

Jerry Colonna: Hi, roshi. It's so wonderful to see you again. Thank you for coming on the show and thank you for joining us and talking. Before we get started, could you just take a moment and introduce yourself?

Joan Halifax: Thank you, Jerry. I'm really happy to be here. My name is Joan Halifax and I'm the abbot of Upaya Zen Center and a person who's done a lot in the field of engaged Buddhism. Also, in my early years I was an anthropologist, so I had an opportunity to look at culture and society from a very unusual perspective. My life really turned when I encountered Buddhism, because I realized that there is a possibility of bringing together a contemplative life with a life that's socially engaged and socially responsible.

Jerry Colonna: I really resonate with that. Roshi, even though we've not been in retreat together often, I do consider you one of my deep teachers and, really, a bit of a hero. In part, because I so appreciate the way you join ... In Shambhala Buddhism, my root lineage, we talk about joining heaven and earth and I see you joining heaven and earth. I see you joining the aspirational piece and the on the ground reality of our daily lives. It really is an inspiration.

Joan Halifax: Thank you.

Jerry Colonna: I watched you from afar do everything from around this incredible Zen center outside of Santa Fe, this gorgeous location to land in Nepal and help just people who are ... Because I do work in Tibet, I can relate to this ... people who, for me, suffer at the one hand this sense of extreme poverty and on the other hand have this incredible gift of preserving and holding dharma in their daily lives. There is this incredible experience of encountering people who just live with an awareness that's vivid and real in the mountains, in poverty. Thank you for doing that work as well.

Joan Halifax: I feel that the opportunity to serve in the Himalayas is such a paradox because it's materially very simple but it's very truly so rich. The people are so resilient. I often pull the jackets of my clinicians and the people who are supportive in the clinics and I say, "You know, this is the end of whining." With people like this who they have lived so close to the bone of life, and yet the sense of complaint, entitlement, privilege, whining, all that's gone. It's just this being right there in the present moment. I'm glad you have a good sense of that, too, Jerry.

Jerry Colonna: What comes to mind is a quick little story. I'll tell about the first time I visited Tibet. That was in 2010 after an earthquake in the region known as Yushu. The group that I worked with and I had spent the summer raising money to bring earthquake relief supplies. We drove from Chengdu into Yushu, which was no mean feat, especially-

Joan Halifax: I know.

Jerry Colonna: It's the back roads of the back roads of the back roads. We pulled into this city which had 80, 85% of the buildings had been flattened and destroyed. We began giving out tents and blankets and water. It was fairly well-organized so that we were doing good work. Eventually, we went out and we were finding people in various locations. I remember encountering this man ... This is five months after the earthquake ... who had a compound fracture that had not been treated. The bone was still out. He began crying and he was so grateful for us showing up with food and water and blankets and things. He had taken in a nun who's blind and mute and he was caring for her. He referred to her as his daughter but as it turned out, of course, she wasn't his daughter. Of course, she was his daughter.

At one point he was crying in Tibetan and I turned to one of the people we're traveling with and I asked, "What is he saying?" He said he was telling the story about how his life the morning of the earthquake was circumambulating the stupa when the stupa collapsed and killed her. He was crying and he said, he said that he wished that if another earthquake would happen, it would happen to him and to this group because they had already experienced suffering and he wouldn't want anyone else to experience the suffering that they had gone through.

Yeah. I mean, I don't want to give in to the impulse that a lot of us in the west have to unknowable, beyond humanity certain people, and place them on some sort of unreal, superhuman pedestal. When you said no whining, when you said resiliency, it's like, "Oh, right."

Joan Halifax: Yeah.

Jerry Colonna: Right? That is a powerful, powerful expression of compassion.

Joan Halifax: It's so inspiring; these humble people become role models for us. It puts our lives in perspective. I think it also, as you say, it really is like the good wind on the fire of our aspirations. I like to stand in that good wind.

