

**CRITICAL COMPASSION:  
PROLEGOMENON TO A LIBERATING EDUCATION**

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# AMIR'S FABLE

**There is an old fable which tells that Truth and Falsehood went for  
A swim together, leaving their clothes on shore. Falsehood  
Coming out of the water first, puts on Truth's clothes  
Truth being what it is, absolutely refused to wear  
Falsehood's clothes, thus remained naked.  
Ever since then, Falsehood, appearing  
As Truth, has been accepted as  
Truth, while Truth still  
Awaits to be seen.**

After the four day Congress in Bombay during January, 1986, a small group of participants, mostly Westerners, went on a tour in India. Our first major post-congress press conference took place in New Delhi. Twenty-five Indian journalists were present to listen and query. The journalists were especially interested in our impressions of India as well as our assessments of the Congress.

When I was called upon to speak, I rose and stood before the Indian reporters, trying to marshal my thoughts and tell them something useful and interesting. In a flash, I knew what I had to do. "Ladies and Gentlemen of the Indian Press," I began, " I must do something unusual, for it's the only way I can convey my feelings to you today. At the risk of offending you, I must tell you two of your own ancient and venerable teaching stories. The first expresses a diagnosis of the problem of reconciling Science and Religion as well as Science and the World and the Science of Man. The second story, one often told by Ramana Maharshi, a great sage of 20th century India, intimates a solution to the problem." The Journalists were puzzled, but in the end, appreciated my rendering and use of the story treasures from their culture.

Here is the first story, in a rendering by an Indian sage for Western Psychiatrist Medard Boss ( in A Psychiatrist Discovers India):

**It seems there were ten merchants on their way in order to conduct transactions in another city. They had come to the banks of a broad river. The rains had caused it to rise so much that it had swept away the bridge. nevertheless, their business was urgent. And so the merchants decided to swim across the river. When they reached the other bank, one of them began to count the group. He wanted to make sure that no one had drowned during the crossing. To his horror, however, he always ended up with nine instead of ten, no matter how often he repeated the count. The others too began to count. But no one got a higher figure than nine. A hermit, coming long, delivered them from distress and doubt. He laughed merrily, counted the merchants and found that all ten were there. Only then did they notice that each of them, when making his count, had forgotten to include himself explicitly.**

I had heard the second story some years before while sharing cultural insights and stories with a new friend who had immersed himself in the work of Ramana Maharshi. Over the years, before and after the Congress, I performed the story for many people, including thousands of my students at CSU, Sacramento. In 1991 I prepared a revised version of the 1986 paper for presentation at the California Colloquium of Vermont College held in Montecito, California. I had never put the story into writing before. Performing and improvising was one thing. Written word was another. The task required a lot of effort and ingenuity, but a version emerged which satisfied me and pleased my listeners. Here it is:

**One day a spiritual master and his disciple were walking in the courtyard of the monastery. Deep in silence, they slowly circled a beautiful fishpond gracing the center of the courtyard. The disciple finally broke the silence by asking a question which had obsessed him for many years. In a pleading tone, the disciple asked: 'O**



The original paper began with three quotations. They seem as relevant now as they did when I first included them.

Our language is originally built around the realities of self-attention. That is, human language is meant to be an instrument of a conscious being, a being who is fully and precisely aware of all that takes place within their own psyche. Such self-attention has disappeared from our lives, but the corresponding instrument of language remains. We have no real self-attention, yet the shells of human language remain.

-----Jacob Needleman,  
**The Heart of Philosophy**

In the process of putting so much pressure on language, thought ceases to be satisfied with the support of words; it bursts away from them in order to seek its resolution elsewhere. This 'elsewhere' should not be understood as a transcendent realm, a mysterious metaphysical domain. This 'elsewhere' is 'here' in the immediacy of real life. It's from right here that our thoughts rise up, and it's here that they must come back. But after what travels! Live first, then turn to philosophy, but, in the third place, live again. The man in Plato's cave has to go out and contemplate the light of the sun; then, strengthened by this light, which he keeps in his memory, he has to return to the cave. Verbal philosophy is only a necessary state in this voyage.

