

Compassion: A New Paradigm?



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Simple Essence

Imagine a friend who has suffered a loss . . .

What arises within you?

A sense of their suffering?

Caring toward them?

A wish that they not suffer – and desire to help if you can?

Three Essential Elements of Compassion

Empathy

Benevolence

Motivation

The “Base Case” of Compassion

Empathy – extended to someone we like or is inside the circle of “us”

Benevolence – expressed in soft, tender, gentle ways

Motivation – applied to the immediacy of the suffering at hand, and perhaps to its psychological or interpersonal causes

This “base case” of compassion is beautiful,
and very common.

Imagine a world without it.

And – is this all that compassion is?

Expanded Opportunities

While appreciating the simple essence of compassion, voices are calling for a more expansive, even radical vision . . .

. . . that responds to our times of:

- differences, divisiveness, and polarization
- numbing, indifference, callousness
- powerful systemic factors (e.g., wealth inequality, rising authoritarianism)

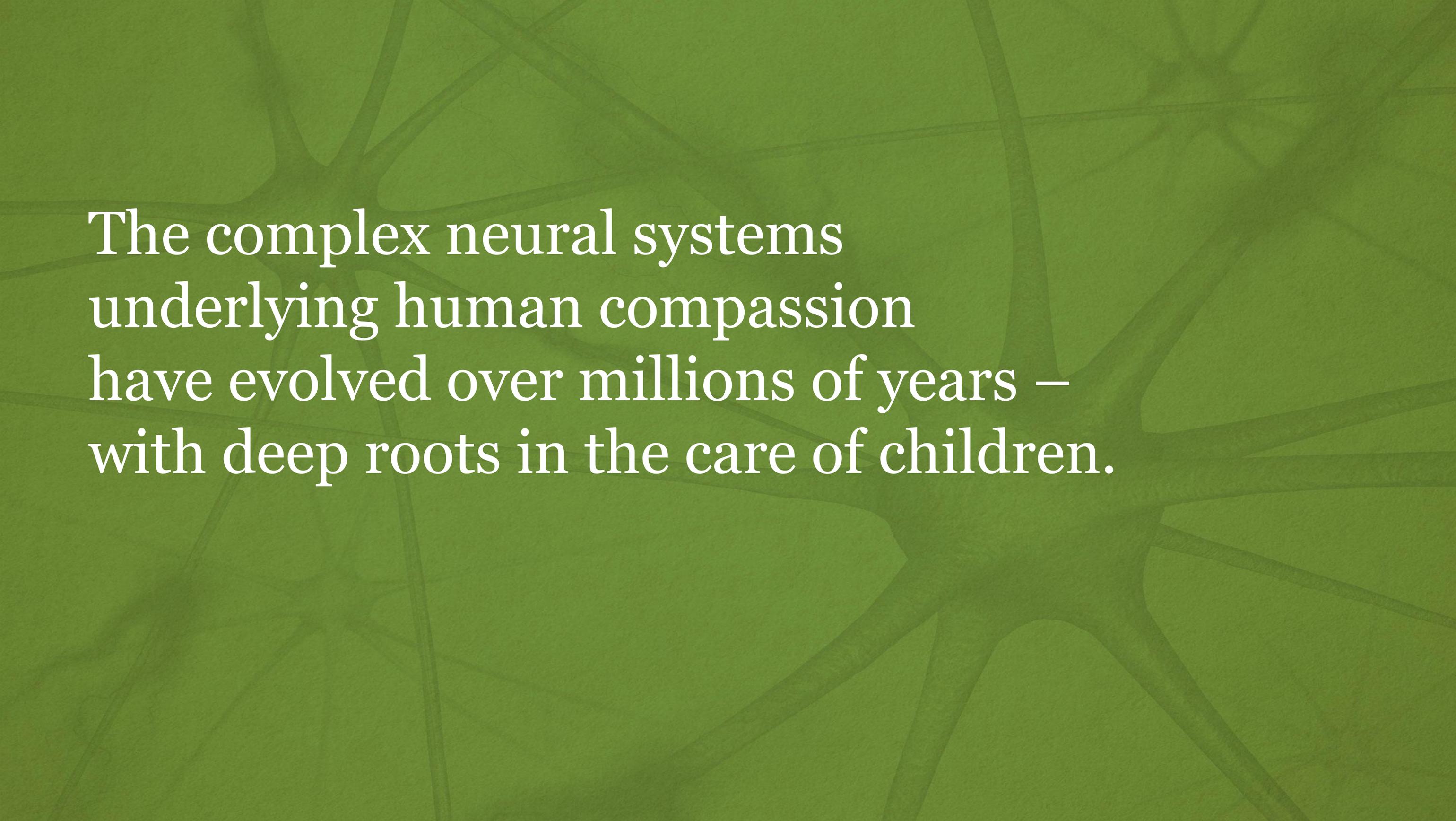
Expansive Compassion

Empathy – extended to those we dislike or oppose, in a larger circle of moral concern

