

## **Compassion, Mercy & Love: Lessons from Guanyin on Creating a More Peaceful World -- *by Andrea Buscemi***

Good morning.

This morning, I want to share some reflections on compassion, mercy, and love—and how these qualities have shaped the way I respond to suffering, both my own and that of others. In particular, I want to explore how we meet suffering—especially anger and fear—without turning away, and how acting compassionately actually leads to peace.

When I talk about compassion, mercy, and love, I'm not talking about ending, curing, or fixing suffering. I'm talking about the practice of staying present with it in a way that allows peace to emerge. These qualities reflect a deep respect and even benevolence for the First Noble Truth—the truth of suffering. Suffering isn't noble because it's good or desirable; it's noble because it tells the truth. And telling the truth is what makes liberation possible. When we strive to be perfect or eliminate suffering, anger, or fear, we often disconnect ourselves from our own humanity.

This understanding can only be cultivated through practice, not perfection or control. Through my own practice—and through my lens as a military veteran—I've seen how the belief that there is a “perfect” way to be or respond is a form of dualistic thinking that disconnects my heart from my mind. When I've done that, I have fundamentally misunderstood the teaching of the first noble truth. Peace doesn't come from denying suffering or negative feelings like anger and fear, but from perceiving them wisely.

At OZS, we begin our practice by chanting the Heart Sutra, which references Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. In Chinese Buddhism,

Avalokiteśvara is known as Guanyin—the one who hears the cries of the world. Across cultures and traditions, Guanyin is revered as a protector of those in distress or anyone in trouble. What stands out to me is that her compassion begins with listening, not fixing. She hears before she acts. She shows us what compassion looks like when it's lived, not idealized.

For many veterans, our nervous systems were shaped by vigilance and survival. Anger and fear can be trained, protective responses. My practice hasn't erased that anger or fear, but it has helped me relate to it with compassion rather than shame or even more fear. It has taken ongoing practice to show up more fully in my life and live more from the body and less from that reactionary state. When feelings like anger or fear are met with compassion rather than shame, they lose their grip, allowing me to respond with loving-kindness rather than react.

To be clear, I haven't perfected this. I'm an emotional and highly empathic person, and anger and fear can be catching. I've learned that if my response to anger and fear is more anger and fear, I am only contributing to my own suffering and perpetuating our collective samsara. It has taken a lot of practice, but I believe I am better able to discern the difference between empathy and compassion and, therefore, act more peacefully. Empathy says, "I feel what you feel," whereas compassion asks, "How can I help?" Empathy connects us, but compassion allows for wise, non-reactive action. Guanyin hears the suffering of the world without being overwhelmed because her compassion arises from steadiness, not reactivity.

At OZS, we end our practice by reciting the four bodhisattva vows. When I say them, I often imagine Guanyin saying them alongside me—as a reminder that compassion, especially toward ourselves, reconnects heart and mind. When we practice compassion, we act more peacefully and help create the conditions for collective liberation. For me, compassion isn't about fixing the world. It's about

staying present enough to hear its cries—including my own—and respond to them with patience and grace.

Thank you for letting me share. I'd like to end with this question: Through the lens of compassion, what does creating a more peaceful world look like, starting with you?