



# THE LITTLE BOOK OF COMPASSION

by Wendy Ellyatt



COMPASSION IS ABOUT UNDERSTANDING WHAT UNDERPINS OUR COMMON HUMANITY, WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF PROMOTING INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FLOURISHING. IT IS ABOUT HONOURING PERSONAL STORIES AND LIFEPATHS AND ALLOWING POSITIVE CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION TO TAKE PLACE, EVEN IF THIS INVOLVES OVERCOMING CHALLENGE AND DIFFICULTY. IT PROMOTES THE UNDERSTANDING THAT, AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE EXIST WITHIN A CREATIVE, GENERATIVE AND UNIFIED SYSTEM THAT IS ALWAYS MOVING TOWARDS BALANCE AND WHOLENESS.

AS SUCH, IT ENCOMPASSES THE BIOLOGICAL, COGNITIVE, SOCIETAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF LIFE.

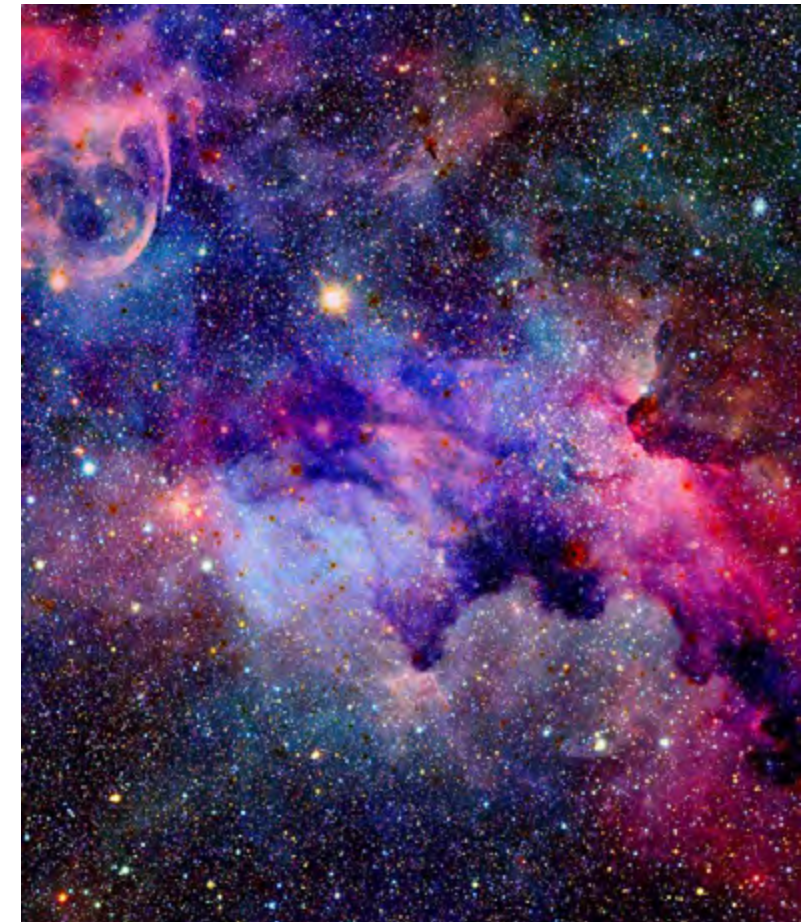
- THE FLOURISH PROJECT -

# THE UNIFIED NATURE OF REALITY

The unified nature of reality is something that has been recognised by indigenous traditions throughout the world, and, over the past few decades, has increasingly been explored by science as a fundamental, integrated, informational property of the universe. It is grounded in connection and love and, as such, it is an essential element of human flourishing. Human beings are part of this larger informational system, with every thought and feeling impacting the whole.

*"Consider that every human being radiates their entire information into space – the whole past, the present moment, and the potential future. If life is full of information, how do we tune in to hear our unique song?" – Thomas Hubl*

*"Modern science shows the universe to be awe-inspiringly beautiful, complex and mathematically elegant. Whether by accident or design, it is precisely fine-tuned for the emergence of intelligence and moral consciousness....Somehow the factors of consciousness and value must be included in any comprehensive account of Ultimate Reality." – Professor Keith Ward*



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# THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN VALUES

No matter where they are born in the world, all human beings share the same seven core needs that then shape what they want and value. Our motivations and behaviours stem from having our needs met (or not) and our values are a reflection of these needs.

