



# TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

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## Compassion

## Wisdom Story



### Introduction to the Theme

Compassion is a core value for us. In our second principle, we affirm and promote *justice, equity, and compassion in human relations*. We begin with the inherent worth and dignity of every person and immediately bring compassion into the equation. The words in the second principle articulate the gold standard necessary to maximize what is possible in human relationships.

We affirm that justice must prevail in human relations; that justice is the basis for the world we would create. We begin with justice because, based on the rule of law, it establishes the common ground upon which we all stand.

Through the application of justice, we submit to laws that govern our behavior. We are, we say, a nation of laws, which affirms that no one is above the law. With regard to people, we say that justice is blind, but justice must often go beyond the law, especially with unjust laws. Theologian Joseph Sittler wrote, "Justice is love operating at a distance." Such love is a tough love, a love practiced in detachment. Because of this, justice is significant, but not sufficient.

We then add equity to our principled equation of right action. The application of justice is modified by equity, which allows Lady Justice to lift the blindfold to look at individuals and their circumstances, to see the individual and respond contextually rather than impartially. In words of condemnation, Rafael Sabatini said, "With you it is always the law, never equity." The reality is that we need both. Equity takes into account mitigating factors. It takes the long view, which includes the possibility of

(Continued on page 6)

### Compassion & Building Beloved Community

The Beloved Community is impossible without compassion. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "The aftermath of violence is bitterness. The aftermath of non-violence is the creation of Beloved Community, so that when the battle is over, a new relationship comes into being. The end is reconciliation. The end is redemption. This is the love that may well be the salvation of our civilization." Love is important. Compassion is essential. The Latin root of passion, *pati*, means to suffer. The prefix "com" means "with." Compassion goes beyond "suffering with." It recognizes our common humanity and evokes a desire to help, to alleviate the suffering, which binds people closer together. The ties that bind are an essential aspect of beloved community because they acknowledge and transcend difference.

*Touchstones is committed to exploring liberal theology. This journal is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations. For daily meditations, photos, and more visit/like Touchstones at <https://www.facebook.com/Touchpossibility/>*

### The Monk and the Scorpion

*an ancient tale, adapted*

As was his early morning custom, the monk went on a walking meditation from the monastery to and around the pond. He walked with great mindfulness. With four slow steps he breathed in slowly. With the next four steps he breathed out slowly. The rhythm of his breathing and walking were so deeply connected that he did not have to count his steps to match his breathing. He simply walked with great attention to all that surrounded him. He was grateful for the beauty that he saw. He took in the colors, smells, and sounds as he walked. His crimson robes flowed gently in the cool breeze. As he approached the pond, he saw the dancing reflection of sunlight on the rippling water.



When he reached the pond, he took a seat on a large rock beside a weeping willow tree that stood at the water's edge. He closed his eyes and began meditating. Though deep in meditation, he was startled by unexpected sound.

(Continued on page 2)

## Building Beloved Community

## Nature of Compassion

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

"Plop." The monk stood and looked in the direction of the noise. He saw near the water's edge a scorpion splashing in the water where it had fallen off of a low-hanging branch of the willow tree.

Without hesitation, the monk walked to the pond, knelt, and reached out his hand to gently scoop up the drowning creature. As he did this, a woman passing by stopped to watch what was going on. The monk lifted the scorpion out of the



water, only to feel a sharp and painful sting. He was so startled that he dropped the scorpion back into the water. Plop!

The scorpion began thrashing about again, and again the monk reached his hand into the water to save it, only to have the scorpion sting him again. Plop! And so it went. Scoop! Sting! Plop!—Scoop! Sting! Plop! The monk was beginning to feel the effects of the venom.

The woman who was watching could keep quiet no longer. "What is wrong with you," she said. "If you keep trying to rescue the scorpion, you may end up in the water yourself." The monk looked at her with determined eyes and replied softly, "Thank you for your concern." He reached into the water one more time. Although the scorpion stung him again, the monk was able to drop it on dry ground, and the scorpion scurried away.

The monk returned to the stone and sat down again. He said to the woman, "Please understand that the scorpion meant me no harm. It was simply its nature to sting me because it felt threatened. We all act out of our nature. I have been practicing loving-kindness for years and now my nature is to be compassionate. The scorpion could not stop what it was doing, and neither could I."

