



None
knows
the
weight
of
another's
burden.

George Herbert
(1593 - 1633)
Poet

A value of community is the chance to understand another's experience. We grow by seeing the world through another's eyes, by walking a mile in another's shoes. Insight can expand our capacity for empathy, even as it is impossible to truly know how someone else feels.

Compassion is based in the humility of not fully knowing.

Unknowing, we must trust in another's self-assessment. We believe whatever emotion they name. We meet them at whatever severity they describe. Without full understanding of another's interior world, we cannot assume we know their needs. We must hear their request, trust in their conclusions, honor their assessment of what will be comforting or helpful or kind.

Unknowing, we draw from our own experience without daring to paint another's canvas. In seeking to empathize, we may look for resonance within our own world. We might consider similar situations we have faced, and recall how we felt or what we did. In compassion, we always make a, never completely accurate, imaginative leap. Any helping hand must be offered with a humble heart.

Unknowing, we trust in mystery. Without complete access to understanding, we create space for something beyond ourselves to be present. Compassion may be between two people, but it is enlivened by a spirit that transcends both. That spirit is active in mutual discovery, in unexpected insight, perhaps in a still small voice that leads the way to a healing connection. Something mysterious bridges the gap of our separate experiences.

A greater knowing may be found in the impulse to care.

How do I respect the presence of the unknown? How can I care with humility?