-----Rene Daumal, "Une Experience  
Fondamentale," translated by Roger  
Shattuck in the Introduction to  
Daumal's **Mount Analogue**

To know means to be learning or to be teaching; there is no middle way. The human mind enjoys no state of passive grace. yet beyond a certain point teaching becomes a subtle and deceptive undertaking, scarcely to be distinguished from learning. 'Socrates,' Faumal writes, 'never teaches anything. He plays the fool and from time to time tells a legend, assuring us that it's just for his own amusement.' So Daumal, too, with obvious relish, tells us a legend in which we find not doctrine but a sturdy weave of action and reflection, not thoughts only but people thinking.

-----Roger Shattuck in the introduction  
To Daumal's **Mount Analogue**

### **Critical Compassion: Prolegomenon To A Liberating Education**

The World Congress for the Synthesis of Science and Religion manifests our collective desire and hope that we find common ground in our work and our lives in order to promote understanding, peace, and wise guardianship of our planet.

The Congress is also an educational undertaking designed to recognize, enhance, and celebrate the integrating power of human beings and human consciousness in meeting the challenges of the 21st century. The scientists, philosophers, religious leaders, educators and politicians gathered here today are truly beacons of light and liberation in a world where the forces of darkness and ignorance often reign. The congress' very being expresses the heart of true collegiality--the collective desires, hopes, and efforts of individuals who are dedicated to life's most consequential project, that of creating whole, healthy, caring human beings with knowledge, experience, and wisdom equal to the task of improving the quality of life in all cultures.

We have reached a turning point in our evolution as conscious human beings on this planet. Our technologies have allowed us to create civilizations unlike any known in recorded history. But civilization has overreached itself. Life on this planet is at risk, threatened by war, environmental disruption, and social and economic chaos.

Technologies of Outwardness--the tools we employ to comprehend and tame nature are not balanced by technologies of Inwardness--the means we have devised through the millennia to understand, control, and enhance ourselves as conscious and self-conscious human beings. The outer forces by which we command nature are not rooted in the inner capacities we possess to define and express ourselves as free, self-determining, balanced human beings.

Humankind is our synchronization with itself and the world.

Tension, division, and polarization mark our lives. Integrity as organisms, as co-members of the biosphere, as self-conscious co-creators of all life is rapidly disappearing. Loss of integrity means the death of life and the planet at the very worst, and at best, impotence in the face of urgent social, economic, environmental, and educational problems.

The First World Congress for the Synthesis of Science and Religion represents a new image of human liberation -- one that can restore integrity in the human enterprises of knowing, doing, and being in the world. Only a heightened sense of individual and institutional integrity can overcome the false and destructive separation of outwardness and inwardness which is manifest in all our activities.

I want to build upon the images of integrity and liberation which lie at the heart of this momentous gathering of people from around the world.

The image I propose is the of **CRITICAL COMPASSION**. **CRITICAL** evokes the ideas of critical acuity, reason, discipline, focused attention. **COMPASSION** goes to the heart of our sense of feeling together as whole human beings sharing suffering and joy, despair and hope, animosity and love.

Critical detachment allows us to see. Compassionate attachment allows us to feel. Wholeness in the human being demands the presence of both components. "Criticism

without compassion is empty; Compassion without criticism is blind." An old fold aphorism expresses the same relationship, but with further literal and metaphorical depth: "Seeing is believing, but feeling is truth." The individual in whom and the institution in which, criticism and compassion are integrated possess integrity.

Our institutional and individual loyalties often obscure our images of the "other" as well as our images of our totality and commonality as human beings. We tend to "stand over against" those whose values we do not share. And we are disposed to "stand over against" ourselves as totality. In each case, as the Indian story about the 10 merchants tells us, we forget to count ourselves.

**CRITICAL COMPASSION** discloses some of the means for "standing together" rather than "over against." I invite all of you to cultivate images of your human totality.

**CRITICAL COMPASSION** also reveals an image of what it is to be a conscious human being. A conscious human being comes alive in the liberated play of awareness and self-attention. The aware, liberated human being expresses in an heightened and balanced whole all the forces informing our lives and our species: Physical, Sexual, Emotional, Mental, Intuitive, Social, Environmental, Spiritual, and Cosmic. The truly liberated human being, one who makes self-conscious, self-determining choices relative to the totality and wholeness of a situation, is both critical and compassionate.

**CRITICAL COMPASSION** signifies certain crucial attitudes and perspectives. A distinct picture of our humanity and our aspirations begins to emerge from the following disclosures. I invite all to entertain and cultivate these expressions of our humanity:

**FIRST**, a sympathetic understanding of viewpoints, values, and actions other than our own. We have to focus through the fog of our own subjectivity, our biases, our prejudices, and all the conditioned zones of perception. We cannot comprehend another human being until we are acutely aware of ourselves, nor can we understand ourselves unless we appreciate the other.