Source: Touchstones

## A Luminous Force

### The Charter for Compassion

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and put another there, and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, ...with absolute..., equity and respect.

It is ...necessary in... public and private life to refrain ...from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently..., to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We ...have failed to live compassionately and ...some have ...increased ...human misery in the name of religion.

We ...call upon all... to restore compassion to the center of morality and religion, to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate; to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures; to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity; to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings, even ...enemies.



We ...need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in ... determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological, and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

Source: full text at <http://charterforcompassion.org/> (2009)

## Spiritual Practice

### Cultivating Compassion

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

"Compassion doesn't always call for grand or heroic gestures. It asks you to find in your heart the simple but profound willingness to be present, with a commitment to end sorrow and contribute to the well-being and ease of all beings. A word of kindness, a loving touch, a patient presence, a willingness to step beyond your fears and reactions are all gestures of compassion that can transform a moment of fear or pain. Aligning yourself with ...compassion, you are learning to listen to the cries of the world," writes Christina Feldman.

Feldman states that compassion grows out of having to deal with tragedy, loss, suffering, and pain. Although our usual strategy is to run from



these disagreeable situations, it is better to work with them as they surface in our experiences. Daily life presents us with innumerable occasions and people who make us uncomfortable. Instead of closing down, ...manifest the compassion ...within us by opening our hearts:

[Feldman says,] 'Sometimes we are so accustomed to living in the house of intolerance and blame that we no longer even question it. We believe that, because we carry ...resistance and impatience within ourselves, they will be with us until we die. The path of compassion asks us to overturn our habits, beliefs, opinions, and prejudices, to understand ...hearts can be transformed ... [when] we are ...still, receptive and aware.'

We can change our lives and become more compassionate to ourselves and others. But it takes practice in patience, letting go of our egocentric needs, accepting impermanence, and befriending our aversion and resistance to people, places, and things.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/view/10050/compassion>



## Readings from the Common Bowl

**Day 1:** "Compassion is not a virtue—it is a commitment. It's not something we have or don't have—it's something we choose to practice." Brené Brown



**Day 2:** "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." Dalai Lama

**Day 3:** "What I've come to learn is that the world is never saved in grand messianic gestures, but in the simple accumulation of gentle, soft, almost invisible acts of compassion." Chris Abani

**Day 4:** "Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity." Pema Chödrön

**Day 5:** "Make no judgments where you have no compassion." Anne McCaffrey

**Day 6:** "Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion and the beginning of morality." Ian McEwan

**Day 7:** "There were different kinds of strength. I knew that now. It didn't always come from a knife or a willingness to fight. Sometimes it came from endurance, where the well ran deep and quiet. Sometimes it came from compassion and forgiveness." Ann Aguirre

**Day 8:** "Compassion is the sometimes-fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It's the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too." Frederick Buechner

**Day 9:** "Compassion and pity are not the same: pity is looking down on someone, feeling sorry for them and offering nothing; compassion is seeing their pain and offering them understanding." Jasinda Wilder

**Day 10:** "The purpose of all the major religious traditions is not to construct big

temples on the outside, but to create temples of goodness and compassion inside, in our hearts." 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama

**Day 11:** "I would like my life to be a statement of love and compassion—and where it isn't, that's where my work lies." Ram Dass

**Day 12:** "They learned no compassion from their own anguish; thus, their suffering was wasted." Betty Smith

**Day 13:** "A culture that does not grasp the vital interplay between morality and power, which mistakes management techniques for wisdom, and fails to understand that the measure of a civilization is its compassion, not its speed or ability to consume, condemns itself to death." Chris Hedges

**Day 14:** "In this world, where we find ourselves, we need compassion more than anything, I think, or we are all alone." Guy Gavriel Kay



**Day 15:** "Fear is such a powerful emotion for humans that when we allow it to take us over, it drives compassion right out of our hearts." Thomas Aquinas

**Day 16:** "If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete." Buddha

**Day 17:** "Listen with ears of tolerance! See through the eyes of compassion! Speak with the language of love!" Rumi

**Day 18:** "Compassion is the chief law of human existence." Fyodor Dostoyevsky

**Day 19:** "We have to make mistakes; it's how we learn compassion for others." Curtis Sittenfeld

**Day 20:** "Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. ...Compassion means full immer-

sion in the condition of being human." Henri J.M. Nouwen

**Day 21:** "When we know ourselves to be connected to all others, acting compassionately is simply the natural thing to do." Rachel Naomi Remen

