

Daoyin, or Some Ways to Avoid Compassion Fatigue

This is a difficult class, a difficult subject. I have learned from my own experience with the subject and from other students about some of these difficulties. Each quarter I offer a few words of wisdom that have helped me and others.

1. If you get upset, as you will, you don't have to be stoic. It **IS** disturbing.
2. Don't back away, but take care of yourself in all ways, especially this quarter. In the words of Cynthia Keenan:

"Try not to sink and try to cultivate that which uplifts."

3. When or if you begin to question basic human goodness, remember that war and violence and suffering are only a small part of being human. Sometimes I think about this quote from Andre Gide:

"Know that joy is rarer, more difficult, and more beautiful than sadness. Once you make this all important discovery, you must embrace joy as a moral obligation."

4. Consciously think differently. Be dispassionate within the compassion; look for patterns, systematic analysis.
5. Go easy on your friends; complain to us. Set aside a time to end immersion in the subject. Find a way to leave the work. My advice: don't read about war and atrocities after 8PM; do something physical (break a sweat!), go dancing, do yoga at least once or twice a week; love someone, something, an animal, a virtual friend, etc. Eat well, sleep well. Find a noble joy (Music? Poetry? Art? Beauty? Nature?). ***Come into the present.***

6. Think about these quotes:

"Purity does not lie in a separation from the universe," he wrote, "but in a deeper penetration of it." — *Karl Popper*

"Only the good has depth and can be radical." — *Hannah Arendt*

"The victims become as bad as or worse than their persecutors; suffering is not ennobling but brutalizing." — *Euripides*

"More people have died at fishing, I read once, than at any other human activity including war." — *Annie Dillard*

7. If it just gets to be too much, watch a comedy (I used the Adam Sandler movie, *Waterboy* one time and laughed and laughed). Stay away from *Sophie's Choice*, *Breaking The Waves* with Emily Watson, *The Piano*, *Beaches*, and anything with Magnolias in the title, unless you really want to sob cathartically. One class liked to have occasional potlucks to "debrief" and watch a movie. One group went dancing together.
8. Social activism can energize a person. Write a letter, join a cause, or speak your truth to power. If the situation seems right, I also like to ask rude questions to people in power who, in my humble opinion, have failed in what they have done and in what they have failed to do.
9. Please remember, there isn't anything you feel that I haven't felt too.