Benevolence – expressed in ways that can be bold, courageous, persistent, penetrating, even “fierce”

Motivation – applied to the upstream, systemic causes of suffering, not just their downstream effects

Widening the Circle of “Us”



The complex neural systems
underlying human compassion
have evolved over millions of years –
with deep roots in the care of children.

Our hominin ancestors began manufacturing stone tools over 3 million years ago – with brains a third the size of ours.

As the brain got bigger, childhood grew longer – requiring more complex compassionate care and eventually “the village it takes to raise a child.”

Compassion and other prosocial capabilities enabled the brain to get bigger, which fostered greater prosocial capabilities in an upward spiral.

Humans have walked the earth for 300,000 years.

Until farming-and-herding emerged 10,000 years ago, they lived in small hunter-gatherer bands.

Dependent on each other for raw survival, the foundation of social life was “caring-and-sharing” – compassion and justice – rather than the “holding-and-controlling” of other primate species.

The circle of “us” was obvious in daily life.

And reinforced in conflicts with “them.”

Empathy – the foundation of compassion – was naturally evoked in the conditions of daily life. People did not have to deliberately cultivate it.

But today we are surrounded and affected by people who are “them.”

That sense of difference undermines empathy – including in its neural circuitry.

And fosters divisiveness, callousness, and conflicts.

So we need to consciously look for similarities, shared values, common ground.

Bring to mind someone who is moderately challenging for you . . .

. . . And then take a minute to consider what you share in common, and notice how that affects your empathy and compassion for that person.

At this time in our history,
there is nothing more important
than mindful efforts
to expand the circle of “us”
to include all of humanity . . .

. . . and all of life itself.

Wisdom, Courage, Passion

Moved to relieve suffering in others as well as in ourselves, sometimes it is necessary and skillful to be:

Firm . . . Assertive . . . Intense . . . Direct . . .
Unapologetic . . . Loud . . . Uncompromising .
. . . Passionate . . . Fiery . . . Morally confident
. . . Critical . . . Willing for others to be
uncomfortable . . . “Fierce” . . .

To expand our expressions of compassion,
we need :

- Wisdom – discernment, insight, self-regulation
- Courage – grit, bravery, persistence
- Passion – vitality, space for intensity