Jerry Colonna: Well said. Well said. Thank you for this. I'll be honest, I was inspired to talk with you after we both spoke at the Mindful Leadership Summit about a year ago, maybe just over a year ago. I'd heard you give a talk on the application of a model you called G.R.A.C.E., which is an acronym which we'll get to in a second and the notion of compassion and leadership. I know a little bit about the history of G.R.A.C.E. and I know that one of the things that you have cared deeply about is caring for those who are caring for others whether it's an end of life practitioners or healthcare workers or those showing up in the mountains of Nepal to help after an earthquake. Maybe it would be helpful to talk a little bit about this G.R.A.C.E. model and then we could shift into just a

broader leadership around it.

Joan Halifax:

I think that my own work with clinicians in various settings, the end of life care setting, but also in Nepal and then having so many clinicians coming to Upaya Zen Center for our trainings, also working in clinical context since 1970 and being aware that it's one thing to be a patient and to have the resources or not to be able to deal with whatever is arising in the experience of illness, but it's another to be the clinician leader, if you will. Because I see clinicians are leaders in their way. Leaders are clinicians in their way. They are there to heal organizations, keep them healthy, and to create a community, which I believe clinicians also are responsible for doing.

I began to move out of direct work with dying people, I continue it but not to the degree that I did in the past, and to really concentrate my work on training clinicians. That training has, interestingly enough, expanded out of just a few other palliative care to all disciplines in medicine. What I saw so clearly, Jerry, in the lives of clinicians is that clinicians suffer a great deal. They experience moral suffering. They experience empathic distress. Often, they suffer from pathological altruism, altruism that is not healthy; that they're always power dynamics in the patient-clinician relationship, and they're often working in institutions that are rather toxic.

I wanted to look at why there was such a deficit in compassion in medicine. I would say the same is true in terms of leadership as well. There are so many things going for compassion, but I realized that people don't really understand what compassion is. It's become religiously associated, if you will, or associated with religion. It seems a rather murky concept. What I did, Jerry, was I was very fortunate to have been appointed as a distinguished visiting scholar to Library of Congress where I was free of administrative and teaching responsibilities and I had a chance to really look at compassion deeply to see what was compassion composed of. What is compassion?

In the months of sitting in the Jefferson Library or the Jefferson Building at the Library of Congress in my office there, I began to unpack the valences of compassion and realized one afternoon that compassion is actually composed of non-compassion elements. Then it was difficult to actually train people in compassion as a kind of lump to be compassionate. Yet, if we were going to be effective in training people in compassion, whether it was a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, a parent or a politician, that we really had to work on the inner structure of compassion.

The first thing I did was to develop a heuristic map of compassion which laid out these non-compassionate elements which are all elements that are familiar to all of us, and in which we can train. Then I began to see that compassion is actually a complex dynamic system where compassion is the

emergent process when a number of factors combined in a particular way. Compassion then began to take on real life for me. That was the first thing that I did. I published this in a medical journal and then it's been inspired other models of compassion that have come out of it like the work of Tania Singer and so on, and this particular perspective of compassion in Berlin for a small gathering of top row scientists on compassion a number of years ago. People really, they got it.

I thought, out of this map, we actually need to have an application. We need a kind of instrument, if you will, something that can be in the back pocket of the politician or a physician, a nurse or a parent that will be the means, the skillful means for people to actualize this quality. It was the G.R.A.C.E. process that you heard about in D.C. which came out of my deliberations, realizing you need to have an acronym or a mnemonic, you have to have something that is non-religious, but actually, secretly, it has very deep roots in Buddhist psychology and philosophy. I think that is very accessible to anyone whether you're a kid or an adult, whether you're a highly educated person or a person who are Nepalese that some of the people that we work with have no education, but they immediately got G.R.A.C.E..

That process is called G.R.A.C.E. and there are very specific processes that we go through in order to cultivate compassion in the direct encounter with someone who's suffering.

Jerry Colonna: G.R.A.C.E., if I understand this right, so the trajectory went from an inquiry into compassion, then understanding of compassion as really a complex process that consist of multiple parts, and that for a model of cultivation and training, you developed this notion of G.R.A.C.E., which again is an acronym, a lovely one because it means grace. I'm going to jump in and describe the acronym. G is for gathering attention. R is for recalling the intention. A is attunement to self and other. C is considering in order to open to insight and to discern, to use the power to discern. Finally, E, ethically engaging and enacting and then ending the interaction.

Joan Halifax: Yay.

