

Great Responsiveness — For The Good Of All

The Sound Basis Of Mahākarunā — An Answer To Late Capitalism And The Climate Crisis Of Global Ecocide

We are small in demeanor today, resentful of the daily insults heaped upon us by a seemingly demonic way of life (that many call “late-capitalism”), fearful of losing what we have, facing an unknown future, and hurtful in our actions. Our lives are filled with a *commonplace* malevolence, both directed towards us and directed by us towards others. And we *hope* for a hero—someone larger than we are, perhaps even Science or God—who will save us.

A hero is someone who strives for something that is greater than the fulfillment of their own small interests in this life, being neither heedless of, nor solely heeding, what their own hurt and suffering heart desires to have. Instead, a hero trains themselves to be responsive to the evolving conditions they find themselves in—and that they strive to create as they focus their efforts on the goal of achieving a greater good for all—and this is called a hero’s journey.

But the hero’s journey is a journey that we can all be on—and should be on, if we honor our life—because it’s not our individually selected goal that is important, other than that it not be for our own self-interest primarily, but the journey that we undertake to accomplish our goal and whatever good we can bring into this life by traveling it.

Each of us can and should contribute to the positive benefit of all in whatever way we can. We may not be able to “save the world” ourselves, but powerlessness, in the sense of believing that our actions have no positive impact at all, is a lie that is told to us—and often we tell to ourselves—to keep us enslaved to a way of life that leads only to global suffering and the end of life itself for countless beings just like us.

What is important on this journey is that we manifest a profound heartfelt intent to work for the benefit of all—which includes ourselves, of course—but includes all other beings as well. Because that is the substantive difference between a meaningless life filled with resentment, hurt, anger, and selfish striving, and one filled with heroic acts—frequently of small consequence, yes, but in changing our commonplace malevolence to a commonplace benevolence, we contribute to the collective progress of all life.

And the key to this collective progress is the profound intent that we manifest on our journey. The ancient Greeks had a word for it: *thumos*. This means the energy of life itself, and not some intellectual idea that we adopt and bandy about in our conversations. Peter Kingsley, a philologist—someone who studies words and their ancient uses—defined this ancient word this way:

*It's the raw presence in us that senses and feels; the massed power of our emotional being. Above all it's the energy of passion, appetite, yearning, longing.*¹⁹³

The role of the hero had been exaggerated by storytellers in the past, because it is never a solitary hero that saves us—it's we who save ourselves as heroes all, by working together for our common benefit. Modern storytellers have come to understand this, and have started to change their stories from singular histories to collective memories of things done collaboratively.

As well, the violent way so often depicted in these stories is wrong. When we are fighting ourselves, we are fighting our own ignorance and perhaps learned stupidity, as well as our general amnesia of what we can each be; so violence has no place in that struggle.

But the one qualification of the hero: that she be self-less in her desire to achieve a greater good by concerning herself with the needs and desires of all beings, is not a unique trait of special individuals that may arise at times of extreme need—that is also a misleading story that teaches us to wait for someone else to come to our aid.

Rather, the special quality of the hero is that she has trained to be a hero—it is the result of a learned technique that changes the individual so that they do not respond in a selfish way to the circumstances of their daily lives, much as we ourselves have been trained by others using various techniques throughout our lives to be mean, thoughtless, and selfish.

Our lives are peppered with examples of such heroic individuals, yet most commonly go unnoticed, because their heroic actions are not eulogized by those who are embarrassed by their own inaction.

Unfortunately, this technique that brings us on a heroic journey, and its critically needed fruit, has been hidden from our consideration by those intent on remaking humanity in their own brutish image through the ignorance that we are inculcated into—because this technique's effect is antithetical to late capitalism and the necessary selfishness of egocentric striving that is its vital engine.

¹⁹³ "Reality," Peter Kingsley, 2003, page 27

We need to tell ourselves this story of the hero's journey once again, and of the possibility to train ourselves to make that journey—for the good of us all.

