



Two Wings Over Gaza:

Wisdom, Compassion, and Living the Paradox

The Razor's Edge of Witnessing

In recent weeks, as the horror in Gaza continues to unfold, I found myself caught in a paradox I could not easily resolve. On Facebook, a post on 27 August 2025 by Anne Sweet [link](#) sparked a fierce and heartfelt exchange. Jared Howe spoke of the shocking recognition of perfection even in the midst of atrocity. Frank Youakim pointed to the raising of consciousness as the only way to bring about collective change. Blake Ludwig named the intuition that something even deeper and more vital is needed right now. My own contribution emerged in dialogue with theirs: a reflection on the impossibility—and the necessity—of holding two seemingly opposite truths together.



Two Real Responses

On one side, there is the living realisation that reality is always, in this very moment, Love made manifest. However distorted, violent, or incomprehensible events may seem, nothing falls outside of the Whole.

On the other side, there is the raw human response: grief, anger, torment, rage at the suffering we are capable of inflicting on one another. To feel this is not weakness, but the ground of compassion—the recognition of suffering and the longing for its release. To turn away from this is to turn away from our humanity.

The Challenge of Holding Both

The challenge is how to hold these two truths in a single embrace, without either diluting or erasing the other. Wisdom without compassion becomes cold and abstract, flattening the lived reality of anguish. Compassion without wisdom becomes reactive, easily consumed by despair or rage. We as humans are the threshold between the limitless and the limited, the place where these two currents meet.

This is not a place of balance—that would suggest a safe compromise—but a place of creative tension, a crucible where something new can be born. To live with this tension, without rushing to resolve it, is what it means to



inhabit the ground of being. The paradox itself becomes fertile, and our task is simply to stay present until the next step shows itself.

The Two Wings of Enlightenment

Buddhism names these the two wings of enlightenment: wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). Like the wings of a bird, neither alone can fly. Together, they carry awakening into the world.

Wisdom sees the perfection of being; compassion feels the reality of suffering. Wisdom without compassion risks drifting into detachment; compassion without wisdom risks burning out in despair. Only together do they reveal their true power. The perfection of being and the reality of suffering are not competing accounts of reality, but two perspectives of the same whole.

The Threshold Within and Without

In my earlier essay *The War Within*, I explored how inner conflict mirrors outer conflict, and how coherence is not achieved by suppressing one side of the struggle but by allowing the tension itself to ripen into coherence. Gaza, and crises like it, demand the same from us collectively. We cannot resolve them by denying either perfection or pain, but by inhabiting the war within until a deeper coherence emerges.

The Practice of Not-Knowing

Similarly, in *The Honesty of Staying with What Is*, I reflected with Bayo Akomolafe on the importance of not-knowing—of resisting the pressure to fix or to collapse complexity into false clarity. Not-knowing is not passivity; it is a form of trust. It allows us to stay present to the unbearable without reducing it, and from that presence something unexpected may arise.

Here, wisdom and compassion fold back into each other: wisdom recognises the limits of our knowing, compassion allows us to remain tender within that uncertainty. Together, they open a space in which the unforeseen becomes possible.

Beyond Fixing: Creative Response

This, I believe, is what is being asked of us now: to bear both wings, even in their contradiction, and to remain in the uneasiness of not knowing how to respond. Out of this bearing, creative responses can emerge—responses that may not look like direct solutions to the horrors we witness, yet still carry the seed of transformation.

As Frank wrote, the most important thing we can do is raise consciousness—our own and others'. Not as an escape from the world, but as the only ground from which real change can arise. And as Blake reminded us, there is another deeper, more vital shift needed right now—one that is spiritual at its root.



Living the Ground of Being

So I stay with the uncomfortable space of not-knowing, trusting that by holding both the perfection that underlies all things and the raw reality of human suffering, space opens for something real to arise. That response may not answer Gaza directly. It may come as a gesture of love, a work of art, an act of courage, or a new way of being together.

To live in this way is to inhabit the ground of being: to bear the paradox without resolving it, to let wisdom and compassion stretch their wings together. Only then can something new take flight—something rooted in love, yet responsive to suffering; something fragile, yet carrying the possibility of a world transformed.

Reflection

This essay grapples with a real-life issue that is deeply challenging, and it finds echo in two other essays you can explore here: [*The Unshakable Ground*](#), which invites us to discover the ever-present stability beneath the turmoil; and [*The Question of Embodiment*](#), which explores the paradox between the freedom of pure being and the grounded clarity of life lived in the body. Together, they form a subtle conversation about presence, paradox, and how we move—as individuals and as witnesses—through times that demand both love and clarity. Exploring this paradox is the essence of what I am attempting with this blog: to stay available to the tension between limitlessness and limitation, and to see what new life can emerge there.