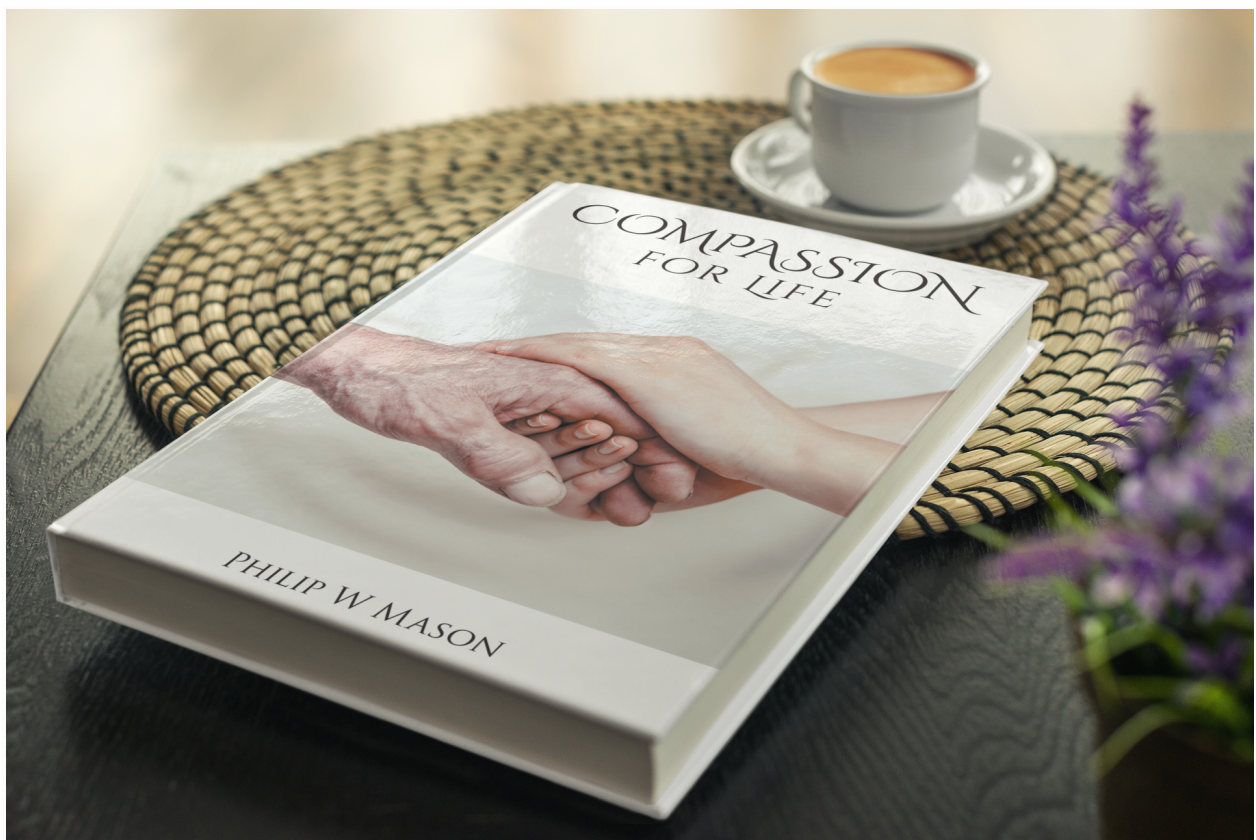


Welcome to my blog!

Posted on December 19, 2022 by Philip W. Mason



Here are some thoughts about my book that you might find useful as you read through it. It is relatively short, with close to fifty-five pages that contain significant text. The main message of the book is very similar to that found in the book *The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse*: true friends make us feel like a valued human being, and are a precious gift.

The book provides a detailed discussion about the background and development of concepts related to compassion and self-compassion. It explores these emotions' relationships to other emotions, and provides all kinds of windows into understanding these relationships

The book has a chapter entitled "An Example of Having and Sharing Love." It contains the story of Lee, who was a homeless man I met up with three years ago and who slept in the woods in a tent in the middle of winter when the temperature was 20F. The chapter describes in detail his plight under those difficult conditions. I befriended him, took him into my home and worked with him towards reestablishing himself into society. The moral of the story, explained at the end, is to be compassionate towards the homeless and help them, because you may end up in their shoes at some point.