Jerry Colonna: Yay.

Joan Halifax: Thank you.

Jerry Colonna: I'll be honest in that I'm reading from my notes. If we can talk a little bit about each of those steps and then really move into the application into our daily lives, because I know that this was, in effect, an exploration of compassion and really in response to, say, the burnout and the challenges to resiliency. There's that word again, that you're experiencing with clinical practitioners, but also I

imagine first responders, I imagine anybody who's encountering the world in its suffering, if you will. What do we mean by gathering attention?

Joan Halifax:

The very foundation of everything that we experience when we're in our own subjectivity or in our inter-subjectivity that is relating to others is attention. The cultivation of attentional balance that is being able to perceive in a way that allows us to perceive clearly, to have attention that's stable, to have a quality of attention where there's high resolution or vividness, and to actually be able to sustain our attention for more than a moment. Of course, our attention has been so co-opted by our digital devices by the corporate world in a certain way, through marketing, advertising, by some industries of green, but having our attention ungrounded has a number of influences on us.

One is that we are more easily influenced, that we don't really stand in a quality, of quality that is characterized by stability so that the media can influence how we think and also how we feel. Attentional balance is really critical, Jerry, in terms of being the foundation where we're able as leaders or clinicians or parents or lawyers to be fully present and to have the ability to discern clearly what is happening in the present moment. That capacity, if we are able to see clearly what's happening in the present moment and we're not grounded but we are upregulated and our attention becomes divided or dispersed or distracted, there's no possibility that we can actualize compassion, no reason for that balance.

Attention is really a critical feature in the experience of compassion. I asked myself, Jerry, "Can someone be compassionate and not be attentionally balanced?" Clearly, they cannot.

Jerry Colonna:

When I first heard you speak of this and then subsequently when I read more about your writings about it, it also strikes me that, in a sense, the call to not pay attention is actually not nearly a function of external forces working on us, but also a function of internal forces saying, "I don't want to look. I want to look away, because if I look, then I'm going to experience pain." One of the first things that we worked with ... I do these multi-day immersive four-day, we call them boot camps. The joke is people come for four days of crying with Jerry. One of the first things I ask people to do is to actually answer a simple question, "How are you?" Just bringing their attention to how they actually are feeling in the moment is oftentimes enough to open up a heart because it's so close and so tight. Does this resonate with you?

Joan Halifax:

Totally. I think this is so important, Jerry. One of the ways of describing this is presence or coming alongside or bearing witness. Yeah, there you are. This is critical in terms of how we are able to bring ourselves into deep relationship into connection with others. Again, because of our devices, the experience of intimacy is deeply interrupted because we'd allocated our attention to

something that is outside of us.

Jerry Colonna: Right. I think sometimes, thinking about the entrepreneurs that we work with, another part of the motivation for allocating attention to outside themselves is they've also allocated a sense of self-worth outside themselves. I'm going to pay attention to "how my company is doing" as a means of assuaging a voice inside of my head that says I'm worthless, that says that I have no meaning and purpose. I wonder, too, if that ... You spoke about pathological altruism, which I love that term. I'll be honest, I often use the term pathological optimism to describe entrepreneurs. I think the pathology lay, in some ways, in the externalization of self-worth and self-purpose and self-meaning. By not paying attention, we lose this basic means of being able to find an almost endless resource of attention and empathy and resiliency. There's that word again.

Joan Halifax: Yeah, when you allocate your attention or give your attention to one thing and rest in that one thing, the sense of ease, also of rest and of power, because energy is liberated because we're not distracted. We're not trying to "multitask" or not having to reset our brains all the time, each thing that we are bringing our attention to one after another, which is very exhausting. It takes a lot of glucose to attempt to "multitask" or to keep changing screens all the time.

As you say, we want to see what's happening in the present moment, and we also ... If you're in a position of responsibility which leaders are and clinicians are, really all of us are, we want to be able to see accurately what is real before you. Clearly, the truth of impermanence, but to recognize suffering.

Jerry Colonna: And to recognize, I imagine, where is the appropriate application of my energy in this moment.

