COMPASSION AND CODEPENDENCE

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At opposite ends of the nourishment spectrum are compassion and codependence. Although they share some superficial characteristics, and can sometimes be confused by even the most well-meaning and perceptive people, compassion and codependence actually directly oppose, antagonize and interfere with each other. Confronting this reality can be unsettling, but is ultimately liberating. What follow are a number of ways to explore the nourishment dynamics of these two modes of being within the framework of *Integral Lifework*, and thereby identify and transform such tendencies and patterns in our relationships.

MODES OF BEING

First let's look at some of the similarities. Both compassion and codependence are modes of being that stem from a desire to heal or nourish on some level. And for both it is important to distinguish each mode of being from actions or emotions with which they are frequently associated. Feelings of commiseration, kindness or sympathy may be present in both modes. As can a strong desire to remedy wrongs, heal what is broken, or relieve suffering in some way. Actions may on the surface seem to be similar as well. For instance, giving food to someone who is hungry, or attention and emotional support to someone who is hurting, or praise and encouragement to someone who believes they are disempowered. But by definition *modes of being* are not emotional states, states of mind, or even types of action; modes of being are an expression of who we are at any given moment. They are a natural overflowing of our essential characteristics into the world around us, in the most unedited and unfiltered ways. We are not striving to be compassionate or codependent, we simply are. These are the unselfconscious emanations of Self that interact with everything around us.

To understand how different these two modes of being are, consider the common evolution of *externally dependent* relationships between romantic partners. In these relationships, the focus is on receiving nourishment from external sources, either through the conscious demands we place on others, or by the unconscious expectations we have of them. The course of such a romance is predictable. First, there is a strong attraction and interest; a curiosity to understand, explore, and connect. Once there is mutual acknowledgement, other desires immediately begin to intrude: To be prematurely trusting and relax all personal boundaries. To quickly begin pleasurable intimate contact. To rapidly claim exclusivity or ownership in a public way. To monopolize each others' time and energy, dominating every activity and experience with togetherness. And, ultimately, to emotionally enmesh and no longer have self-confidence or even a well-defined identity separate from each other.

These patterns can become obsessive to the point of what are clearly controlling, manipulative and possessive behaviors. But, as dysfunctional as the relationship has become, a tacit agreement has been reached that the mutual need for *external dependence* is satisfied, and neither party wants to risk losing that satisfaction by challenging the relationship's dynamics. Over time, a sort of equilibrium is reached in which mutual benefits of the relationship are solidified; that is, the value and identity of *togetherness* becomes rigid and reflexive. The desirable or pleasurable experiences that were at first a matter of experiment and exploration become habitual demands. There must, according to externalized nourishment expectations, be regular intervals of shared experience, interaction, intimacy, demonstrated reliance and so forth, for these reinforce the illusion of togetherness. And, if these habits are interrupted or delayed in some way, it tends to cause fear, conflict, accusation, feelings of abandonment and even self-destructive despair. When togetherness habits are suspended for any length of time, the relationship begins to unravel completely, with each person feeling isolated, injured and abandoned to chaos and emptiness. Why? Because each party has become so dependent on the other that the only identity left to them is to become a helpless victim.

Now let's turn to the characteristics of an *internally empowered, interdependent* romantic partnership. Here we acknowledge our own responsibility for self-nourishment, and do not demand or expect another person to meet all of our needs. These relationships are grounded in shared values, mutual appreciation and goal alignment, but those conditions are less engineered or expected; instead they tend to happen spontaneously and serendipitously. The initial attraction, curiosity and desire to connect may still be present, but these impulses are managed and prioritized within a different context – the context of interdependent nourishment. There is sharing, but it isn't a desperate, clingy sort of exchange, it is the easy giving and receiving that has no strings attached, and which respects the personal boundaries of each party. There is shared pleasure, but it is celebratory rather than controlling or needy. There is honesty and openness, but it evolves casually and does not demand reciprocation or exclusivity. In an *internally empowered, interdependent* context, no one has responsibility over another's happiness, satisfaction or well-being. There are beneficial synergies and beautiful harmonies that might not exist without the relationship – which is ostensibly the purpose of relating to each other, after all – but there is no insistence on dependability, permanence or rigid routine. There is less habit, and more spontaneity. Togetherness is not an identity but a celebration of a each shared moment. So when interference with the connection occurs – when there is separation or even an end to certain aspects of the partnership – there may be recognition of loss and a time of grieving, but there is no sense of injury or abandonment. There is no panic in the face of chaos, and no descent into hopelessness or victimhood, because each person has remained whole within themselves.

