

# **Introduction to Compassion and the Healing Relationship:**

## **Learning to Help Others on the Sacred Path to Wellness**

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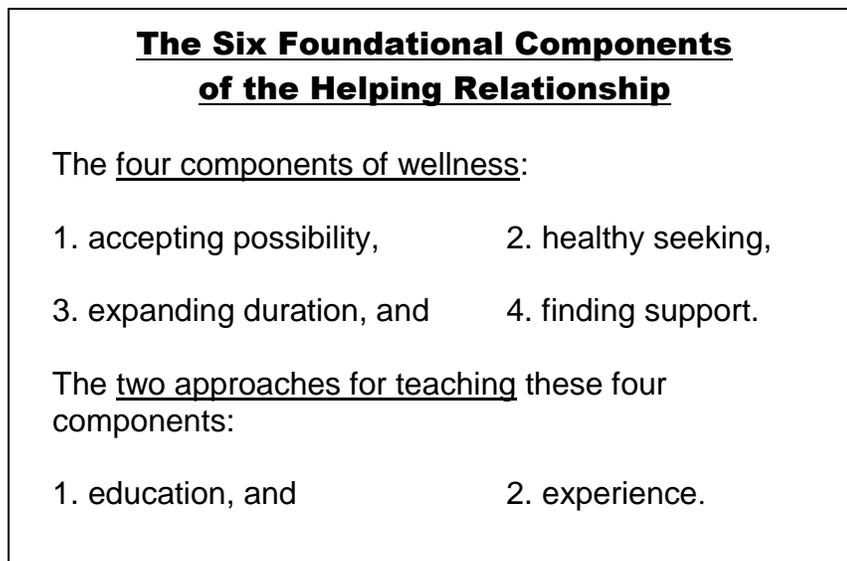
The very first thing that needs to be stated here is that there is no established science of compassion - at least not at the time of writing this book. What will be presented here is a foundation for such a science, which is likely to grow and develop with time. Compassion is about one person seeking to relieve the suffering of another. To this end is a helping relationship that people use when seeking to reduce suffering. This helping relationship aims to guide people back to a living a "sacred" path to wellness. The term sacred here is not meant to specify something religious (nor to disavow) but rather to portray the path to wellness as something to be held in reverence and high esteem.

Walking the sacred path to wellness is not the same as finding a cure for disease, although healing may be a part of the process. Wellness is a journey of discovering balance, wholeness, and relationship harmony in our lives. Wellness is linked to our perceptions of illness, which is more than disease, and includes those things that prevent/enhance balance, wholeness, and relationship harmony. In some manner, we are all on a journey of wellness and, during this wellness journey, we encounter people who help us and people who hinder us. This book is the introduction to a series on understanding the sacred path of facilitating healing within the compassion space. The series offers descriptions of relationships that help people with their journey toward wellness. This book does not provide the reader with specific treatment techniques, but rather offers description of the relationship behind the techniques that can be beneficial to

peoples search for well being. The goal of this series of texts is to build a consensus of opinion, an agreement, on a definition of the terms empathy compassion, helping relationship and healing relationship.

Whether professionally in the role of human service practitioner, providing peer support, or providing family support, we may be asked to help someone on his or her journey of discovering wellness. This is an act of compassion in that we use our abilities to “understand” the person’s suffering and then act to relieve that suffering. This compassion occurs within the compassion space, a relational space between the participants and the nature of compassion. The compassion space is held as a possibility during the wellness journey.

Figure 1: The six foundational components of the helping relationship



There are four components of the wellness journey: discovering wellness possibilities, finding healthy ways of seeking wellness, enhancing wellness duration, and, promoting the types of relationships needed to support wellness

duration. When using the helping relationship to assist with these four wellness components there are two helping approaches that need to be balanced with each other: 1) support for wellness remembering, and, 2) offering the opportunity of experiencing wellness. Throughout this text this author will refer to these six parts (the four components of the wellness journey and the two helping approaches) as **the six foundational components of the helping relationship**. The six foundational components of the helping relationship serve as overarching concepts guiding both practitioner intent and practitioner development while learning to apply the guidelines presented.