Joan Halifax: Right. It's at the point where one doesn't all together have to ask that question because you're in a kind of seamless interface. The Buddha called it an appropriate response. An appropriate response arises or it's a upaya, that a skillful means that arises but not ... It arises like if a mother hears the baby cry, she picks up the baby.

Jerry Colonna: It arises almost organically, not out of a force of intellectual will.

Joan Halifax: Thich Nhat Hanh says it beautifully. He says, "The right hand, if the left hand is injured, takes care of the left hand." Just naturally. I think that's important.

Jerry Colonna: I'm going to ask a fundamental, and I think in some ways elemental, question, because I think there's been a presumption you and I have had, which is that compassion in leadership is a good thing. So many of my clients, so many of

the folks who listen to this podcast live in a world, broadly speaking, called the tech industry, but it's really made up of lots and lots and lots of tiny little villages, right, but broadly speaking. There is this presumption, there's mythology around leadership needing to be forceful and hard and in some ways aggressive. Oftentimes, when I or another coach encounter someone who's really ... They'll comment to one of our offices either virtually or in reality, and no joke, they will sit down and be heard for the first time and break down into tears.

As someone once said in one of our boot camps, "Jerry, this thing that you're asking us to do, which is to be present in our lives, to be authentic in our leadership, to allow the brokenness of who we are to be a source of our leadership, a source of our intention, not something that's in opposition, this thing that you're asking us to do goes against the very playbook that we all carry around in our minds." I wonder if we could go at that question, which is, so what's the point of being compassionate?

Joan Halifax:

I think one of the things that we don't realize about compassion is that it is one side of a coin that we know the other side is wisdom. What's the point of being a wise leader? Everything. We're not talking about empathy here. We're speaking about compassion. We're not talking about some kind of mental quality that's fuzzy. Compassion has its ferocious aspects. Compassion has its kind aspect. Mostly, compassion is wise. That we are able to stand in a quality of attention that is characterized by fearlessness, where we are grounded in a powerful, ethical ways where we have moral sensitivity and we are coming out of the place of strong moral character, and where discernment is present.

We have this capacity of self-knowledge, knowledge of what is real and what isn't real. We can down-regulate or up-regulate our emotions when we feel morally threatened. We can do perspective taking. We can distinguish between self and other. We are operating out of a moral imperative. I mean all of these relates to, if you will, the inner structure of compassion. We recognize the truth of impermanence. That's part of the wisdom function of compassion. A leader who doesn't have this perspective is working at a major disadvantage.

Jerry Colonna:

I think the point you're making is a really important and powerful point. Many of the points you're making are important and powerful. One really goes at this myth that compassion-based, compassion-infused leadership is somehow less strong, or to use our terminology, less fierce and the teaching I often give is be fierce, not ferocious. The fierceness comes in the willingness to discern or to actually going on within myself, within the organization, within the world, and to cut through my desire to look away, my desire to distract, with courage in the face of fear to stand.

Joan Halifax:

Exactly. You got it. I think most people who are in positions of responsibility

have this either actualizing their lives or very close to the surface. The kind of work that you're doing and the kind of work I endeavor to do is to really water those seeds.

Jerry Colonna: I want to go back to this notion of pathological altruism. In my observation, the entrepreneurial leadership version of that relates back to align from Shakespeare which I love to quote, Shakespeare's Henry V, where Prince Henry, Prince Hallucination has assumed the throne of England and he's really coming to grips with the burden of leadership. He says upon the king, "Let us our lives, our souls, our debts lay upon the king. O hard condition. We must bear all." I love that image because as he has so often did, Shakespeare captures the feeling and yet there's a myth associated with that. The myth is it is not, even though it feels like it's upon the king, it lays upon our shoulders. That's the myth. In my experience, stepping into fierce compassion with grace allows you to share the collective burden of leadership to create-

Joan Halifax: I think-

Jerry Colonna: Go ahead.

Joan Halifax: No, I was just thinking of Robert Greenleaf's work in Servant Leadership.

Jerry Colonna: That's right.

Joan Halifax: I think he made a tremendously important point here is pathological altruism, I think, is a very fascinating term which I hadn't thought of exactly in this perspective, but there is something that is so ego-based in a pathological altruist. When you disempower the people around you as a leader or you don't enter into a process of mutuality between clinician and patient as a clinician and shared the process of healing or leadership or shared responsibility, it's like coming out of the sense of your own impoverishment and your distrust. Then it becomes pathological altruism.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah, and-

Joan Halifax: [Crosstalk 00:34:31] rest of the point.