## Security, Relationship, Independence, Engagement, Fulfilment, Contribution and Growth

These human needs represent the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects that give our lives meaning and purpose. As they grow young children need to steadily experience and build on each aspect, whereas healthy adults are able to integrate them all.

The ability to feel whole as a person is really important for our wellbeing and, just as in all other living systems, our biology is always trying to bring us into a balanced energetic state. Our 'self-energy' is constantly encouraging us to balance both our internal and external needs, so that we can access our authentic nature.

The spiritual aspect of our development is always moving us toward wholeness, that includes contribution to something larger than ourselves, and our ongoing growth.

**A core objective of any human-centric system, whether it be a family, school, organisation, city or nation, should therefore be to nurture positive self-energy and the fullest expression of human potential.**

Such systems should seek to promote a way of being that values self, others, and the environment. They should nourish pro-social behaviour and promote innate positive qualities and dispositions from an early age. They should remember that we all have rich inner lives that can promote, or drastically inhibit, our capacity to learn and form meaningful relationships with ourselves and others.

**Understanding why we are the way we are, that our values and personalities are a reflection of what has happened to us in our lives, and that others have experienced the world differently, starts us on the Path to Compassion.**

To achieve healthy human development and wellbeing, external aspects such as attainment and success are important, **but these must be balanced with the internal need for meaning and wholeness. As social and responsive beings, our wellbeing is also irrevocably connected to that of others and the health of the planet.**

There is an all-encompassing ecology of wellbeing that suggests that we cannot only look at one aspect, without acknowledging the others. In fact, there is an inherent danger in doing so, as is evidenced through the current concerns about the human impact on climate change.



SECURITY RELATIONSHIP INDEPENDENCE ENGAGEMENT FULFILMENT CONTRIBUTION GROWTH



# WE VALUE WHAT WE NEED

We value what we believe we need, and our motivations are shaped by these beliefs. The root causes of suffering lie in the limiting beliefs that we both adopt and develop in the earliest years of life. We are genetically unique, as we each carry the DNA traces of our ancestors, so the personalities that we develop are a combination of the biological patterns and dispositions that have gone before, overlaid with the unique patterns created by our own experiences in the world.

This means that the worlds that we experience as young children literally shape our biology and who we will become. Our inner need for connection and wholeness is always in a state of dynamic flux as we deal with external challenges from the environment. Our personalities are built up from our genetic predispositions and the neurological patterns created by our lived experiences. Each one of us is shaped by the environment, but underneath it all we share a common connection.

## THE WORLDS THAT WE EXPERIENCE AS YOUNG CHILDREN LITERALLY SHAPE OUR BIOLOGY AND WHO WE WILL BECOME



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# HUMAN BABIES ARE UNIQUE

Human babies are unique in that they are so reliant on early relationships for such a long a period of time. Apart from the security of adequate shelter and nutrition, positive human relationships are therefore the single most important factor for healthy development.

If our early environments have been positive and nurturing, we are likely to have developed healthy

mindsets that have enabled us to maximise our natural development and potential in line with our innate energies and dispositions. For example, neurobiological studies suggest that, as a social species, human beings are hardwired to initially be cooperative and trusting. We are also likely to be able to learn and bounce back quickly from any setbacks and failures - which helps us to see them from the perspective of a 'glass half full'.

IN ORDER TO FEEL SECURE AND THAT THEY BELONG, YOUNG CHILDREN MODEL AND ADOPT THE VALUES OF THE ADULTS IN THEIR WORLDS, WHICH IS WHERE WE START TO SEE THE ROOTS OF DIFFERENCE TAKE SHAPE

# FAMILY LIFE MATTERS

All aspects of our lives are therefore based upon the way that our needs have been met - and our values have been shaped – both through our genetic predispositions and then through our early experiences and how they are subsequently expressed through our beliefs and behaviours. We all create mindsets and worldviews that predict how we see both ourselves and others and these are the maps that we then use to survive and grow.

The burgeoning interest in geneology has opened up the understanding that our personal dispositions and capacities have been profoundly shaped by those that have gone before. We are literally walking our ancestors in ways that we are only just beginning to understand. The series of feelings, thoughts, sensations and decisions that we have always thought to be our 'self' actually have layers of predisposition that have shaped who we think ourselves to be.