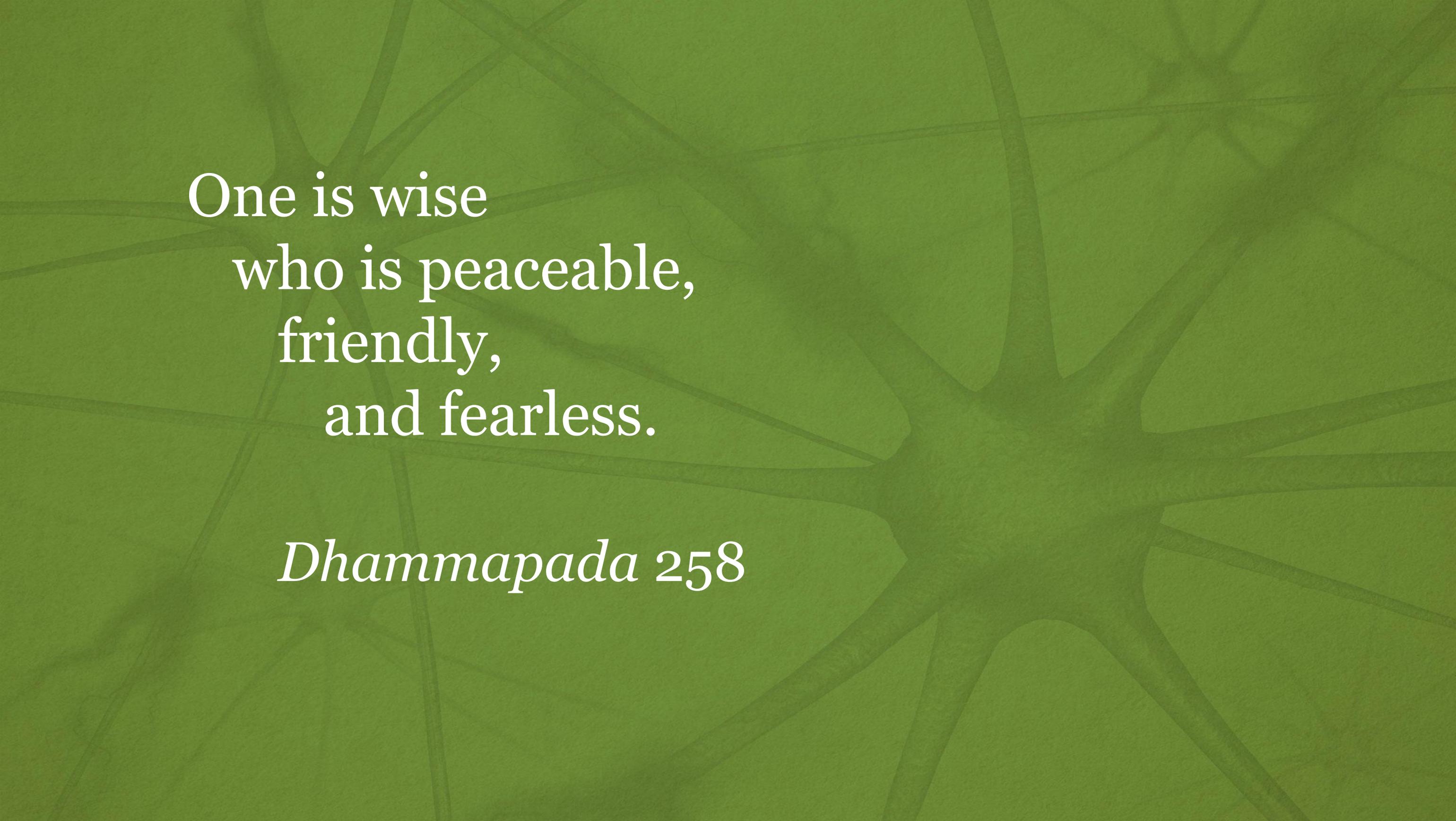
Still: hostility, vengeance, cruelty, and hatred
do not hijack you. See the work of Chris
Germer, Kristin Neff, Mamphela Ramphele,
Jeremy Lent, Paul Gilbert, and others.

There is dignity, gravity, seriousness,
moral weight – and humility.

Think of Greta Thunberg, Malala, Nelson
Mandela. Not dysregulated, not afflicted with
rancor or malice.