Jerry Colonna: I think that it ... if we go back to the why compassion, there's a natural obvious answer which is, "Well then, we create more human environments, human environment for the other." I think that there's a danger if we just hold on to that notion because then it actually feeds the pathological altruism. What ends up happening is the leader subtly, neurotically takes on responsibility for the internal well-regulation of all the people within the organization, thereby undermining their own sense of resiliency and increasing their likelihood to create damage within the organization.

Joan Halifax: I totally agree. Jerry, I'm writing a book right now called *At the Edge*, which is an exploration of a series of states which I recognize or I call them edge states, and the first is pathological altruism. This altruism actually which has its toxic aspect in pathological altruism, and then burnout, another edge state. All these edge states are interrelated and it includes empathic distress because people who are not well-regulated and over-identify with people who are suffering become overwhelmed or moral suffering when there have been transgressions of our own sense of justice and goodness, or power imbalances particularly around bullying and power imbalances in organizational context. The last one, I have a big piece on structural violence, how organizations themselves actually cause harm in many different ways.

I think that this is a really ... This area, what I felt, Jerry, at the time of doing this work was that I wanted to look at what made compassion difficult for people, so the edge states are definitely obstacles, and then, also, what could actually transform these edge states. What I've discovered, of course, in looking at these edge states, at pathological altruism and so forth was that, clearly, compassion is the path out of these states that are fraught.

Jerry Colonna: It's so ironic and there is a teaching in Vajrayana Buddhism which is turn all medicines into poisons, poisons into medicine. In a sense, there's this relationship here where the other reason, if you will, to lead from a compassionate, authentic, open, present, graceful heart is our own resiliency. It strengthens our own resiliency. We care for the other in a way where it feeds not only them but it feeds us, and feeding them feeds us and feeding us feeds them. It becomes this counterbalancing force to a neurotic tendency which we often celebrate as selflessness.

Joan Halifax: Exactly. Actually, I like what Norman Fischer says. He says, "Enlightenment is fundamentally being unselfish." This is another way of saying what you've said. I think it's very difficult. It's like climbing up a mountain of needles in our society where the self is so valued and where we're ... In Zen, we call it the plague of identities, who we are, what we've done, what we're paid, how busy we are. All of this kind of identities will box us in. It also, when we are in relationship with others, there's the same experience. We are moving in that relationship in terms of categories, not in terms of this unfiltered, unmediated relationship with an employee or with a lover or with the patient. How do we drop down into a place where we're really coming from our basic goodness and meeting the basic goodness of others?

I learned so much, Jerry. I've worked as a volunteer in the penitentiary of New Mexico with men who were all of whom are murderers. The first thing is like, "The first filter is A) men who is a murderer." Or it's like ... That immediately separates you from the person sitting across you. It's not to see the truth of

"Oh, that person might not be very safe for me." You got to be able to see that clearly, but you also have to look more deeply into the situation.

Jerry Colonna: I think one of the challenges is if I look more deeply into that situation, then I will encounter the potential murderer within me.

Joan Halifax: Of course.

Jerry Colonna: That is not something I want to acknowledge. I don't want to acknowledge my rage or my anger or my capacity to do harm in the world. It was this much psychoanalysis that it is Buddhism that help me understand that coming into encounter with that aspect of me allows me to defang, if you will, that piece of it and allows me to live into the aspiration of leadership that I want to have.

Joan Halifax: I'm reminded of something I saw right after the Rodney King incident in Los Angeles. I was at a retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh, Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh and he sat up on the stage, this quiet Vietnamese man, and he said, "You know, I did not want to come to your country after I saw the video of Rodney King being beaten up by policemen, but then I realized I was not only Rodney King, I was those policemen as well." The room just ... You could hear the room gasp.