Most of the ancient world traditions and religions have provided tools and resources to help move people from this false self towards the true sense of self as one undivided reality. And when we are committed to exploring the deepest nature of who we are, we naturally start to see others more deeply.

**Positive values and mindsets help us to grow and flourish, whereas limiting values and mindsets act as inhibitors and are based on fears that have to be overcome. The core fears that we either inherit from our family patterns or develop through our life experiences as young children, are 'I am not**

**safe enough' (security), 'I am not loved enough' (relationship) and 'I am not enough' (independence).**

**Values related to normal healthy development include love, trust, courage, justice, respect, patience, honesty, humility, compassion, tolerance, hope and optimism**

But if we have grown up in difficult or stressful environments, our natural energies and development are more likely to have been compromised and we may have adopted limiting belief and value systems that have helped us to survive, but have also limited our ability to become happy, healthy adults. We are then more likely to personalise and struggle with any setbacks and failures – which make us see them from the perspective of a 'glass half empty'.

**Values related to compromised early development include neglect, distrust, fear, anger, frustration, self-protection, dishonesty, arrogance, lack of respect for others, lack of tolerance, despair and scepticism.**

Healthy family life is, therefore, essential to the development of positive human values. Compassionate approaches offer adults the ability to acknowledge and transcend the family patterns that have gone before and support them in optimising the environments that shape the values and mindsets of the children in their care. What we learn, and how we are made to think about ourselves, in the early years and during our schooldays, shapes the trajectories of our lives.

HEALTHY FAMILY LIFE IS  
ESSENTIAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF POSITIVE HUMAN VALUES



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# FROM SECURITY TO RELATIONSHIP

At both the beginning and end of human lives the two core needs are security and relationship. This is because both involve vulnerability and our reliance on others and the quality of the external environment. At the beginning of life, we develop our unique sense of self from our experiences with others and the natural world and at the end of life we increasingly let go of all the material things that have acquired and return to the essential importance of our relationship with others and the natural world. There is, therefore, both a rhythmic and organic building up of the human skills and capacities that create a flourishing and meaningful life, and, later in life, a gradual letting go.

Social and emotional learning is the relational process through which all children acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and capacities that help them to develop their sense of self,

to regulate their emotions, to show empathy for others, to establish and maintain supportive relationships and to make responsible and caring decisions. As such, it is essential for human flourishing.

Healthy and secure environments, followed by the social and emotional learning that can only come through human relationships, create the foundation that allow us to then become independent, engaged, fulfilled and contributing members of society.

What we learn at the end of our lives is that the single most important thing is that we have been able to both give and receive love. And that wealth, fame and material goods mean very little if they have not been accompanied by compassionate understanding and action related to self, others and the natural world.

RELATIONSHIP IS  
ESSENTIAL, AND LOVE IS  
OUR ESSENTIAL NATURE



# THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

There are over 5000 languages in use today and each conveys a slightly different worldview. There are also languages understood only by those with particular knowledge and understanding such as mathematics or music. Language helps us to share our innermost processes in a symbolic way with others.

**Language also demonstrates our cultural and environmental priorities. For example, an eskimo might have 10 words for different types of snow, whereas western society has numerous names for forms of financial transaction. We dissect, categorise, and accord significance to the outside world according to the rules and expectations of our cultural environments.**

Children absorb and adopt the language of their families and cultures, and these then shape their understanding of the world. The infinite nature of reality is chopped up and labelled into numerous and varied patterns of meaning. The advent of language is, therefore, a mixed blessing to the children, as the beauty and wholeness of authentic, sensate, lived experience is increasingly eroded through the need to communicate with others. Children are born with the possibility of expressing their unique individuality through multiple intelligences and languages, but these can be both confined and restricted by adult priorities and expectations.

Compassionate practice asks us to take care with our language, to reflect on what it says about our cultural values, and to realise that the meaning behind what we are saying may be understood very differently by others. It involves deep listening and understanding the power of non-verbal communication in communicative understanding. It also asks us to explore how we might be restricting the extraordinary expressive capacities and potential of the young.