The basic tenet of the book is that if two people are suffering from the same difficulty and start talking about it, an interesting chain of events can occur. When one person starts talking about their problem, they are being self-compassionate. The other person can strongly feel their suffering, because they have the same problem. Afterwards, the listening person usually offers words of encouragement: they have compassion. Then the initial listener has self-compassion and describes their own suffering back to initial talker. This first talker then usually reciprocates and offers encouraging words. And on it goes. At some point they often start discussing ways to help alleviate their own suffering and each other's at the same time. They are then both feeling compassion and self-compassion at the same time, which can form a strong bond/friendship. This is a powerful interaction, and great energy can come from it to try to solve their problem.

The classic example is when two cancer patients discuss their shared illness with each other, and a strong bond/friendship forms. Soldiers in battle experience a similar bond. And there are limitless other examples.

I believe everyone has a powerful gift to offer the world. Everyone. I saw a *60 Minutes* segment a few years ago on a young man with severe brain damage. He was blind, couldn't tie his shoes and dress himself, and needed help eating. And he had a powerful gift. His family was wealthy and could afford to nurture his gift. He was a prodigy, a master piano player. One particularly amazing capability he had was to be given a song name off the top of someone's head (in this case the reporter's) and play it with emotion, and then take the intended style of the song and switch it to another immediately and play it equally well, with equal emotion. During the segment I saw, he played the song in three or four styles, as though the song had been written in each of them. If everyone's powerful gift could be equally nurtured, think about what an amazing world this would be. My key passion in life is learning what others' passions are and then talking about it with them. Most everyone I have met has a strong passion with a positive tone. Some people may even have multiple passions: even better. This is their gift(s) that they would like to share with the world, and they are eager to tell me about it. Perhaps, collectively, we could tap into that strong exuberance, similar to the prodigy of a piano player, and make great things happen from it.

Of course, I am just another man. My gift is a vivid imagination. I have been blessed by many rich experiences in my life, and have used my gift to learn what I can from my experiences. If my book were to become a hit, please treat me like an ordinary individual and don't make much to-do about me. The current state governor of my home state, Maine, has a great saying: "Stop fighting each other and start fighting problems." In a similar fashion, I think we should stop making celebrities of each other and start working together to solve the world's problems. Some work can be difficult at times, of course, and with heart, grit, and perseverance, success at the end can cause the strong emotion of delayed gratification. It is satisfying to me, and can make me happy at times. Even if success has not occurred, I still reflect on what went wrong and learn what to do right next time, and I am gratified at having learned something. I also get some happiness from that, although usually to a much lesser degree than if I had succeeded.

Happiness can come from feeling the uplifting push that comes from a positive emotion. True happiness never directly comes from feeling a negative emotion. When we feel a negative emotion, often instinct kicks in and causes our response. If we are able to interject a cognitive thought, we have the option of making our response negative, nothing, or positive. If the response is negative, then some form of harm (physical, mental, and/or emotional) can occur. If instead the response is nothing, our emotions and feelings stay the same. Alternatively, if our response is positive, then often good things come from it (also physical, mental, and/or emotional). The direction of the response is a choice we can make. With practice, we can consciously make the response positive, resulting in good things. In other words, having a positive attitude helps. It comes from practice, and I believe it can be learned and strengthened by everyone.

In contrast, having a negative emotion can cause suffering. But by having self-compassion, one can help turn it around and ease their suffering. Alternatively, if someone else has compassion for the person who is suffering, he or she helps that person turn their thoughts from negative to positive. This helps the suffering person feel better. In other words, move in the direction of the positive emotion. If the emotion is strong enough, it can lead to happiness. True happiness is a special emotion. It only comes after any positive emotion is felt strongly.