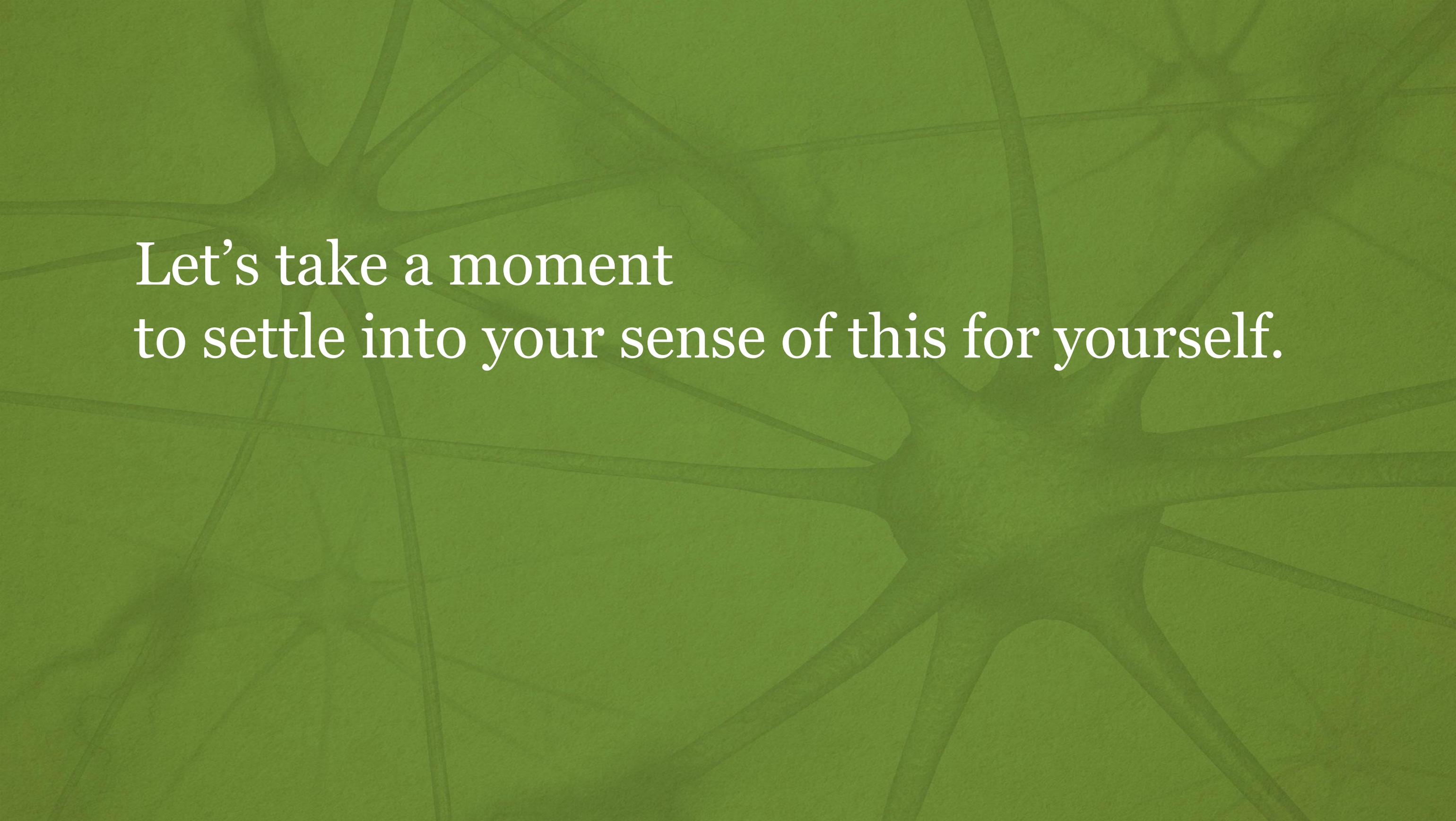
Or think of Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin
Luther King, Jr.