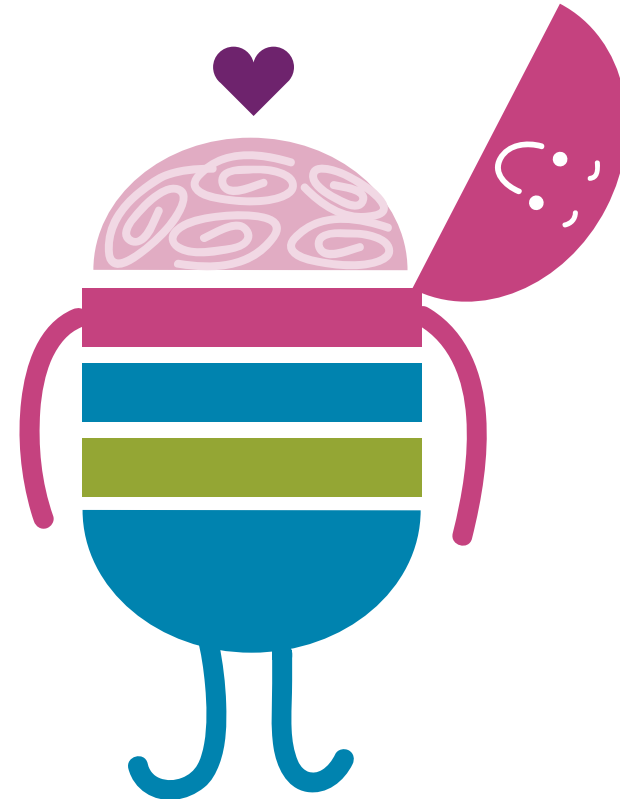


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# PRESENCE

As human beings, we communicate in both verbal and non-verbal ways and we have an inbuilt ability to attune to the inner world of others. Staying true to the present moment helps to expand this capacity, to transcend our habitual thought processes and to fill the relational field with awareness. Mindfulness and meditation techniques assist the process by tapping into our core intelligence.

*"We first thought of presence as being fully conscious and aware in the present moment. Then we began to appreciate presence as deep listening, of being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of*

*making sense. We came to see the importance of letting go of old identities and the need to control and making choices to serve the evolution of life. Ultimately, we came to see all these aspects of presence as leading to a state of "letting come," of consciously participating in a larger field for change. When this happens, the field shifts, and the forces shaping a situation can shift from re-creating the past to manifesting or realizing an emerging future."*

**- Otto Scharmer**

A COMPUTER HAS FINITE GAPS  
MADE OF EMPTINESS; WE HAVE INFINITE  
GAPS FULL OF INTELLIGENCE

- DEEPAK CHOPRA -



# CREATIVITY AND GROWTH

As part of the larger system, we are always reaching out into novelty and growth. Generative creativity, and the ability to imagine new and interesting possibilities, is our nature from the time that we are born. That is why curiosity,

playfulness and risk-taking is so important to us and why learning is a lifelong process, rather than something that is restricted to educational institutions. Play is essential for personal independence, engagement and flow.

COMPASSIONATE PRACTICE ASKS  
TO LOOK AT HOW WE ARE  
NURTURING PLAYFULNESS AND  
RISK-TAKING WITHIN OUR OWN LIVES  
AND THOSE OF OTHERS