If one becomes happy from success associated with feeling a negative emotion, great harm can come, and often on a continual basis. That type of emotional response can be addictive, and has led to some of the great tragedies the world has experienced. If the addiction is strong, it can be difficult if not impossible to overcome, and to turn the negative thoughts to positive ones. I believe there is a glimmer of hope for everyone, no matter how severe the addiction to negative thoughts or the mistake is. In my opinion, no one should be sentenced to death, no matter how heinous the crime. Redemption is possible for everyone. To put another human being to death for a negative-emotion addiction or mistake is to give up on hope for that person. When that feeling of hope we have for another person is extinguished, something dies inside of us: our incentive to have compassion. This causes a feeling of loss, both for the person and our own compassion, and we are saddened. There is nothing more that compassion can do.

Instead, have compassion for them and try to help. They are redeemable and have the possibility of becoming a healthy, happy person again. Compassion is the missing link that can induce positive emotions in another person and move them one step closer to true happiness. I think having compassion may truly be the meaning of life. It sure makes me feel a lot better.

The question comes up as to the correctness and validity of most of these ideas of mine in the book. I am not an expert in most all of these topics. I have only used some anecdotal personal experiences, my lifetime's acquired knowledge, some research from Wikipedia, and a couple of concepts from Christopher Germer in his book listed in the references section. Therefore, others will need to determine the degree of their validity. However, I did find that during the research and the writing, and later reviewing the content of the book after completion, that the ideas make logical sense, fit in with the results of the relevant literature, and, together as a whole, are a complete story that seems to hang together. As for validity, the jury is out.

Encouraging the world to contemplate its accumulated life's knowledge and philosophies (ideas they hold true), helps set the stage for people to become/improve as critical thinkers when they are presented with new information. A critical thinker collects all the information she has about a topic (previous knowledge base and any new information), examines it all carefully, determines if it agrees with her prior understanding of the topic, and then extracts the truth to the best of her ability. She can then use her findings to better contemplate her own opinions, and change them if necessary. Once her own analysis is completed, she can thoughtfully communicate to other people what she believes the truth to be, including what she might have learned from the exercise. This careful thought process to try to determine the truth about a topic can lead to a healthy discourse between people sharing their opinions, beliefs, and ideas. An understanding of how one can achieve the result of a healthy discourse is indeed the main purpose of this book.

The book is primarily intended to serve as a tool to foster a healthy exchange of thought between people in order to make life better for ourselves, others, and the world in general. The content is intended to act as a foundation for the generation of new ideas, ideas from which to build things, and possibly have a positive impact on the world. I hope you enjoy reading it. The fun part comes when you start discussing the book with other people, share what you have learned, and start discussing your own ideas with each other.

The gift that I have to offer the world is my vivid imagination. That is why I don't like to do repetitive work. Once I've learned something, I add it quickly to my existing experience base and use my imagination to generate new ideas from this mixture. If I get to try out my new ideas I can learn something new, which I can add to my experience base. And on it goes. This approach is used in the scientific method. It starts with an idea (theory). That idea is generated by combining a new piece of information with existing knowledge, and mixing them with imagination. The new idea perhaps gets

tested and the outcome is the piece of new knowledge that gets added to the experience. The additional knowledge can then be used to help generate new, better ideas.

The scientific method is loosely applied to the example of the mother and baby at the beginning of the book. I first notice that mother and baby are experiencing the emotions of self-compassion, compassion, pain, and suffering. My idea (theory) then describes how those emotions interact individually for mother and baby, and also describes the interaction of the emotions between mother and baby. I then explore the process of what I surmise mother and baby to be feeling during the process. What I find in this case is that my idea (theory) matches well with my observed interactions. I can now add this information as both evidence and knowledge to my experience; namely, add the description of this natural phenomenon that causes the rich interaction of emotions between baby and mother, and how it can form a strong bond between the two.

Note that when scientists come up with theories, they are merely expressing an idea in a formal way. They then apply the scientific method to their theory through the process of an experiment, and determine if their theory—really an educated guess—is supported by the experiment or not. Actually, this is the natural process by which everyone, all forms of life, learn to react and grow in their environment: by trial and error. Evolution can even be thought of as life learning a better characteristic for survival. The scientific method is a natural method for learning new things.