**The journey starts with the awareness of wellness possibility**. This is also the same as accepting the possibility that the compassion space is possible. Many people, both practitioners and consumers, are not aware that wellness, and the compassion space, are obtainable. Becoming aware of the possibility and exploring issues around this awareness is the initial step in the discovery of a personal wellness path. As indicated above, there are two approaches a practitioner can use to assist with developing the awareness of wellness possibility: 1) providing information about the possibility, and, 2) providing an experience that illustrates the possibility. Providing information about wellness possibility can be assisted through the sharing of healing stories, through a careful examination of personally-remembered wellness, or through an introspective look at the mindset, or attitude, that inhibits the possibility from being accepted. In addition to teaching information, the practitioner can provide the opportunity for wellness to be experienced. This would be a shared experience that clearly illustrates the possibility of wellness. Such an experience can only happen if the conditions for the “healing relationship” are properly established. When these conditions are established, then both practitioner and

consumer can experience an experiential shift in perception accompanied by a sense of wellness. Once this perceptual shift has been experienced, it serves as the reflective point of wellness possibility -- a part of the individual's personal experience that can be used for remembered wellness. From this point forward the person can begin to seek his/her own path to wellness.

**The journey involves seeking the experience of wellness.** Once wellness is accepted as a possibility, then the participant (client, patient, consumer) can search for his/her own definition of "wellness" and a new healthy style of seeking wellness. There are two approaches used when helping someone who is seeking wellness: 1) providing information on what others have said about seeking, while also personally reflecting, or 2) providing opportunities for additional wellness experiences that more clearly illuminate the path as part of the seeking process. Information can be provided to the individual about the path others have taken, about relapse, and about habits and techniques. Seeking is a deeply personal process and there are no techniques, rituals, medications, or platitudes that can be universally applied to all. It is more about finding the right pairing of teacher and student, and using the right technique for that pairing at that moment. The participant can learn to document and reflect upon how they engage in seeking while on their wellness journey. This is an educational process that requires healthy introspection, a process that often needs to be taught. Some of this introspection into one's patterns of seeking can be taught through information, but some of it can also be learned through shared experiences with the practitioner.

A skilled practitioner can offer the opportunity to practice seeking of wellness as an experiential process. This journey of seeking "wellness" has

many paths. The skilled practitioner/facilitator learns to walk the path with the other, acting as a guide, reflecting on the journey without interference. The role of support persons for the person learning about seeking wellness is linked to an understanding of the individual's quest for wellness, of understanding how they seek, and then assisting with his/her natural process of improving his/her personal seeking process. It is not so much a question of a given technique, but rather of finding the right approach for that individual within the mindset of seeking wellness.

**The journey shifts to enhancing wellness duration.** Once wellness has been experienced as a possibility, and healthy wellness-seeking avenues have been established, then one can experience wellness with increased duration. As with the other components of the wellness journey, there are two approaches to helping someone who is looking to enhance wellness duration: 1) provide information about the wellness duration that can then be a part of personal reflection, or, 2) provide opportunities for wellness experiences with extended duration. Once healthy seeking has been established as a part of the person's way of life, then the person may experience moments in his/her life where the sense of wellness has greater duration. There are many different situations in life that can contribute to increased wellness duration. Initially, the person may not recognize this. They will need help in clarifying that such improvement is occurring. It is important that the individual find ways to constructively reflect upon these moments of increased wellness duration. Many techniques can be applied to help with this process (e.g., journaling, group discussion, insight based therapy). Knowledge about one's personal experience of what works to contribute to that specific person's wellness duration is an important part of the wellness journey. In addition to education, information and reflection, it is also

possible that the skilled practitioner can offer to the person the possibility of experiencing expanded wellness duration. This process of facilitated wellness duration can be quite difficult. These difficulties are linked to the training of the practitioner and the expectations of the participant. Perhaps the most important point to emphasize is that the journey of wellness must involve increasing the duration of wellness moments in one's life and that this can be facilitated through both an educational (support) and an experiential (facilitated) process.