**Day 22:** "There is no small act of kindness. Every compassionate act makes large the world." Mary Anne Radmacher

**Day 23:** "Be kind to people whether they deserve your kindness or not. If your kindness reaches the deserving, good for you; if your kindness reaches the undeserving take joy in your compassion." James Fadiman

**Day 24:** "Every single person has at least one secret that would break your heart. If we could just remember this, I think there would be a lot more compassion and tolerance in the world." Frank Warren

**Day 25:** "The beauty and mystery of this world only emerges through affection, attention, interest, and compassion..., open your eyes wide and actually see this world by attending to its colors, detail, and irony." Orhan Pamuk

**Day 26:** "For there is nothing heavier than compassion. Not even one's own pain weighs so heavy as the pain one feels with someone, for someone, a pain intensified by the imagination and prolonged by a hundred echoes." Milan Kundera

**Day 27:** "Compassion is not religious business, it is human business, it is not luxury, it is essential for our own peace and mental stability, it is essential for human survival." 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama

**Day 28:** "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." Mother Teresa

**Day 29:** "Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth." William Faulkner

**Day 30:** "Someday, beyond the clouds and all the world's wrongs, there will be love, compassion, and justice, and we shall all understand." Flavia Weedn

**Day 31:** "Compassion is a verb." Thích Nhất Hạnh



# Faith and Theology

## Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life

In her book, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, Karen Armstrong has created a 12-step program to replace our addiction to egotism with compassion. She writes, "We cannot think how we would manage without our pet hatreds and prejudices that give us such a buzz of righteousness...." We have a capacity for both compassion and cruelty. If compassion is to truly guide our responses and our actions, then it must be cultivated through ongoing reflection and practice. It is as simple as living by the golden rule, which is not so simple.

### 1. Learn about Compassion

The first step is to learn about compassion. In providing a brief overview of the value placed on compassion in world religions, Armstrong points back to the Axial Age (900 to 200 BCE) and the accord given compassion by world religions due to this religious revolution that informed the spiritual development of humanity. Compassion would become a foundational element in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism on the Indian subcontinent; in Confucianism and Taoism in China; in the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Middle East; and in the philosophical rationalism in ancient Greece. Armstrong notes that, "These traditions... agree that compassion is natural to human beings, that it is the fulfillment of human nature, and that in calling us to set ego aside in a consistently empathetic consideration of others, it can introduce us to a dimension of existence that transcends our normal self-bound state."

### 2. Look at Your Own World

The second step is to look at the world. What contexts exist that mitigate against compassion individually and collectively? The world is a far different place than it was in the Axial Age. It is now composed of large, industrialized states and too many failing states with escalating violence that often leads to genocide. We have become urbanized societies with aggressive, commercial economies that compete globally.

Income disparity grows within countries and between rich countries and

poor countries. Environmental degradation and climate change harm the earth and its species.

What impact does this have on the individual, on relationships, on families? How does it affect the workplace, politics, and diplomacy? And what about our relationship with earth, our only home? What would each of these look like if they were imbued with compassion? Closing the gap between reality and possibility is the work of compassion. This is daunting, but as Armstrong writes, "every man or woman in the street can become a force for good in the world."

### 3. Compassion for Yourself

In the third step, Armstrong reminds us that, "The Golden Rule requires self-knowledge; it asks that we use our own feelings as a guide to our behavior with others. If we treat ourselves harshly, this is the way we are likely to treat other people. So, we need to acquire a healthier and more balanced knowledge of our strengths as well as our weaknesses. As we work through this step, we should ...make a list of our good qualities, talents, and achievements. We recognize flaws in some of our closest friends, but this does not diminish our affection for them. Nor should it affect the way we value ourselves. Before we can make friends with others, we have to make a friend of our own self." The birth of compassion must first happen within ourselves for ourselves.