What is happening here? Why are these two modes of being so different? In the case of *externally dependent* relationships, our affection and commitment are conditional; we must receive certain benefits to sustain the association. In *internally empowered, interdependent* relationships, our affection and commitment are not conditioned on the benefits we receive. But there is more to it than this. In *externally dependent* relationships, we have completely abdicated our responsibility to care for ourselves. We are not seeking a partner, friend or soul mate, we are seeking a parent. We are perpetuating a child-like dependence on another

person to feel safe, loved and whole. At the same time we are trying to become someone else's parent by allowing them to depend on us in the same way. In contrast, the parent-child dynamic is entirely absent in *internally empowered, interdependent* relationships. Each person is invested and skilled in caring for themselves with love, having become whole in the process, and thus able to share that whole, fully loved person with someone else. One mode is like a broken cup that can never be filled enough, and the other is like a flawless cup endlessly filled to overflowing. And this is how we can define the former mode of being as codependent, and the latter as authentically compassionate.

Of course, in the intricacies of day-to-day life, most of us are constantly navigating many different circles of intimacy, and our modes of being are expressed differently in different circumstances. Just because I have a healthy, interdependent relationship with my romantic partner does not mean I have a healthy, interdependent relationship with my boss at work. The society in which we live insinuates roles, responsibilities and other expectations into our various relationships as well. And then there are old, habitual patterns, established with family members when we were young, which still linger into the present. So can we ever be free? I think it is possible to first imagine our freedom, and then to cultivate a sense of liberation through interior disciplines that empower ownership of our own well-being. And I think it is possible to transcend the counterproductive patterns of our parent culture and family of origin – through rigorous practice of holistic self-care and techniques designed to overcome such barriers. These are some of the intended benefits of *Integral Lifework*. The result is not freedom in the sense of complete independence, because integral disciplines tend to reveal and reinforce an underlying interconnectedness of everyone and everything. This freedom is more about realizing what choices we have before us, the consequences of those choices, and how to go about making them consciously and compassionately.

Which brings us to defining yet another layer of what compassion and codependence really are.

BOUNDARIES

Authentic compassion cannot be sustained when its source has an incomplete purpose, a wounded heart or a broken will. And codependence likewise cannot endure a happy, content and fully nourished life. And yet both modes of being may be woven into our existence at different points in time, or in different arenas of interpersonal connection. So how can we distinguish one from the other? And how can we encourage and train ourselves onto the healthiest course?

Probably the most significant differentiator between compassion and codependence centers around personal boundaries. In *Integral Lifework*, boundaries are what regulate self-nourishment. They define the limits of Self and Other in the context of relationship and how those two energies interact. They allow us to function with a sense of safety and trust. If I have healthy, fully formed personal boundaries and am able to clearly and confidently express them, I am taking responsibility for nourishing myself. If I listen for, understand and respect the personal boundaries of others, I am also allowing them to take responsibility for nourishing themselves. In both cases, I am acknowledging a fundamental feature of compassion: empowered self-nourishment. If, on the other hand, I have trouble defining my own boundaries or understanding and respecting the boundaries of others, my emotional responses and behavior will tend to be codependent, and my ability to self-nourish and permit others to nourish themselves will be incomplete.

Here, then, are some examples of how personal boundaries function:

- **The Boundaries of Others –** In many Western cultures, we have a tendency to express boundaries in a forceful way. "Stop looking at me like that!" "Who do you think you are, touching me that way?!" "How dare you go through my things!" "I can't believe you just asked me to do that!" These are ways of expressing a perceived violation of the interpersonal trust that boundaries represent. However, not everyone is so direct. Sometimes facial expressions or body language are meant to convey a personal

boundary. A disapproving frown, the breaking of eye contact, holding up a restraining hand, a subtle shake of the head, a slight turning away, a flush of embarrassment and so forth are all means by which such boundaries may be communicated.

- Cultural standards of personal interaction regulate many boundaries. For instance, actions that are considered impolite, unethical, illegal or perverse – or which generally fly in the face of social mores – are usually violations of culturally defined boundaries. We may not take off someone else's clothes without implied or explicit consent, for example. We may not take someone else's things. We may not intrude on someone's personal life, and so on. And even though these boundaries tend to shift from generation to generation, vary greatly depending on parent culture, social setting and level of intimacy, or evolve over the course of a relationship…they are always present in some form.