To go even further, what drives evolution is thought to be random (stochastic) misplacements of atoms and molecules of DNA. At the most basic level, what causes these random events to occur? The answer is embodied in the realm of quantum physics. There is a fundamental statement in physics called the “uncertainty principle.” The principle states that two properties (such as proton speed and position) cannot both be predicted precisely and simultaneously in the future by knowing their starting conditions (speed and position at the beginning of the experiment). In other words, there is natural, unexplained, and random variation occurring in any system over time, and we do not have a window to look into and see what is causing it to behave the way it does. No matter how precise the experimental apparatus is set up to be, nature always adds its own little bit of variation which we cannot account for. No matter how hard we have tried, we don’t know what is ultimately behind the most basic of mysteries and secrets of quantum physics.

However, remember that the uncertainty principle has no real theory behind it. It is just an observed principle. So the question comes up: should we continue the search to understand the source of that variation? We are, after all, an inquisitive species and have an extreme thirst for exploration and knowledge. It is this thirst that makes us the human beings we are. There was allegedly a similar question posed in the late 1800s to James Clerk Maxwell: “should we continue searching for new physics?” He was a famous physicist who came up with the full theory to describe how electricity and magnetism behave and interact with each other. His theory describes the fundamental knowledge behind how electrical (as opposed to electronic) devices work, such as power-line grids and toasters. He was supposedly asked what remained at the time to be done in physics. He replied that only the physical constants need to be precisely determined. During this time, other researchers

remained inquisitive; however, shortly thereafter quantum physics was discovered. New imaginative theories were developed based on new experimental observations to explain the motions and interactions of these new particles and phenomena. From the fundamental knowledge of quantum physics comes inventions such as the transistor, which is the workhorse of all modern-day electronics, such as the cellphone and the internet cloud, the laser, nuclear power plants, LED lightbulbs, LED TVs, and the list goes on.

We are now in a situation similar to when the alleged question was asked of Maxwell. To the limit of our knowledge, there is not a cause as to why the natural variation described by the uncertainty principle behaves the way it does. Do we just accept it and work to refine the theory of quantum mechanics, or do we search further? That is a decision that society makes. The information age, supported substantially by the discovery of quantum physics, brought with it the ability to access information and knowledge easily. The next natural step forward is to use that quick access to knowledge as a strong foundation, and then build from it by combining it with our imaginations and personal, diverse wealths of experiences. From that powerfully diverse mix we can then formulate ideas, by ourselves and with others, to make this world a better place. It is the search for new knowledge, and the imaginative ideas it brings with it, that can result in powerful new ways to make life better. I believe we should keep looking.

If everyone in society could use their god-given talents for contributing vibrant ideas to the mix and share them with others, imagine the great possibilities we could have to make this world a better place to live. Why not start something called “the age of sharing ideas”? With that mindset, everyone’s strong natural talents could be fostered and tapped to generate robust, impactful ideas for sharing and discussing with others. This sharing of ideas, especially the ones from god-given talents and compassionate friendships, would encourage people to work together to generate solutions to the problems society has. Just as with the example at the beginning of the blog, where two cancer patients had the same problem they were trying to solve, the generic sharing of compassion and self-compassion with each other produces a wealth of shared ideas to solve that problem. And at the same time, this type of sharing interaction can dramatically produce and strengthen friendships and the associated bond people feel with each other. The ability to share is what makes life so rich and full of surprises. Oh, the things we could learn and be able to do together! What a wondrous time it is to be alive.

Happy reading!

My oldest daughter recently graduated from Worcester Polytechnic Institute with a Bachelor of Science degree in physics. She has worked extremely hard to earn that degree, as she does with most anything in life, and I couldn’t be any more proud of her and all that she has accomplished in life. My youngest daughter has been through a lot of difficult times medically for most of her life. During all that suffering, she has maintained a positive attitude and has also worked very hard to become the exceptionally fine young woman she is today. I believe in her being able to continue to persevere and even thrive. Her natural gift is to have compassion. She is able to show it as well as

anyone else that I have ever known, and I couldn't be more proud of her. Both of my daughters are using their god-given talents to make this world a better place for themselves and others. Miss you two. Love to you both. 😊

Philip W Mason

Gorham, Maine

December 15, 2022