Photo by Tatiana Syrikova from Pexels

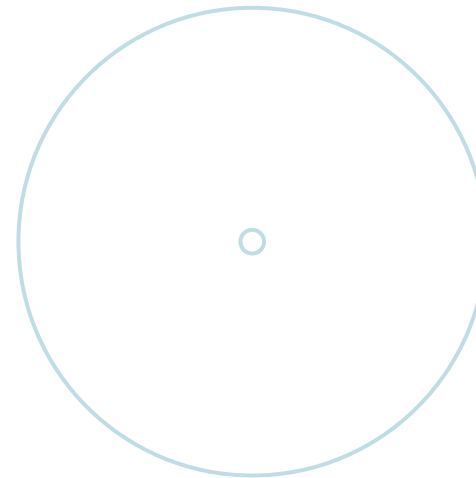


# SELF-EXPRESSION

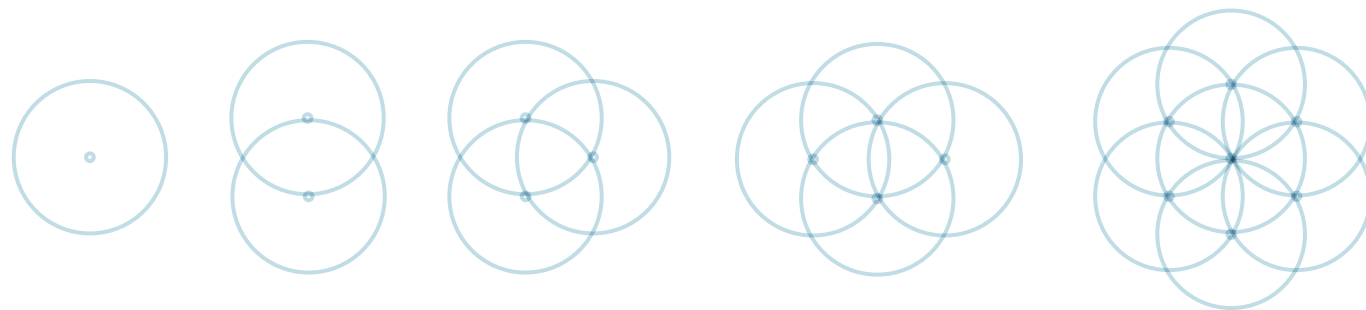
To be fulfilled, however, we also need to be able to express our learning and creativity and to share it with others. We have a biological need to contribute to something greater than ourselves.

**As human beings we live in social worlds. We need, rely on, and are shaped by, our interaction with others. Our sense of self is co-created through relationship, and we are also constantly connecting with and influencing the lived experience of the larger field.**

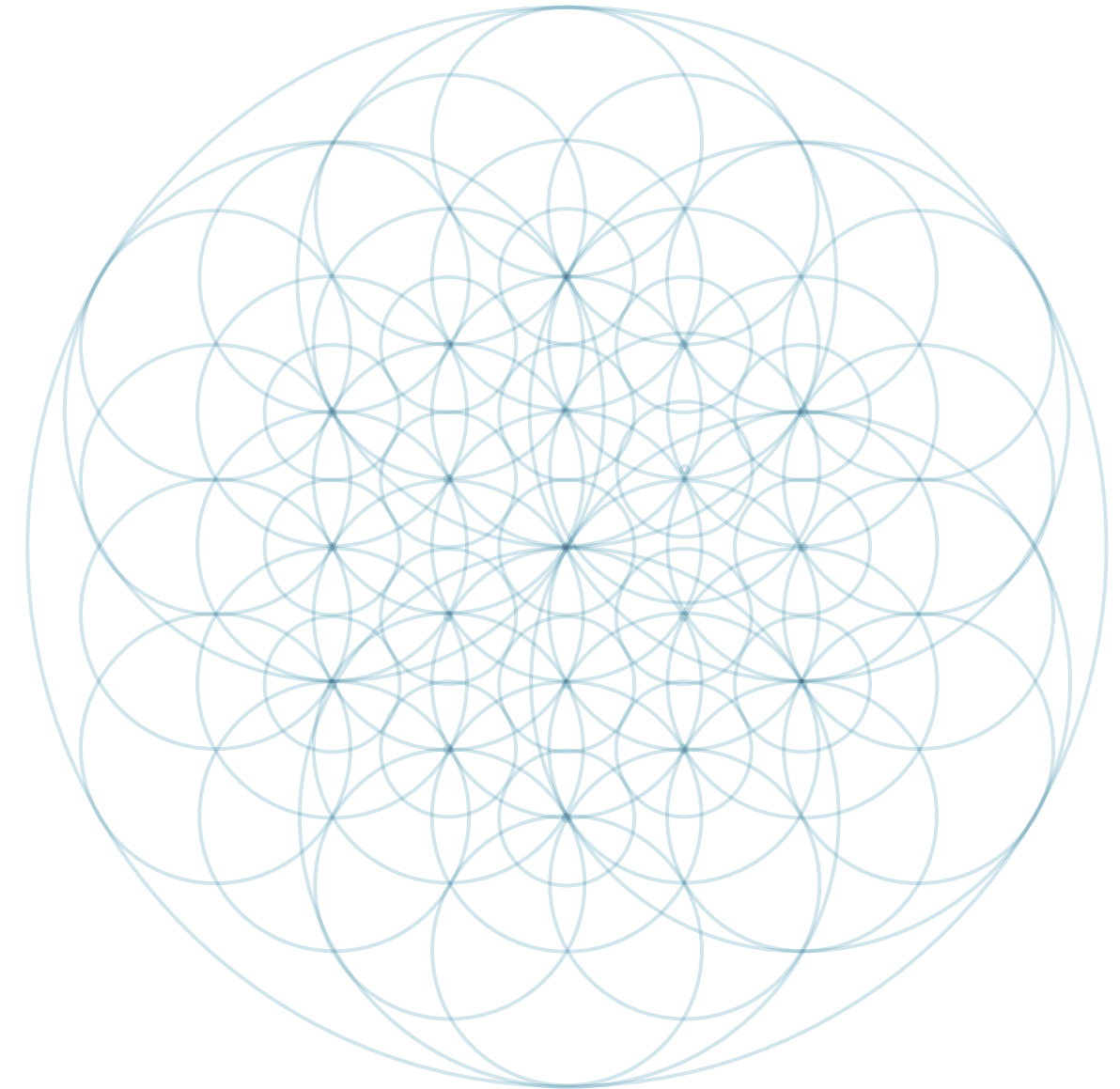
We are a co-operative species, living in a dynamically interconnected social world.