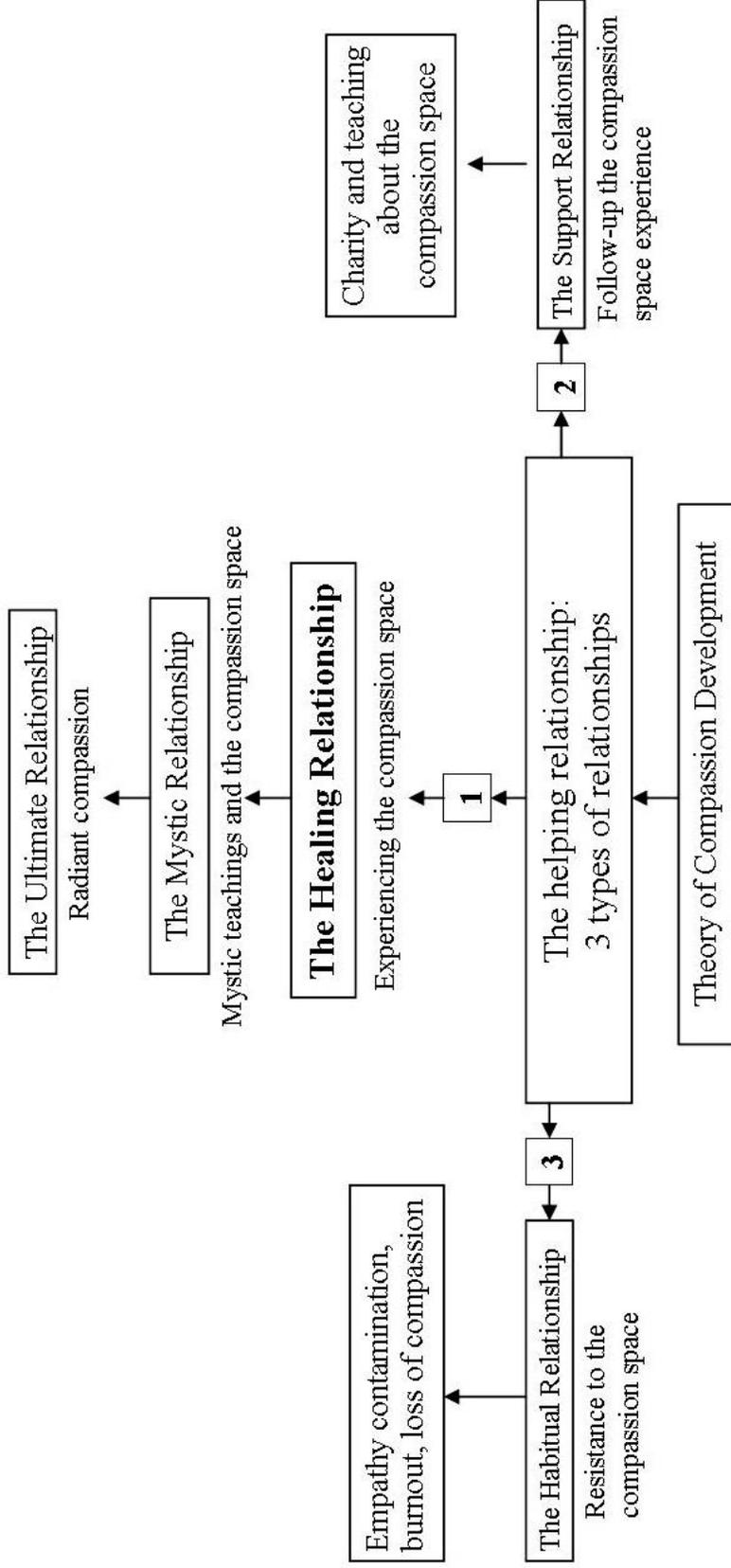
**Community support is essential for wellness duration.** The community needs to provide the individual with the overall systemic and personal support needed to develop wellness duration. It is important for the consumer to feel supported in their struggle to maintain, or expand, his/her experience of wellness. Within the helping relationship one can provide information about the nature of healthy support relationships, ones that facilitate wellness duration. Relationship support for wellness includes people at work, peers, family, and both health or education paraprofessional and professional staff. This relationship support involves three types of relationships: the healing relationship, the support relationship, and the habitual relationship. Training can be provided that describes each of these relationships and how they fit with helping a person on their wellness journey. It is possible for practitioners to offer opportunities where the person may experience a healthy relationship, one that facilitates wellness duration. Community support requires that those people who are to provide the support for wellness duration also should have support. The environment, the language used, the work culture, should all reflect the approach of promoting wellness duration. In addition, systemic factors (e.g., curricula of training programs, and design of progress documentation) need to be re-designed to assist people in their wellness journey.