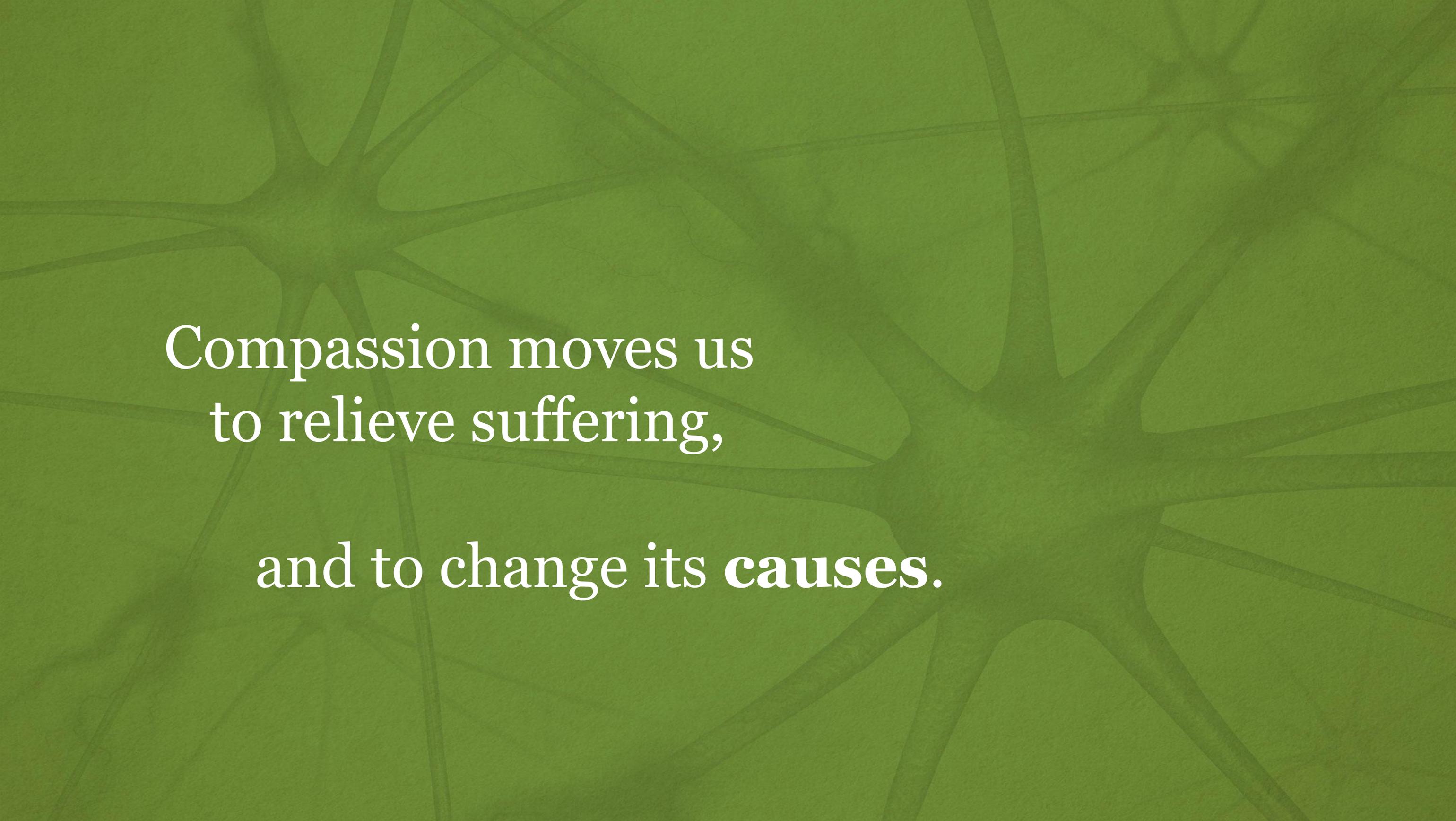
One is wise
who is peaceable,
friendly,
and fearless.

Dhammapada 258



Let's take a moment
to settle into *your* sense of this for *yourself*.

