horrors of our lives? Can we find love and compassion for our own sickness and weakness? Love and compassion are the weapons of the post-heroic revolution. There was a time for slaying the dragon, and we did. Now, we must use the gift of consciousness and place our feet in the serpent's mouth. The shadow, like the unconscious itself, is more than a cauldron of darkness; it is also a beacon pointing toward greater light. It is both *prima materia* and *lapis*. The shadow is both the awful monster seeking redemption, and the suffering redeemer leading us on our way.

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