### 4. Empathy

Armstrong writes that, "Imagination is crucial to the compassionate life." Crucial, because imagination informs our feelings of empathy. When we see another suffer, and there is so much suffering, there is an interior movement of compassion and instinctive empathy, and, as Peter Abelard suggested, that saves us by making us more human than we would be otherwise, and by making our response more compassionate than it would be otherwise. In addition, our own suffering is also an education in compassion. In terms of how we relate to others, Armstrong offers this caution: "We may think that we are compassionate people, but so much of our goodwill is de-

pendent upon subjective likes and dislikes." Cultivating empathy takes us beyond such tragic limitations.

### 5. Mindfulness

The fifth step in cultivating compassion is essential. As Armstrong writes, "The purpose of mindfulness, one of the practices that brought the Buddha to enlightenment,



is to help us to detach ourselves from the ego by observing the way our minds work." She continues, "In mindfulness we mentally stand back and observe our behavior while we are engaged in the normal process of living in order to discover more about the way we interact with people, what makes us angry and

unhappy, how to analyze our experiences, and how to pay attention to the present moment." This needs to become a daily spiritual practice through both meditation and ongoing attention to how we react and why in each present moment. Let your life become your teacher. The goal is to have mindfulness become habitual.

### 6. Action

Mindfulness, however, is not the goal. It is the pathway to the goal. For Armstrong, action has three components. She counsels, "First, make a resolution to act once every day in accordance with the positive version of the Golden Rule: 'Treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself.' ... Second, resolve each day to fulfill the negative version of the Golden Rule: 'Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you.' ... Third, make an effort once a day to change your thought patterns: if you find yourself indulging in a bout of anger or self-pity, try to channel all that negative energy into a more kindly direction." Once these have become habits, then up your commitment by doing each twice a day, and so on. As she concludes, "The goal is to behave in this way 'all day and every day.'"

### 7. How Little We Know

Because we know less than we think, Armstrong reminds us that, "Religion is at its best when it helps us to ask questions and holds us in a state of wonder—and arguably at its worst when it tries to answer them authoritatively and dogmatically." She continues, "The aim of this step is

(Continued on page 7)



## Raising Children who value Justice and Compassion

Michelle Richards

...We can teach our children to respect, appreciate, and affirm people who are different from us. We can actively work to not perpetuate harmful assumptions about others when we express our ideas. And we can encourage our children to avoid teasing and name-calling as well as to stand up for victims and speak out when they recognize oppression in any form.

The true development of compassion, however, is another matter. The nature of children (particularly young ones) is inherently selfish, because they have an egocentric view of the world. This is why a child can give a beloved toy to a friend without a second thought and then in the next few minutes snatch it right out of their hands. Their brains literally do not comprehend that others have a perspective other than their own. Yet children need to understand that being compassionate can help them create a better world. Beyond modeling this value within our families, developing a family tradition of community service—such as engaging in social justice projects together—communicates that compassion is a family value.



Volunteering together to work a Saturday afternoon shift at a soup kitchen; gathering up groceries to give to the local food pantry; or participating in a walk, bike ride, or fun-run for an important cause can be family enrichment activities—especially when there is talk

of why it is important to help out the people who will benefit from the family's efforts.

Source: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/children-value-justice>

## 8 Ways to Teach Compassion to Kids

Signe Whitson

### 1. Walk the Talk

Children ...learn from ...your actions. When you have a chance ...practice a random act of compassion.

### 2. Put the Child on the Receiving End of Compassion

While showing compassion to others is [important]..., allowing a young person to experience compassion first-hand is ...more impactful. When your child is hurt or sick, ...provide abundant ...tender, loving, compassionate care. ...

### 3. Talk the Talk

Most children can learn about true compassion by seeing and feeling [it] ...acted out, but when parents talk ...about acts of compassion, they communicate it as ...a ...family value. ...

### 4. Volunteer Your Time

When children become actively involved in acts of showing compassion to others, they learn about this value in a very deep and enduring way. Find age-appropriate ways to introduce your child to volunteering....

### 5. Care for a Pet

...Children who care for pets learn ...values such as responsibility, unconditional love, empathy, and compassion....



## 6. Read All About It

Children's books are great for providing a window into the experiences of others. [As an example, see the book *Listening with My Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion* by Gabi Garcia, author and Ying Hui Tan, illustrator. A video of the story is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaa0Zod5reY> (7:26)]

## 7. Compassion It™

...A relative ...put the [Compassionate It] band on her wrist with its black side facing outward, as a personal reminder to act compassionately.... When such an act is committed each day, she turns the bracelet to its white side.

