

COVID-19 pandemic brought upon us various restrictions, including months of social distancing at best, or lonely self-isolation and sense of loss as one of the hardest experiences we have been put through.

For many, our home became our workplace, virtual reality our offices or lecture halls. Most of us never ceased to communicate, all through these unprecedented times, we've been sending messages to one another, continuing with our studies, our work, our friendships. And maybe, in some sense, interpersonal communication, though mediated by technology, have been keeping us alive? Or maybe, if we haven't yet appreciated the power of authentic communication, we can see it as a possibility for restoring human connection?

There are many different kinds of dialogues, whether a simple chat, work conversation or philosophical debate. While authentic communication is about relating to what's fresh and alive - within ourselves and others.

And sometimes what's most alive is pain, annoyance, impatience or overwhelm. Without trying to correct any of these states of mind and heart, we can see them as valuable pointers towards the living qualities of our being. Buddhist teachings on Buddha Nature, or Tathagatagarbha, point out that we all possess compassionate nature which expresses itself as inherent sensitivity within our ordinary experience. Everyone feels sad, angry or resentful at times. But most of us interpret these experiences as weakness or over-sensitivity. Therefore, we don't want to talk about them, as if they were something to be ashamed of.

That's why we need pointers because these qualities, such as ease and compassion, are not readily visible or obvious to us, right within difficult experiences. They can be experienced but they cannot be perceived or pinpointed. Yet strangely, we can communicate them to others.

We cannot bypass the natural pain of life—the pain of change and transformation. Such pain is natural in the way giving birth, growing teeth, or having a period is painful. This pain does not indicate that there is something wrong with you or your relationships. It comes with life, naturally. Often it indicates growth. But it is up to you whether you allow the guilt to bury you alive, or whether you grow out of it.

Once you allow yourself to experience the pain of life, to feel the burden of guilt, sorrow, and regret, you can use it as soil. The dark place you find yourself in can easily be misinterpreted as a grave. But consider that perhaps you have been planted. All seeds start growing in darkness before sprouting into the light.

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