- Learning how to navigate the boundaries of others is a chief right of passage to becoming an adult, and in ongoing social acceptance. Understanding what actions or statements are socially appropriate defines us as trustworthy people; it can determine whether we are included in social gatherings, or whether someone will find us appealing as a friend or lover. And all such "appropriateness" is a matter of interpreting and responding to boundaries in different situations, and thereby gaining access to the nourishment we need – or providing it for someone else. This is a dynamic and highly valued skill in our society.

- **Our Own Boundaries –** One way to describe personal boundaries of self is what level of interaction is comfortable for us, and what alienates or offends us. Just as with the boundaries of others, our personal borders will shift over time and adjust to different contexts of interaction. How much we are willing to disclose about ourselves, for example, will depend on the situation, with whom we are speaking, etc. It is always up to us to define and enforce those boundaries. We can't anticipate that even the most typical conventions will consistently be respected if we remain passive. Perhaps we

don't appreciate a coworker's amorous advances, for example. Or we may be flustered by a salesperson's attempt to gain personal information about us. We may sometimes feel we are being taken advantage of by a friend. And in each of these situations, if we don't assert our boundaries and communicate them clearly, a social trust could be violated.

It is also important to recognize that each person has a unique set of boundaries that vary from the cultural norm. For example, one person is shy and concerned about their physical appearance, and another extremely open and unconcerned. Depending on how far to one extreme or the other our boundary deviates from a perceived social standard, we may become self-conscious about it or even feel guilt or shame. But on some level we also know that feeling safe is necessary for us to nourish ourselves. Gazelle pausing at the river for a drink must be assured the lions won't eat them. We must find our own balance between personal boundaries that too rigid and prevent nourishment, and boundaries that are so flexible or porous that we lose our sense of self. In either case, the feeling of safety and empowerment is something we generate, and is not something that is defined by others.

How are these interpersonal boundaries formed? For most people, they are learned in early childhood through interaction with parents and socialization with other children. Many boundaries also seem to be natural reinforcement to innate individual characteristics. In *Integral Lifework,* this combination of early social programming and predetermined tendencies creates *chained associations*. The result is a reflexive way of interacting with the world that is for the most part unconscious. There can be unfortunate deficits to chained associations. If our parents tended toward indulgent or authoritarian parenting styles, for example, or if they were more absent than present during our formative years, we may have underdeveloped, rigidly overdeveloped or otherwise poorly functioning personal boundaries. And if our physiology skews our perceptions in some way, erratically influences our mood, or distracts us with strong

impulses, our ability to form healthy boundaries for ourselves and perceive those of others will be limited. Then again, it is also true that chained associations can work to our advantage if we had a healthy, happy childhood, or if innate abilities enhance the awareness and self-discipline that interpersonal boundaries require.

So with that brief introduction, let's examine what codependence and compassion look like with boundaries and nourishment in mind. The following chart describes four levels of codependence as it relates to *behavior that controls nourishment*. To reiterate, it is important to understand the interdependence of empowered self-nourishment, overall well-being, maintaining healthy personal boundaries, and respecting the boundaries of others. All of these rely on each other to function smoothly as a complete boundary system. Using the cup analogy again, if our cup has cracks in it (i.e. we can't maintain personal boundaries), we will be incapable of nourishing ourselves enough to be whole. And if we are constantly pouring ourselves out for everyone around us (i.e. not respecting the boundaries of others) we will likewise become empty. And when we hold others accountable for our emptiness, we naturally will manipulate all interactions to conform with that worldview.

