



Day 14

True Compassion

Our faith traditions tell us we are supposed to be patient, kind, and generous, but sometimes that's just plain hard to do. Life is challenging. People are too. This is why it is important to learn to treat ourselves kindly—to treat ourselves as lovingly and tenderly as we would a dear friend or a precious child. Instead of being disappointed in ourselves for missing the mark, or failing at embodying the spiritual virtues to which we aspire, we can choose another course of action: self-compassion.

In every spiritual tradition, compassion is highly valued. Compassion for ourselves, however, has often been aligned with self-absorption or selfishness. And we are not taught, nor encouraged, how to be self-compassionate.

In truth, self-compassion is one of the most powerful spiritual virtues we can adopt to walk peaceably in the world. First, we must learn to walk peaceably with ourselves. Then we can learn to walk this way with others. We cannot exhibit true compassion for others if we have not cultivated it for ourselves.

Going Deeper

1. Self-assess and reflect: How skilled are you at self-compassion? Do you talk nicely to yourself or are you self-critical? Do you make kind choices for yourself or do you tend to push yourself? Do you have high expectations of yourself and find fault with yourself if you don't meet them?
2. Reflect on this teaching about self-compassion by the Buddha: "You can search throughout the entire universe for someone who is more deserving of your love and affection than you are yourself, and that person is not to be found anywhere. You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe deserve your love and affection." What stirs in you when you read this?
3. Right now, place your hand over your heart and offer self-compassion to yourself, saying "I am enough." Breathe in, breathe out. Allow a sense of "enoughness" to wash through you. Feel the transformative power of knowing you *are* good enough—just as you are.



Day 26

Opening Up, Letting Go

Sometimes our minds feel rigid and tight, too full of conversation, input, and chatter. As our technology-based society continues to pick up pace, offering us unlimited data and boundless opportunities to do more, life can begin to feel overwhelming. I call this feeling the “too-muchness of life.”

When we feel that life is too much, we know that it would be good for us to turn inward—get still, pray, or meditate—but our mind and body are moving too quickly to do so. It is wise at times like these to give ourselves time and space to settle down. When the mind feels tight like a steel band, the body responding with tension, consider taking yourself to the edge, literally, to a place whose geography is spacious—vast, boundless and open.

You can do this by placing yourself in the healing hands of Mother Nature. Stand on the top of a hill or mountain so you have a wide view. Go to the shore and stand at the ocean’s edge. No mountain, no shore? Gaze at a rolling landscape. Focus on the horizon and locate the place where the sky meets the land. Turn your face to the sweeping blue sky. Allow the vastness of the universe to open you to feelings of interior spaciousness.

Going Deeper

1. When we are feeling shut down, it is up to us to open wide. Brain Gym experts tell us that every twenty minutes we should shift our focus from what we are concentrating on up close to that of a visual landscape. This reboots the brain, balances its functions, and brings the body-mind back into good working order.
2. To open up: The Creator has placed within our glance the perfect tools for opening to inner peace through spaciousness: sky, mountains, shore and horizon. Place yourself in one of these and stand tall. Close your eyes. Open your arms wide, bend back a little, and open some more. Expand your heart center. Turn your face to the sky. Breathe.
3. To let go: Prayerfully invite the Divine One to enter your heart. Release what constrains or burdens you. Let it all go. Allow waves of release to wash over you. Give thanks for the bounty of nature, for the power of open spaces to restore and rejuvenate you.