It is hard to shift from the mindset of matching cure to disease, of being the “fixer”, to the approach of being the guide on a wellness journey. This “fixer” mindset is very much a part of how we seek and deliver health care services in this country. The skilled helper learns that diagnosis and treatment are useful, but also that treatment success is enhanced through the healing relationship. The skilled practitioner of the healing relationship does not try to “fix”, but rather offers to take the journey with the person toward well being, and for a short while offer the opportunity to discover the compassion space and experience a reduction in suffering.

Helping people to experience wellness involves 1) accepting wellness as a possibility, 2) developing healthy ways of seeking wellness, 3) enhancing wellness duration, and 4) developing the types of relationships needed to support wellness duration. Helping a person

## Figure 2: Helping Relationship Tree

# The Helping Relationship Tree — Connections to the Compassion Space



with each of these four components of the wellness journey involves a balance of education and experiential processes. These are the six founding components of the helping relationship that promote wellness. Training in these six core components includes understanding the characteristics of the types of relationships encountered during the process of wellness development, as shown in Figure 2.

The helping relationship can be viewed as consisting of three different relationships the healing relationship, the support relationship, and the habitual relationship, Increasing skill with the healing relationship can lead to the mystic relationship and finally the ultimate relationship (radiant compassion) but these are beyond the scope of this book. The support relationship is one where the practitioner provides support for continuing on the path of wellness, ideally as follow-up to witnessing a healing event. But support can also include charity and education. The habitual relationship is one of resistance to either the compassion space or the help being offered.

The healing relationship is just one aspect of the helping relationship. The components of the helping relationship are shown in Figure 2: The Helping Relationship Tree. Illustrated are several different types of relationships that one will encounter when trying to help another person toward well being. Only the healing relationship is the focus of this book. Also the focus here is with an emphasis on describing general guiding principles. as a foundation for the science of compassion, rather than specific self help techniques.

### **The Principle of Offering a Helping Relationship**

Whenever a helping relationship is offered one also is presenting the opportunity to enter the compassion space

This book, entitled “The Healing Relationship” describes the characteristics of a relationship that offers to the participant the possibility of experiencing facilitated wellness. The focus is not to provide a set of methods or techniques, but rather to provide a set of guidelines for learning to use the helping relationship and the compassion space (described in chapter 1). The techniques, rituals, methods, explanations that a practitioner used to help another vary depending on training, the culture, the situation presented and the expectations of the person seeking help. The practitioner, in every helping possibility, is always entering into a relationship with the person seeking help. The goal is to clarify the fundamental aspects of those relationships that foster another’s development of wellness. Understanding the fundamental aspects of helping relationships that promote wellness will include understanding the different types of relationships encountered by practitioners (healing, support, habitual, mystic) so that practitioners can begin to improve their own helping relationships. As the practitioner becomes deeply familiar with the rules and guidelines presented herein, s/he will develop a flexible, and eclectic, set of principles to use when providing help to another. This flexible set of principles will assist the practitioner when s/he is attempting to find the best approach for the person’s needs.

Any person who is asked by another person to help them toward wellness and/or to help him/her cope with suffering can use the information contained within this text. This includes the following:

- Family members, peers and co-workers.
- Paraprofessionals: support staff, aides, and direct care workers.
- Professional staff: counselors, therapists, teachers, nurses, clinicians, social workers, case managers, practitioners of alternative medicine, pastoral counselors, and psychologists.