This is exactly what you're saying, Jerry. We not only recognize the truth of our own inner aggressors, but that we're not separate from any political figure, any abuser, anyone who's doing harm that at a very deep level, we live in a system that includes everyone in everything. It's not just our inner difficulties, but also we are inter-arm with all beings and things. I think that's one of the functions of compassion is to actually have that discernment, that deep insight into what Thich Nhat Hanh call interbeing.

Jerry Colonna: It feels to me that ... To go back to this core question of why compassion in leadership, if we look at our core sense of intention and purpose, the alleviation of suffering, the teachings don't say the alleviation of only your suffering. The teaching say the alleviation of suffering of all beings, myself included, and that compassion is a means to the alleviation of suffering, leads to environments that are more capable of withstanding and recovering some naturally occurring suffering, which then allows us to then co-create something beautiful in the world, whether it's a new app to distract us or a Zen center in the mountains of New Mexico. It allows us to have that experience of co-creation and interbeingness and community.

Joan Halifax: Yeah. Yeah, I think finding a livelihood which you love and which also serves the world, minimizes harm, maximizes good, is pretty great. I remember, I was friends with one of the executives of Zynga which is this kind of unusual company that produces games that are all designed to stimulate the dopamine

load. That is really interesting. In talking with him, he was one of the founders of Zynga and talking with him, he was very clear at the time that this company was and its product was really designed to produce a kind of addiction. He left the company and started a whole new life based on a completely different set of values and parameters. I think that, like many of the people that I've met in the Silicon Valley world, really amazing people, are endeavoring to actually transform the orientation of that world toward good, whether it's in philanthropy or the production of apps which are about generating positive states of mind. I think about [Meng 00:46:14], for example. I have enjoyed going to Wisdom 2.0 in the past and just meeting people whose aspirations are ... At the very young age, all of a sudden they are incredibly wealthy and it didn't give them what they wanted.

Jerry Colonna: I think it's that visceral experience of waking up and experiencing beyond we that comes in now of, "Is that all there is? I thought this was going to ..." Many people who listen to the podcast know my own story of waking up at around age 38 to the reality of I achieved a certain pinnacle of success and it still hurt. As I've shared with others before, I encountered my first gateway drug of *When Things Fall Apart* by Ani Pema Chodron and cried my way through that book and said, "What have I been carrying in my mind?" Now, 15 years later, my life is completely reoriented where I think about and have conversations like this, maybe in a pathological altruistic pursuit of helping alleviate suffering.

Now, I happen to do it in a form that is socially acceptable to a group of people. "Oh, coach me so that I can be a better leader so that I can have a greater return on investment," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. As my partner colleague likes to say, "What we're really trying to do is just smuggling consciousness here."

Joan Halifax: Right on.

Jerry Colonna: By any means necessary.

Joan Halifax: I think your story is just incredible, Jerry, because it's a real transformation of consciousness. One thing turned you around. On some level, it's reading Ani Pema, but also there is the other thing that turned you around which you read Ani Pema on just the right moment in your life.

Jerry Colonna: That's right. That's right. It was actually my sister, Ann, who gave me this book and said, "You must read this book." She gave me that book. She gave me Parker Palmer's *Let Your Life Speak* and Sharon Salzberg's *Faith*. As I've said to Sharon, that was the most moving book of all books she's ever written. She looked at me and she said, "And that was the most difficult book for me to ever write."

Joan Halifax: Yeah, I can imagine.

Jerry Colonna: Right.

Joan Halifax: Exactly. Jerry, I'm just so grateful to have this time with you. Also, I hope that this very simple intervention that I was fortunate to discover or develop or create, however we want to say it, can be useful in the lives of many people. I want to see compassion everywhere.

Jerry Colonna: Yeah. I can speak for my own life. I can guarantee you that understanding your work, roshi, both with the G.R.A.C.E. model but all of your writings are really applicable. One of the things I adore is the fierce directness of your understanding of the neurology, the sociology, what we would call the hard sciences, and the relating to that. I think it's incredibly powerful. I personally encourage many people to really understand Upaya as a place for exploration in this inner landscape. Thank you for taking the time here. It's really been a gift and a joy. Thank you for the work that you do in the world. Thank you.

Joan Halifax: No, thank you.

Jerry Colonna: Thank you.

Joan Halifax: Just fantastic in encountering you in this way, Jer- ...