**SECOND**, an attitude of self-critical attention toward our own viewpoints, values, background, needs, and blindnesses. Our lives are encircled in conditioned zones of behavior, thought, and feeling. To transcend the conditioning we should be prepared to skeptically examine everything in our lives. Nothing is sacred to **CRITICAL COMPASSION**. This does not mean we will give up what we believe and do, but what we believe and do become the result of liberated, eyes-wide-open choices. We become more self-aware and less self-deceptive. We may also begin to see others as they **are** rather than how they appear.

**THIRD**, an "experimental temper" as we act in the world. We should approach each event respectfully and openly. We should not be misled by first or singular appearances, nor should we ignore them. We should not leap to premature

interpretations. It's important to keep awareness open to multiple appearances and interpretations. The phenomena of the universe within us and outside of us are infinitely diverse and varied. We have the capacity to approach and appreciate anything that occurs. If we experiment rather than judge, we will expand the zones of awareness indefinitely.

**FOURTH**, an attitude of respect for the integrity of any person (including ourselves), any idea, or any phenomenon. All points of view are legitimate, at least with respect to the state of consciousness out of which they come and the state of consciousness to which they are addressed. We should not demand anything of anyone what cannot and should not be given. To know what we can and cannot demand of ourselves, another, or any occurrence in the world means we must be sensitive both to what we are and what others may be in any particular moment.

**FIFTH**, an awareness of state of total attention to what we are experiencing of ourselves and of others. This is the principle of attentively. Be alert to all that occurs in awareness at all times and be especially vigilant and mindful regarding contrasts and changes in the content of consciousness. Observe and heed most thoughtfully the point of view you occupy or are as you attend. The eye with which I see the other is the eye which sees me.

**SIXTH**, we should withhold judgments of any kind, particularly ones about ourselves or others. Judgments assault the integrity of another, as well as ourselves. A judgment distorts what is. Judgments never portray another, but always reveal what we are.

**SEVENTH**, we should refrain from making comparisons of any kind, particularly ones regarding ourselves as we grow and change moment by moment, as well as ones regarding another and ourselves. Comparisons are judgments. Comparisons distort, so that we fail to appreciate the integrity of **this** person, **this** moment, **this** event or **this** idea.

**EIGHTH**, we should put aside the **need** to understand anything. This does not mean we put aside understanding, but the **need**. When we **need** to understand anything, the **need** rather than the understanding dominates. when we are openly, attentively aware, understanding comes.

**NINTH**, an attitude of attentively toward the languages we and others use. We should not take our own, or another's words literally, nor should we take them non-literally. Instead, be sensitive to the subtleties of language use in specific situations. At the very least, cultivate a tolerance for ambiguity in persons and words.

**TENTH**, interrogate authority--all authority, especially the authority we claim for ourselves, our beliefs, our lives, our rightness. We have the birthright of self-determining authority and self-determining power. Others are happy to take responsibility for us, that is, take our authority and our power. But only we can claim it. So claim it.

These simple disclosures of our humanity do not begin to exhaust the potentialities we possess. But one other category emerges to claim its place---**LOVE**. Philosophers, inspired by the spirit of Socrates, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Rumi, Krishnamurti, the Dalai Lama and many other sages, are nothing if not lovers. Truth and wisdom are the objects of devotion. **LOVE** of truth animates the scientist, the spiritual seeker, the philosopher, the scholar. **LOVE** is the pathway of unconditional devotion to that which transcends the particularity of the moment. The impetus and momentum of **LOVE** carry us toward the invariant best in the world within and without.

Scientists passionately seek unifying concepts which encompass the animating forces of the quantifiable world. Religious seekers devotedly pursue inclusive visions of the psychical and spiritual forces animating human. The Philosopher interrogates the obvious to reveal the hidden truths by which humans might live. The scholar envisions theories which can truth-tested in practice.

**LOVE** uncompromisingly unifies. It does not allow us to be less than we might be.

A synthesis of **CRITICAL ACUITY, COMPASSIONATE FEELING** and **LOVE** creates the power to synchronize our lives, our knowledge, and our collective, global consciousness. Such a synthesis calls us to Integrity. Integrity and integrity alone, generates the inner capacity to use our powers with wisdom in all the realities we simultaneously occupy.

OM SHANTI SHANTI





