



## From Victim to Liberator: The Power of Compassion

by Pamela Bloom

PAMELA BLOOM is an award-winning author, intuitive counselor and vibrational sound healer whose passion for spiritual exploration has taken her through many disciplines, including Judaism, Tibetan Buddhism, Western mysticism, energy healing and the Divine Feminine.

An intuitive opening around the age of thirty inspired her to develop a unique form of energy healing that combines clairvoyant insight with the medium of her singing voice. During the early 90s she honed this skill as a counselor on staff at the Manhattan Center for Living, founded by Marianne Williamson to assist those with life-challenging illnesses. She is also a third-degree Reiki master and Johrei practitioner and has experience as a hospital chaplain.

She presently offers both private healing sessions combined with intuitive soul readings as well as workshops in creativity and meditation.

For over 25 years Pamela has also been a highly published writer in many fields. As a music critic she has been a Contributing Editor at top entertainment publications; as a travel writer she received the Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Award twice for her guidebooks on Brazil and the Amazon forest; she also has won awards for fiction. Her articles on lifestyle topics have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Village Voice*, *New York Post* and *Parabola*, *Science of Mind*, *New Age Journal*, and *Elle* magazines, among others. She is also the author of *Buddhist Acts of Compassion*, *On the Wings of Angels* (about angel lore) and *The Heart Sutra*, in *The Dalai Lama's Altar Kit*.

Among Pamela's most recent works are *The Power of Compassion: Stories that Open the Heart, Heal the Soul and Change the World* (Hampton Roads, 2010), and *Heaven Speaks: Intimate Interviews with Illuminated Souls* (with co-author Carla Flack) (Soul Connections Unlimited, 2010)

I was on a meditation retreat in the south of France when a visiting master was introduced to the group. An audience of over three hundred Western students of Buddhism waited quietly for him to speak. He was about forty years old, quite tall and broad-shouldered for a Tibetan, with an enormous presence like a mountain, though he barely smiled. As he began to talk he repeatedly wiped at his draining right eye, as if something in him was constantly crying, but his voice remained strong. Soon his personal story unfolded.

For fifteen years, as a young man, this Rinpoche and his elderly master had been imprisoned inside Tibet as victims of Communist Chinese persecution. Although he did not go into details, the conditions they had had to endure were of the roughest sort, with many days spent chained together in their dark, dirty cell. The Communist, he said, not content with normal torture, had been determined to persecute devout Tibetans in the worst possible way by denying them the right to meditate; every time their eyes closed they were beaten. But because the Communist did not understand that Tibetans actually meditate with their eyes open, the two were able to continue their prayers and meditations in secret. Unfortunately, as the years went by,

the abuse only got worse; in fact, Rinpoche's constantly tearing eye was the result of beatings from that time. He had even had to endure the loss of his master, who died next to him one night in their cell. After many years of torture, escape from this living hell had come to seem impossible. But then one day, out of the blue, two of the jailers addressed him directly: "What are you doing?" they said. "No matter what we do to you, now matter how we hurt you, nothing moves you." Apparently the jailers had practiced all sorts of martial arts, but they had finally met a power they didn't understand. "You know something we don't," they told him, "and because we are the jailers, we must learn it in order to become stronger than you."

So because he had no other weapon, he taught his jailers the very practice he and his master had been doing—the Tibetan meditation called Tonglen, which is the practice of breathing in the suffering of others and breathing out light. It was the same practice that many of us had been learning at this retreat with some struggle, for to actually take on the suffering of others with no sense of martyrdom or resentment is a great affront to one's ego.

So, to imagine that this monk and his elderly master had found the

inspiration to not only practice compassion but to teach it in the middle of hell to the very beings who were the agents of their suffering . . . well, that was a level of compassion that transcends the ordinary mind. And yet, that is the essence of Buddhist compassion. And as a result, as Rinpoche told it, the unbelievable happened. One day, some time later, the Communist jailers suddenly announced to their Tibetan captive that they were releasing him from jail. No reason. Just his time was up. And they set him free. And that is how he came to be before us on that bright sunny day in the south of France, with his eye running like a persistent rain of remembrance, his gaze brilliantly clear, his posture immovable like a warrior's.

In fact, as I remember it now, there was not even a trace of resentment in his voice, only perhaps the bittersweet irony that his master had not lived to see that somewhere between the in-breath and the out-breath, the boundary between persecutor and persecuted had finally dissolved.

Source: From THE POWER OF COMPASSION: Stories that Open the Heart, Heal the Soul, and Change the World (Hampton Roads, 2010).

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