I am speaking, of course, of the meditative practices that use inner spontaneous sound, whose alchemical effect upon us is to change us into self-less individuals who spontaneously begin to manifest what is known as *mahākaruṇā* in Buddhism, and by other names in many other traditions. In Pali, “great responsiveness” (sometime erroneously referred to as “great compassion”) is “*Mahākaruṇā*.” In the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, whose title in Tibetan is “The Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States,” *mahākaruṇā* is defined as:

*... ‘great responsiveness’ (mahākaruṇā)... refers to a totally unbiased mind that aspires to the **liberation** of all **sentient beings** from **suffering**, equally. Compassion is said to become ‘great responsiveness’ only when, through proper training of the **mind**, such an altruistic aspiration becomes spontaneous and no longer requires any conscious effort for its arising. The measure of having realized such a state is that one spontaneously feels a sense of intimacy and compassion towards all others, with the same degree of commitment and intensity that one feels towards one’s most beloved.*

And so, this is like the responsiveness of a mother towards her child — without any thought, wavering, or fatigue. The same text adds:

*... ‘great love’ (mahāmaitrī)... refers to an altruistic mental attitude that is unbiased in its love towards all beings and is also spontaneous and natural. It is said that such a spontaneous sense of universal or unqualified love can only arise as a result of a systematic meditative training and an understanding of **emptiness**.*¹⁹⁴

It is this understanding of emptiness — which is the total absence of an intrinsic self-nature with respect to all phenomena — that is the necessary prerequisite for the spontaneous manifestation of *mahākaruṇā* as the *impulse* of *mahāmaitrī*. This is our path, and inner spontaneous sound techniques of meditation are our tools.

People like us have dualistic compassion, whereas the Buddha’s responsiveness does not involve subject and object. From a buddha’s point of view, compassion could never involve subject and object. This is what is called *mahākaruṇā*—great responsiveness.

(Mahākaruṇā is an...) uncontrived state of mind which, no matter what suffering being it may focus upon, feels an uncontrollable wish to free them

¹⁹⁴ “The Tibetan Book of the Dead,” Composed by Padmasambhava, Revealed by Trenton Karma Lingpa, translated by Gyurme Dorje, and edited by Graham Coleman and Thupten Jinpa, Penguin Books, 2005, pages 455 and 484

from their pain with exactly the same intensity of love that a mother feels for her only child. (Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche)

Everything arises from a nondual self-less Naturing as an act of unconditional love, and the fundamental understanding of every spiritual tradition is that we are not separate—or something “other”—from that source. We do not have a true self-reality, being instead a perspective upon the whole—a loving glance, if we allow ourselves to be so. So aren't we all just Love? Unconditional spontaneous responsiveness being its only objective? How could we not love each other? And ourselves? If only we would train our minds to be so.

Why is this the right way? Why not just perform kind acts, try to develop our individual compassion for others, visualizing the exemplar bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara and imagining that we ourselves are manifesting the attributes of that bodhisattva? Because Great Responsiveness is not subject to our limitations — it is unlimited (great) compassion - and this, we must remember, exceeds the limitations of human judgement and our desire to be compassionate and to act in line with that desire.

I try to always remember that even though I cannot change anyone's mind about anything at all, I can inspire them with my positive intentions, whether manifested with words or through my actions; but that words and actions are both extremely dangerous when used without careful attention to the needs of the other person, even if my intentions are otherwise pure and meant to be beneficial.

This is why we need to develop the unlimited responsiveness of self-less mahākarunā, so that we always spontaneously respond to the context we find ourselves in. In this way, our acts are not limited by our personal limitations. It is a path that originates in self-less love, but only with skill and care can it benefit others — unless we change ourselves through the use of inner spontaneous sound. It is individuals that we must help and not just some mental collective abstraction.

All the joy the world contains has come through wishing happiness for others; all the misery the world contains has come through wanting pleasure for oneself. (Shantideva)

But there is always a barrier beyond which human *empathy* and simple *compassion* cannot extend... self, family, of course, and perhaps even one's community—but other races, other cultures, other peoples? Both human and nonhuman? Our wars against each other, our commonplace malevolence towards even our closest fellow beings, are evidence that we need to be something different. Empathy is just a *feeling* we have for the other.

How much better life for all would be if we had no more need of heroes. If acting self-less-ly through self-less love was no longer heroic but simply the only way to be. Because only self-less love can truly overcome these limits of our concern, by removing the phantasm of being an *individual self*, thus allowing our concern to become universal, as it necessarily must.

The choice is ours, and our path is clear. Mahākaruṇā is the way.

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