Changing Systemic Causes

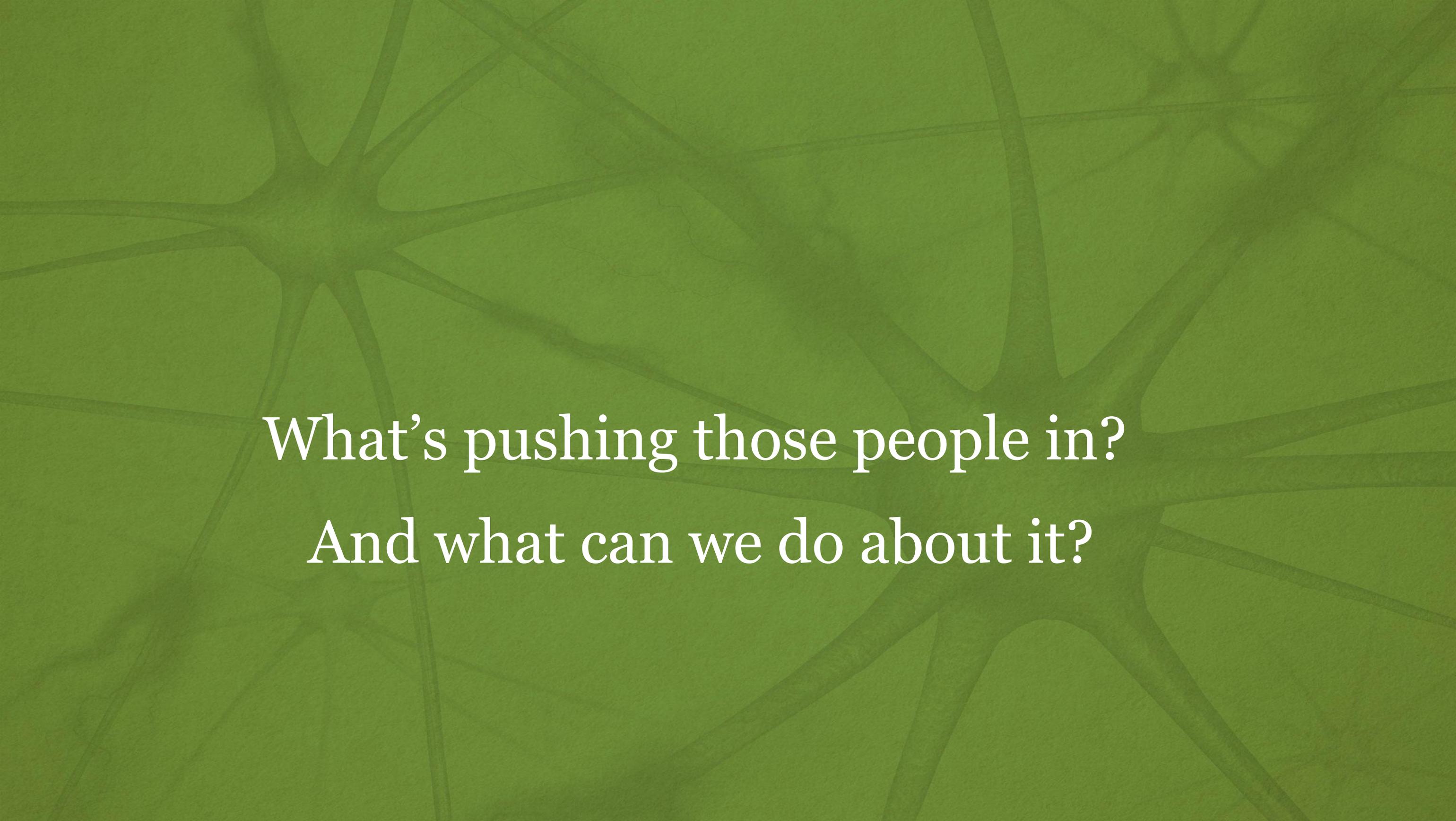


Compassion moves us
to relieve suffering,
and to change its **causes**.

Many of us spend our days helping others
out of the river of suffering.

It's necessary work, good work.

And from time to time we look . . .
upstream.



What's pushing those people in?
And what can we do about it?

Many forces push people into the river of suffering and block them from getting out. It can seem too complicated to fix. But the essence is usually simple:

**We've departed from caring-and-sharing –
compassion and justice –
as the foundation of all societies.**

And for the past 10,000 years, it's been Game of Thrones for most people.

The Un-Common Good Today

Half of us live in a dictatorship, just 6% in full democracy.

Many inequalities for women and other groups

Stolen wealth – trillions of dollars – from slavery, colonialism

8% of the world's people hold 85% of its riches; 8 men hold as much wealth as 4 billion people.

Political influence is tied to money:

- USA, 2000-2016: fossil fuel industry spent \$2 billion against climate action
- Worldwide, \$1 trillion in bribes paid each year

After we recognize systemic causes of suffering, we ask, “What can we do about them?”

In every significant past change to these systemic causes, and in every realistic plan today, we see one key thing.

What is it?

It is effective **collective action**.

In their small bands, our ancestors solved their problems **together**.

Their control of the bullies and freeloaders who would otherwise dominate was a necessary condition for the common good.

And in our lifetimes we've seen collective action for civil rights, environmentalism, anti-racism, women's rights, respect for children, and more.

In the body, enzymes speed up positive reactions.

In humanity altogether – the body politic – collective action is like an enzyme that accelerates positive change.

The main determining force for how this century turns out will be **the amount of collective action** we can mobilize for the common good.

How can we accelerate the rate of effective collective action in the 21st century?

With compassion

Deep in our biology,
compassion brings us together.

And together we can change the world.

Expanding into the 21st Century

The new, expanded paradigm of compassion
brings us home to our past.

Our biological nature is to **care and share.**
With everyone included, fierce commitments
to each other, and acting together.

This is the normal human condition.
We just have to get normal again!

And this expanded paradigm of compassion
can carry us into the future.

It took 10,000 years to get here,
and it will take a while to get to a better place, with:

- Individuals caring about “them,” speaking out against injustice, and actively supporting causes.
- Small groups forming around real projects
- Prosocial organizations forming alliances at big scales to solve big problems

To support this expanded paradigm,
in individuals, groups, and alliances,
we established the **Global Compassion Coalition**.

We promote the study, cultivation, application,
and advocacy of compassion.

We're young and growing
and would love your support.

Each of us has been loved into being
by one or more people.

In the same way, we can love others into being.

And by joining together at the global scale
we can love into being
the world that we long for

with compassion at its heart.

Thank You