Illusory - Isolated self



Connected self



Social self

An ocean of circles, all interconnecting and influencing each other



EACH ONE OF US IS BORN WITH THE POTENTIAL FOR CREATIVITY, GENEROSITY, ALTRUISM AND COMPASSION, BUT WE ALSO CARRY FORWARD THE ECHOES OF OUR SPECIES GENETIC SURVIVAL CAPACITIES OF SELFISHNESS, VIOLENCE, VENGEANCE AND CRUELTY. BY HAVING THE COURAGE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE ALL CARRY THESE SHADOWS OF THE PAST, WE CAN BE COMPASSIONATE TOWARDS OURSELVES AND OTHERS

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## THERE CAN BE NO DARKNESS WITHOUT LIGHT

The extraordinary thing about human beings is that we are a choice-making species. This means that, unlike all other living species, we can transcend our biological instincts to make conscious choices about our future behaviours. In our every daily action we

## DARK AND LIGHT

Science now shows us that seemingly opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world, and how they may give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another. This duality forms a sense of harmony where the opposite is complimented and flows to give dynamism and sense to life.

have the opportunity to alter the habitual patterns of what has gone before and to choose different. And even our brains have been created with the plasticity to support this.

**What kind of world we will see in 25 years-time will depend upon what we are doing in our homes and schools now.**

*Humans are a choice making species with a common future faced with an epic choice. We can continue to seek marginal adjustments in the culture and institutions of the Imperial Civilization of violence, domination, and exploitation that put us on a path to self-extinction. Or we can transition to an Ecological Civilization dedicated to restoring the health of living Earth's regenerative systems while securing material sufficiency and spiritual abundance for all people. – David Korten*





# THE PATH OF COMPASSION

Compassion is, therefore, rooted in the understanding that people have different dispositions, backgrounds, mental maps and worldviews than our own. It is also about understanding the impact of our own thoughts and actions on the larger system and that we always have the ability to choose different.

The path to compassion commits us to practices that expand our own awareness and natural

intelligence, so that we can live more meaningful and purposeful lives in shared relationship with others. It acknowledges that challenge and difficulty are important elements of the path that help to highlight aspects of our lives that have potential for change and transformation.

It invites us to shake off the patterns of the past, and to always choose the path of beauty and love.

COMPASSION AND NONVIOLENCE HELP US TO SEE THE ENEMY'S POINT OF VIEW, TO HEAR THEIR QUESTIONS, TO KNOW THEIR ASSESSMENT OF OURSELVES. FOR FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW WE MAY INDEED SEE THE BASIC WEAKNESSES OF OUR OWN CONDITION, AND IF WE ARE MATURE, WE MAY LEARN AND GROW AND PROFIT FROM THE WISDOM OF THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO ARE CALLED THE OPPOSITION

- MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR -

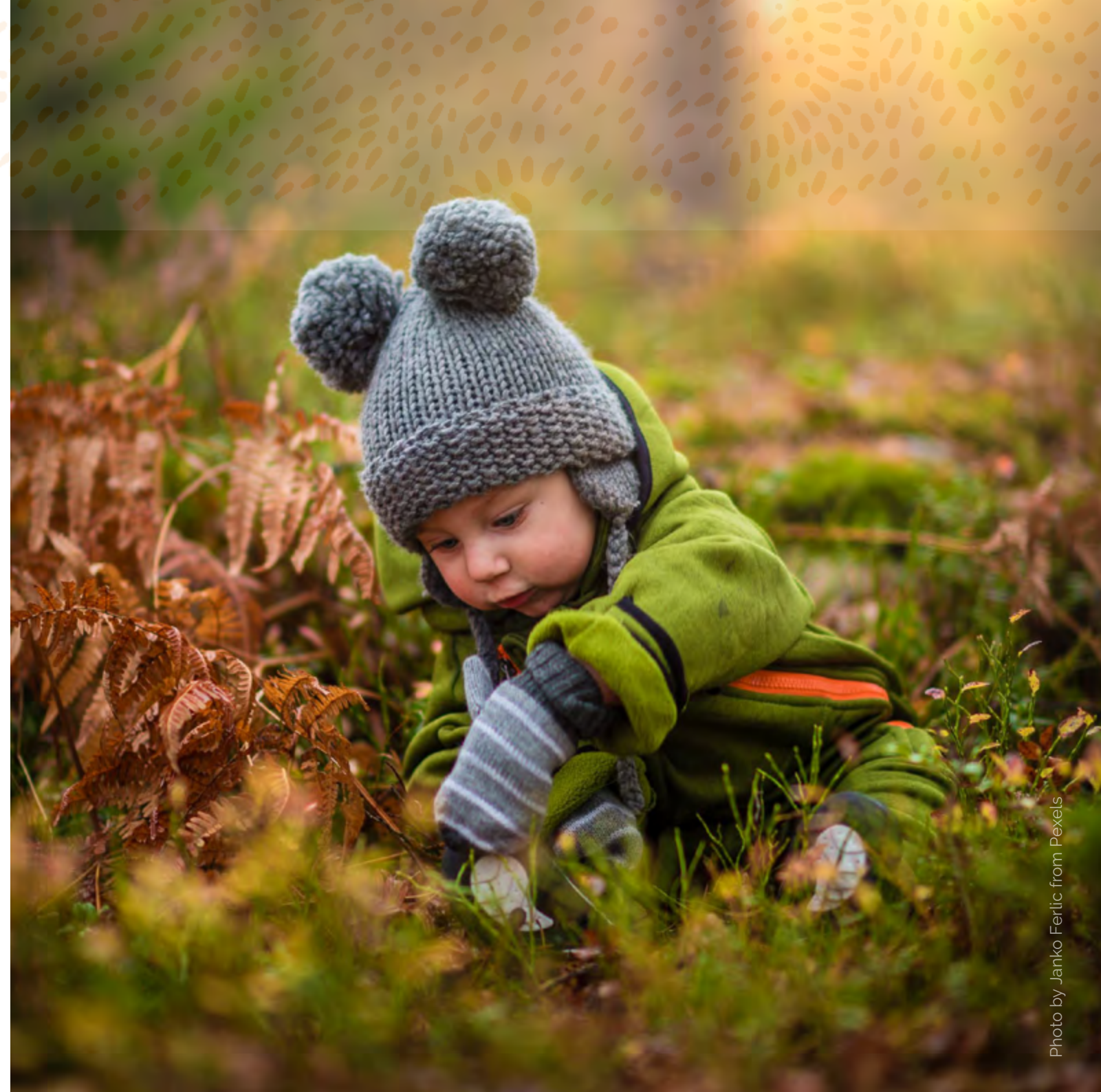
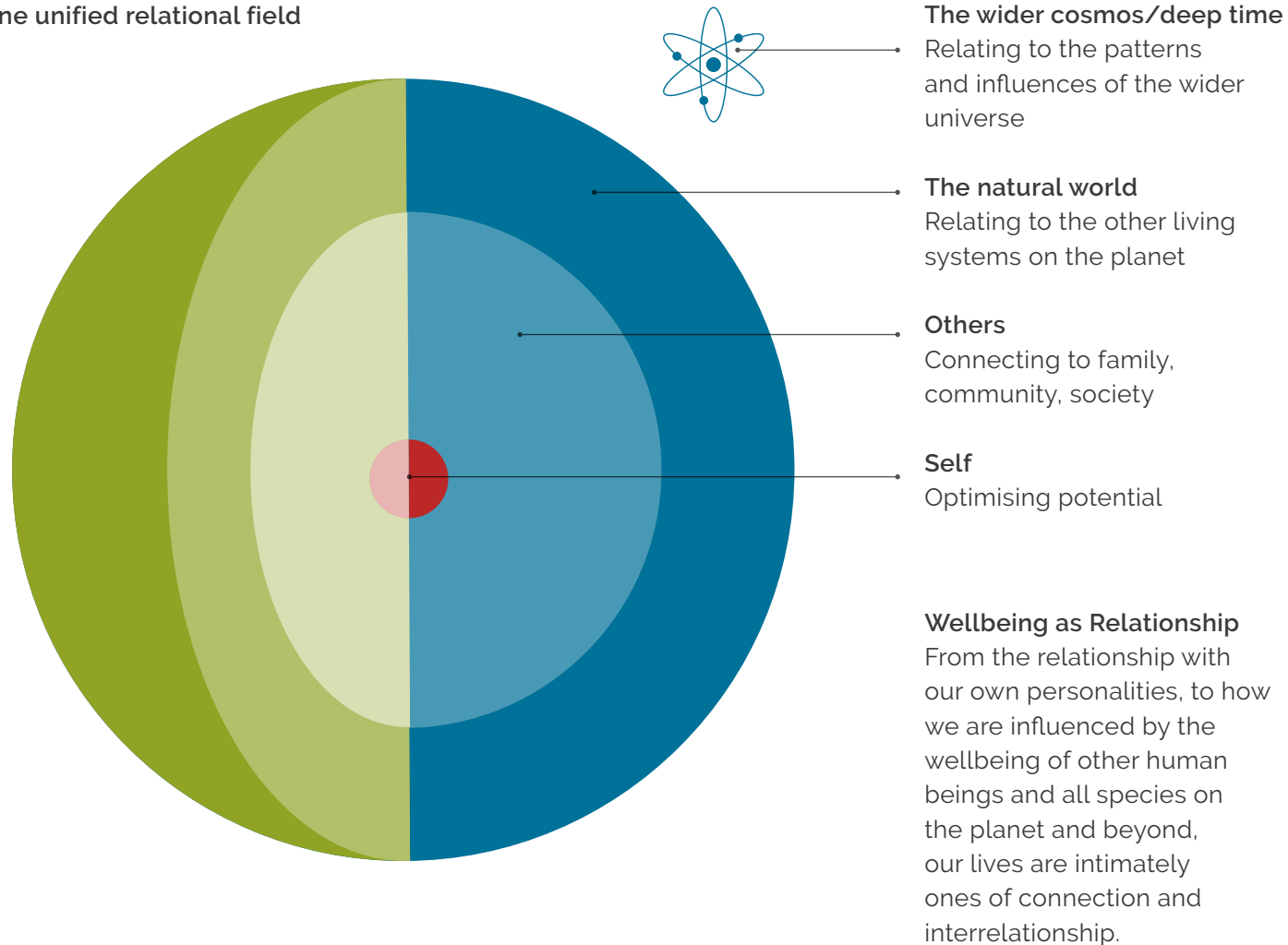


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# THE ECOLOGICAL SELF

One unified relational field



# COMPASSION FOR SELF

- Understanding why we are the way we are and the value of self-kindness.
  - Recognising suffering within ourselves and others.
- Responding to difficult and conflicting feelings and emotions.

# COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

- Understanding that other people see the world differently from ourselves.
  - Understanding that values, beliefs and behaviours are a reflection of genes, cultures and lived experiences.
  - Recognising the universality of human suffering.

# COMPASSION FOR THE NATURAL WORLD

- Understanding that everything is interconnected and that we share responsibility for creating a world fit for children.
  - Being motivated to act to prevent damage, alleviate suffering and protect future generations.



LOVE AND COMPASSION ARE NECESSITIES, NOT  
LUXURIES. WITHOUT THEM, HUMANITY CANNOT  
SURVIVE. I BELIEVE COMPASSION  
TO BE ONE OF THE FEW THINGS WE CAN  
PRACTICE THAT WILL BRING IMMEDIATE AND  
LONG-TERM HAPPINESS TO OUR LIVES

- DALAI LAMA XIV -

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