The various guidelines contained herein are presented as a foundation for a science of compassion, one that can be applied by a broad audience in reducing the suffering in the world. In places where the text presents difficult concepts examples are provided and the basic components of every important concept are highlighted. A summary is also given at the end of every chapter. In addition, for those who wish to pursue more detailed information, a reference list is provided.

### **Introduction to the Healing Relationship**

The six core components of the helping relationship include not only being exposed to information about wellness, and learning about personal wellness, but also having the opportunity to experience facilitated wellness. It is proposed here that the helping relationship that promotes wellness has two parts. First, the

person offering help can provide a support relationship for people to understand wellness within their own worldview. Second, the person offering help can provide a relationship that helps to facilitate the experience of wellness, which later becomes the focus of understanding using the support relationship. A practitioner skilled in the healing arts can offer this experience of facilitated wellness. It is proposed here that this experience of facilitated wellness occurs across cultures, helping domains and across techniques. However, there is little published on how such an experience might be described, so it is not often presented as a possibility for thoughtful consideration or study. Without a readily available description, it is difficult to encourage practitioners in the helping professions to present a relationship that will promote wellness.

Suppose we ask the question, “what is it like being in a healing relationship with a gifted practitioner?” The answer to this question might help to reduce some of the confusion surrounding the practical application of the healing relationship in today’s increasingly technical health care profession. An answer might also decrease some of the tension people experience when entering into a helping relationship (including people who visit alternative medicine practitioners). Additionally, an answer would help us to better understand the characteristics of a healthy relationship so that we could promote this with all those seeking relief from suffering. We can search for an answer to the question of what it is like to be in a healing relationship and what this means for all of us.

Hopefully, the details discovered during this author’s search for these answers will provide readers with helpful information. Knowledge about the healing relationship can be used by anyone in the business of helping another toward wellness. It is information useful to anyone who is getting helping

services from people in the helping profession as they can come to a better understanding of the characteristics associated with a relationship that promotes growth and well being. It is also a text that can be used by anyone seeking happiness within their personal relationships with others as it speaks to the fundamental characteristics that need to be present within human relationships in order for them to foster health and personal development.

The search for answers about the healing relationship started with this author's personal experiences. These experiences started with a childhood of misunderstanding and disconnection. Early in my experiences as a human service worker, there were relationships with others involving nearly indescribable phenomena connected to a dramatic shift in well being. These experiences continue to this day and seemed to extend beyond the boundaries of our health care culture. I could not explain why the phenomena happened, or whether others had experienced anything similar. Yet, I had this urgency to make some meaning of this healing relationship and to find a connection to our health care culture. I focused my Ph.D. research at Syracuse University on the describing the link between empathy and the healing relationship, including describing the effects associated with the healing relationship.

I started my quest into describing the healing relationship with only three ideas. First, I believed, that within the helping relationship I offered to people, there sometimes occurred a healing connection. It seemed like an empathic connection. Second, there was a link between this empathic connection, the healing relationship and compassion. Third, it seemed that sometimes people were afraid of this empathic connection when encountered at advanced levels. With these three ideas in hand I began a journey not only to clarify the nature of

these healing phenomena for myself, but also to present a book that might decrease the misinterpretations that were behind the failure to discover personal well being. Both the ideas I had about the phenomena linked to the healing relationship, and my personal experiences, shaped the interpretive process that is described in this text.

What I have presented herein is not only research, but also my personal journey as a practitioner in the art of healing. It is a story underlain by decades of healing experiences. Using this experience, and my belief that empathy is critical to healing, I completed a review of the literature on empathy, therapy and the practices of healing. This literature review is described in chapters one and two. Incorporated within this review is a model of therapeutic empathy offering a hypothesis of a link between empathy and the healing relationship. This hypothesis proposes that empathy may, in a few individuals, become heightened beyond advanced empathy. It is also proposed that this state of heightened empathy accompanies facilitated well being (the healing relationship). New terms to describe empathy are offered in an effort to provide a more complete description of this common construct and its connection to relationships that promote well being and to the fledgling science of compassion.