	Codependence as Control Behavior	
	Active Codependent Controller	**Passive Codependent Controller**
Level 4: Abusive	Controller *knowingly* creates artificial crisis situations where another person is disempowered, cannot self-nourish, and is expected to rely on the Controller for help or remedy. Controller does not understand or respect boundaries set by others, and generally has underdeveloped personal boundaries in some areas, and rigidly overdeveloped boundaries in others. All boundaries frequently and intentionally become confused or enmeshed (i.e. overlapping or blurred together).	Controller *knowingly* creates artificial crisis situations where they disable or abdicate their own ability to self-nourish, expecting someone else to remedy the situation or rescue them. Controller does not understand or respect boundaries set by others, and generally has underdeveloped personal boundaries in some areas, and rigidly overdeveloped boundaries in others. All boundaries frequently and intentionally become confused or enmeshed.
Level 3: Neglectful	Controller *inadvertently or unknowingly* creates the same dynamic found in Level 4, often as the result of actions intended to be helpful.	Controller *inadvertently or unknowingly* creates the same dynamic found in Level 4, often as the result of actions intended to self-nourish.
Level 2: Compulsive	Controller compulsively interferes with or tries to take primary responsibility for another's routine self-nourishment. Or they attempt to compensate for an undernourished area in someone else. The boundaries of others may be understood, but they tend to be unintentionally violated. The controller also generally has underdeveloped personal boundaries in some areas, and rigidly overdeveloped boundaries in others. All boundaries can become temporarily confused or enmeshed as the result of an habitual need to help.	Controller compulsively sabotages or interferes with own self-nourishment, often rejecting appropriate help from others by setting unreasonable personal boundaries or unrealistic goals. The boundaries of others may be understood, but they tend to be unintentionally violated. The controller also usually has underdeveloped personal boundaries in some areas, and rigidly overdeveloped boundaries in others. All boundaries can become temporarily confused or enmeshed in an almost ritualized process of seeking help.
Level 1: Managed	A tendency or reflex to behave like Level 2 that is self-managed, but which may surface more strongly during stressful or crisis situations.	A tendency or reflex to behave like Level 2 that is self-managed, but which may surface more strongly during stressful or crisis situations.

It is easy for anyone to become codependent, and it is likely that we all have some codependent characteristics, usually more pronounced in one area than another. I may be jealous of romantic attention my partner receives from someone else, but happy and proud about my coworker's promotion. I may be angry that my neighbor is making too much noise at 2:00 am, but patient with my own barking dog. I may not be able to decline my mother's invitation for dinner (no matter how inconvenient the timing), but I can easily refuse buying a drink for an alcoholic acquaintance. In all of these cases, the first response is mainly codependent, and the second draws upon compassion. The revealing question is always "why am I feeling this way or making this choice?"

Let's examine how compassion can also be defined via personal boundaries and nourishment.

	Compassion as Action	
	Expressive Compassion	**Receptive Compassion**
Level 1: Dutiful or Reflexive	Responds to needs of others with a sense of duty, social obligation or guilt. Actively responds to suffering by focusing on immediate outcomes and offering concrete assistance to those who are not able to adequately self-nourish. Less able to empower others to self-nourish and concerned mainly with basic needs. The boundaries of others are not clearly understood, but when clarified they are respected. Personal boundaries may also become confused, temporarily enmeshed or obscured in the course of helping others.	Welcomes assistance from others to meet basic needs from a place of duty, social conformance or guilt. Less interested in learning how to self-nourish or expand self-nourishment into multiple dimensions. Personal boundaries are often underdeveloped, and the boundaries of others may become confused, temporarily enmeshed or obscured in the course of receiving help.

Level 2: **Empathic**	Empathizes with needs and suffering of others. Focused on relieving the symptoms of suffering and expanding recipient's knowledge of how to self-nourish, both to avoid suffering and meet more complex needs. Personal boundaries are well-developed and able to flex in response new contexts and environments, but are not always clearly communicated. Boundaries of others are clearly perceived, understood and (most of the time) respected. The causes of suffering may not always be appreciated or adequately addressed.	Welcomes assistance to relieve own suffering, expand knowledge of self-nourishment in multiple dimensions, and care for self. Takes responsibility for own well-being in most areas. Personal boundaries are well-developed and able to flex with new contexts and environments, but extreme or crisis situations can erode them. Boundaries of others are clearly perceived, understood and (most of the time) respected. The causes of one's own suffering may not always be appreciated or adequately addressed.
Level 3: **Intuitive**	From intuitive observation and understanding, the focus shifts to *consciously and actively* relieving underlying causes of suffering, and fully nourishing recipients in holistic ways. Boundaries are elastic, clearly delineated and firm, and are less affected by crisis situations.	Through intuitive discovery and insight, *consciously and actively* seeks out ways to address underlying causes of own suffering. Takes responsibility for own well-being and self-nourishment in all areas. Boundaries are elastic, clearly delineated and firm, and are less affected by crisis situations.
Level 4: **Love-Consciousness**	Nourishment to others and relief of suffering occurs mainly as a consequence of *unconsciously being* rather than concerted effort. Focus shifts to sharing more radical, transformative and transcendent approaches and practices. Personal boundaries are less consciously maintained, and rather than being elastic they remain porous; a transformative filter for everything they interact with. The boundaries of others and boundaries of self ultimately become unitive (i.e. All-inclusive, one and the same, undifferentiated). Thus having compassion for self then means having compassion for All, and vice versa.	Continuously submerged in *unconscious ways of being* that include transformative approaches and practices, which in turn fully self-nourish in holistic ways. The boundaries of others and boundaries of self become unitive. Thus having compassion for self means having compassion for All, and vice versa.