Although there is little in the literature that directly outlines the characteristics of a helping relationship that promotes well being and its connections to compassion, it is mentioned in the writings of healer/practitioners across many cultures. Chapter Two presents the language of practitioners who describe their understanding of this special healing relationship. Included within this chapter are this author's perceptions. The synthesis of these cross cultural practitioner perspectives with this author's experiences leads to an initial list of

healing relationship descriptors. This is the first step toward offering a universal description of the term **healing relationship** as a foundation for the science of compassion.

A description of the healing relationship needs not only the views of the practitioner, but also the views of the participant (client, patient, student, consumer). Chapter Three presents the language of participant/informants who have experienced this healing relationship and who were willing to honestly describe their experiences to the investigator. This information presents characteristics of the healer's relationship, which, as a sequential collection of effects, have not yet been published. The descriptors given by participants closely match the descriptors given by practitioners, and together provide a general set of healing relationship characteristics. This is a second step toward offering a universal definition of the term healing relationship as a foundation for the science of compassion.

Revealed in both the text analyses of practitioner's writings about the healing relationship and in the participant interviews were frequent references to interpretation. In many instances, an entire explanatory system was developed by a culture to explain the journey toward well being. Seeking an interpretation for this shift into well being appears to be a part of the process of, or journey toward, discovering well being. Chapter Four attempts the difficult task of synthesizing the wide diversity of interpretive attempts applied to healing relationship phenomena. The struggle to make meaning of these transformative phenomena is also described by this author. It is hoped that the presentation of multiple interpretations will help readers with their own interpretations. There are many aspects of this interpretive process that become part of the proposed

universal definition for the term healing relationship. The use of an explanatory system is something that is seen across cultures when the sacred path to wellness is being described and explained. This also can be seen as a foundational element in the science of compassion.

Chapter Five offers to the reader some research implications for persons in the business of providing health services. There is a special emphasis on the ramifications this research might have on training health service professionals in developing the healing relationship, as described in previous chapters. This healing relationship is a special type of relationship and as such requires special training.

Chapter Six speaks to adult compassion development - a part of the science of compassion that has not been examined by modern science. If adults are to become the models of compassion for the next generation then they need to be provided with information on how to develop stronger compassion.

Chapter Seven presents a summary with recommendations.

The book contain a mixture of research, supportive documentation, and personal reflection. As a practitioner who offers to others the healing relationship, I present this work not only as research, but also as testimony of a personal nature. The path of the healer is filled with many adventures. Sharing personal stories that describe the healer's journey is as important as sharing research that seeks to do the same. The interweaving of the personal and the scientific is offered as a way to present different views. Hopefully the reader will seek to integrate aspects of these views into his/her own worldview.

The information contained within offers the reader a generalized description of the special relationship that a few gifted practitioners in the healing arts have shared with those whom they have helped. These practitioners are represented across many cultures and many professions. The commonalities found in the descriptions of the healing relationship are offered as a path returning us to the lost art of being a healer. We have greatly improved our healing technology; now it is time to improve our healing skills. Hopefully, we can learn to use the information contained within this book to move from being technology-smart practitioners to being skilled artists. It is hoped that the information contained within will encourage practitioners to reach further forward in their professional development striving to become facilitators of the healing relationship.

A description of the healing relationship is contained within and is offered as a model that can be used by any person who enters into conversation with another person for the purpose of promoting well being as a compassionate act. It is a model that presents the artistry of what gifted practitioners share with those who come to them for help. It is a model that can be held as a goal in one's personal and professional development, as well as adult compassion development. The healing relationship is not limited by time spent with the person seeking help, but rather by the amnesia of both practitioners (any person in the role of providing human service) and participants (patients, clients, students, consumers) when trying to remember what it means to be well and stay well. It is possible to return to a way of sharing well being that has been lost, but it will require training and a community effort. These compassionate acts need to start with an understanding of the term **healing relationship**.