In reviewing these two charts, areas of potential confusion can emerge. For instance, undifferentiated boundaries can either be enmeshed (overlapping or blurred together) or unitive (All-inclusive, one and the same). So to clarify: With enmeshment, the result is always dysfunctional, preventing self-nourishment and promoting suffering. In the case of unitive boundaries, the result is always spiritually transcendent, nourishing self and relieving suffering. Over time, therefore, it is easy to assess which is occurring. Another confusing instance might be compulsive codependence masquerading as dutiful compassion. From the outside the behaviors appear similar, but results will consistently diverge over time. If the impulse is codependent, the giver will probably experience burnout or the receiver will self-destruct in some way. If the impulse is compassionate, the receiver will likely heal and grow, and the giver will be less attached to outcomes. Only with lack of insight, self-distraction or denial could these differences go unnoticed. However, under certain circumstances – such as when we first fall in love, amid existential crises, when we are misled or have incomplete information, etc. – there can be bewilderment. This is why it is important to develop discernment, self-awareness and patience within our decision making, and to create a supportive community of wise and truly compassionate people.

Still, the opportunity exists for compassion to degrade into codependence, and codependence to be transformed into compassion. At the present time, I call my father regularly because I enjoy speaking with him, care about his well-being, and value his perspective on many subjects. But there was a time when I called him out of fear for his life due to his self-destructive behaviors, and, unsolicited, I was attempting to control his ability to heal and self-nourish. Before that, there were times I called because I wanted his approval of my choices. Before that, I would get angry with him and argue with him as a necessary part of my individuation process. So the act of calling my father has been driven by many different impulses – some compassionate and healthy, and some codependent and unhealthy. One action appears supportive but is injurious to nourishment. Another action appears injurious but is supportive to the nourishment process. Adding to this, we can also make choices that are compassionate in part and codependent in part. Humans are complicated beings.

What can we do? If we are unsure of why we are pursuing some approach or other, or why we are reacting to a situation in some way, we can look deeply into ourselves for guidance. Here are some questions that, if they are examined with careful meditation and introspection, can reveal our underlying motivations:

- Why am I doing this?
- Am I anxious about this decision? Why or why not?
- Am I trying to control another person's choices? Why or why not?
- Do I believe I can take care of myself? Why or why not?
- Am I rescuing others from their own mistakes? Why or why not?
- Do I expect others to help me when I make mistakes? Why or why not?
- Do I become frustrated when others don't listen to me? Why or why not?
- Am I upset or depressed when I don't get my way? Why or why not?
- Am I preventing someone from learning how to nourish themselves? Why or why not?
- Am I being honest with myself about my motivations? Why or why not?

This touches on an essential component of any truly transformative practice: clarifying and modifying our most fundamental intentions. This is how compassion evolves. In the early stages, we are concerned with relieving pain and promoting more pleasurable experiences. Later, we begin to desire sustained healing and a sense of well-being. Then perhaps we wish to grow in multidimensional ways, overcoming obstacles that hindered us in the past. And then we may seek to transform our entire being, our whole consciousness, into something positive, healing and loving. After that, we begin contributing all that we are to the good of All, aligning our identity with universal mechanism of compassionate goodwill. But

throughout this evolution, we are still, as the saying goes, chopping wood and carrying water. We are still eating and drinking, going to work, caring for loved ones and obeying the laws of the land. Our actions may appear superficially similar, but our guiding intentionality shifts. Either we will relax into a greater interconnectedness that dissolves the stubborn, controlling and codependent ego, or we will frantically rationalize all that we do, casting about for ways to maintain an entitled sense of Me and Mine. This evolution takes time, and we can't skip any of the steps. We must be patient.

AUTHENTIC COMPASSION

It is tempting to create some sort of checklist for compassionately being. If we could just know what buttons to push and which hoops to jump through, we could know for certain we are on the right track. But like most multidimensional conditions, compassion assiduously avoids rigid formulas and classifications. However, there are qualities that regularly intersect with compassionately being, and holding these gently in our mind, heart, body and spirit for a time can help open a window of understanding into the highest levels of love. Here is a brief glimpse of some of those qualities:

- The quality of ***acquiescence.*** Acceptance and letting go. Forgiving without judgmental attitudes. Giving without a second thought. Unselfconscious action.

- The quality of ***spaciousness.*** Openness and elasticity. Inner stillness and quietude. Patience and endurance. Limitless possibility.

- The quality of ***freedom.*** No holding back or fencing in. No conditions or demands. No desire to control. No "must have" or "must do" or "must know." Unrestrained laughter.

- The quality of ***discernment.*** A synthesis of intuitive knowing, the wisdom of experience, somatic awareness, empathy, collaborative understanding and spiritual insight. Separating wants from needs. Identifying cycles and correlations. Seeing *what is* clearly.

- The quality of ***faith.*** Hoping for something not immediately evident, not obviously possible, but ultimately true. Trusting in the power of spirit and the soul's wisdom. Undaunted courage.

- The quality of ***healing.*** Relief from suffering. Wholeness and completeness. Joy and contentment. Balanced energy. Harmonized patterns.

- The quality of ***transcendence.*** Viewing existence from a higher vantage point, over a longer scale of time and causality, and without attachment to outcomes.

- The quality of ***transformation.*** New modes of consciousness and being. New levels of love and new avenues to express them. Spontaneous creation.

These qualities are intriguing, but how does authentic compassion navigate the real world? Let's look at an example. If I want to empower someone who has been abused or oppressed, how can I do this in the most compassionate way? Should I champion their cause on their behalf? Should I whisk them away from their environment to a less hateful place? If they are truly and completely helpless, unable to even conceive of a way out, I might try to promote their cause or insulate them from the environment that so enslaved them. But when a victim has even the slightest glimmer of yearning to escape their condition, my primary responsibility is to create space and safety for them to find their own way to freedom. In other words, my role should be to reveal what is happening and what is possible – by sharing what I observe is occurring, and demonstrating an example of self-liberation. Secondarily, if they deliberately seek me out for help, I may reveal the existence of tools, resources, encouragement and so on to help them in their journey, but only to the point where they become educated about options

and possible next steps, and can then take action on their own; only until they are self-empowered. These are compassionate responses. I cannot become their savior or their sole motivation for positive change. I cannot take away their power by making changes for them. I cannot nag them into making healthy decisions or command them to seek help. As compassionate as these actions might appear, they would be codependent responses.

Real world opportunities to choose compassion or codependence crop up every day. We may have insight into the causes of a stranger's suffering, as well as what changes may benefit their situation. For our coworkers, boss or friends, we may know of proven tools that could liberate them from their particular dilemmas. We may see our loved ones make poor choices or begin to self-destruct. But it is not our responsibility to reflexively immerse ourselves in the journeys of others. Rather, we must consider where to apply our energies, and when to share what we have learned, with compassion for ourselves and a conscious vision for our life. As an *Integral Lifework* practitioner, I am confronted daily with situations that inspire competing modes of being when I interact with clients. I must be careful not to proselytize, manipulate, or undermine or overwhelm their own innate impulse to heal and grow. I must, in essence, take a non-destructive approach by creating opportunities for insight, discovery and self-governed accomplishment. Forcing my ideas on someone when they are struggling to empower themselves would be disastrous. This does not mean I can never be directive in therapeutic relationships, but that direction ideally becomes an invitation, a collaborative exploration or a shared *aha*. Otherwise, my ideal quick fix could become another's slow undoing. I must always trust that *Integral Lifework* clients will find the strength and wisdom within themselves to self-nourish. With or without my help, I believe they will discover the right tools for self-determinant transformation and the courage to follow through.

So to be truly caring and helpful people, we must aim to embody the compassionate qualities discussed here in every moment as a natural expression of who we are; we must first find our own way out of codependent responses to healthy boundaries and relationships. We can learn to exemplify and challenge and reveal, but we can never control. We can listen, and be

patient, and collaborate, and create safe space, and have discernment and faith and – completely and continually – let go. Have I ever failed in compassionately being and slipped into a codependent mode? I did so yesterday and likely will tomorrow. So first and foremost I should have compassion for my own imperfections. After all, I cannot force myself into a model of compassionately being, either. I will be patient and kind in my own tumultuous process of discovery and integration. I will create safe space for myself to make mistakes and learn. I will be free to laugh at myself and have faith that, when the time is right, I shall figure it out. In these ways I can nourish those I care about by being whole myself, and avoid the inevitable compassion fatigue that occurs when my inner world is out of balance.