...The bands have turned compassion into an everyday topic of conversation in our household.... [See <https://compassionit.com/shop-wristband/>]....

## 8. Make a Wish

...Use the internet to introduce your child to different charitable organizations that provide compassionate assistance to others... [like] The Make-a-Wish Foundation....



The experience can be life-changing for both giver and receiver.

Source: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/8-ways-to-teach-compassio\\_b\\_5568451](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/8-ways-to-teach-compassio_b_5568451)

## Family Activity: 20 Things We Should Say More Often

Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5yCOSHeYn4> and watch the Soul Pancake YouTube video by Kid President (aka Robby Novak). Discuss as a family which of the 20 things that he says we should say more convey compassion. Then make your own list of things to say that show compassion, and practice saying and doing them.

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to the Theme** redemption and transformation and attempts to make justice more just by going beyond the law, by seeking a restorative justice that views punishment as a terribly blunt and often ineffective remedy.

We promise equity not equality. Rather than saying that we must treat everyone equally, we affirm that, through equity, we will take into account the needs, aspirations, idiosyncrasies, gifts, and challenges of each individual. Through equity we level the playing field as we respond to individual uniqueness. In place of stones, we give this person bread, but to another, because we are mindful of equity, we give wine, and yet to another our gift is salt. Parents understand that fairness in terms of their children is not treating them equally, but with equity, and this principle applies to all others. As Rick Riordan writes, "Fairness does not mean everyone gets the same. Fairness means everyone gets what they need."

Still, in human relations, justice and equity are significant, but not sufficient. Compassion informs and modifies both of them. Compassion comes last in this list, but in reality, it anchors the other two. Without compassion we will struggle to act consistently in ways that embody equity and justice. Compassion comes from two Latin roots: *com* meaning "together" and *pati* meaning "to suffer." Through compassion we suffer with others. Unitarian Universalist minister Charlotte Cowtan writes, "Compassion is an act of human will; it is born of the recognition, acceptance, and celebration of the essential kinship of all humanity. When we choose to recognize that each human being is imbued with innate worth and dignity [our first principle], to accept with humility the fact that each one of us is both mortal and less than perfect, and to express our sincere gratitude for the gift of each and every human life, human hearts become joined in compassion."

Compassion is relational. It is part of a continuum that begins with sympathy—feeling pity for—and moves to empathy—feeling with. We are born with a disposition toward compassion, with what Ram

Dass has called "natural compassion." For most of us, this disposition must be cultivated and deepened.

Compassion first tends to occur interpersonally. We witness another's pain and suffering and are moved to feel, to care, to act. The difference between pity and compassion is vast. Pity is hierarchical. We are moved, but it is from a position of superiority. Compassion is a response among equals, and true compassion affirms that we are all fundamentally equal based on the our inherent worth and dignity. Through compassion, we respond to the other as if he or she is us, because in fundamental ways, given the unity that makes us one, the other is us.



Ultimately, compassion asks more of us. This more is articulated in our second source: *Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.* In every age they arise, some known to history and revered as exemplars—people for us to emulate in word, deed, and spirit. The vast majority of these prophetic women and men, however, became anonymous with the passage of time, but their legacy of compassion and courage endures. They were not trying to become famous. They simply used the life they were given doing the work that they believed would help bend the moral arc of the universe toward justice. They were armed with imagination, compassion, conviction, and hope. Some did truly great things using the transforming power of love; others did small things with great love. May our compassion embrace the oppressed, the downtrodden, the marginalized, the poor, and more. May our compassion inform our action as we circle round to the work of justice: justice, equity, compassion—and so it goes.

### The Principle of Compassion

Rev. Richard Gilbert

Compassion is the spiritual value that ungirds Unitarian Universalist ethics. Living compassionately is an act of thanksgiving, flowing from the blessings of life that we wish to share. The overflow of that compassion in the individual leads to the quest for equity and justice. ...William Schulz wrote..., "Spirituality is the inspiration for all politics which redeems. For once I have looked on the abundance of creation, I cannot rest while others, caught up in its flaws, are deprived of the view." More succinctly put by theologian Gene Reeves, "to be is to be for others."

...In German the word ...*mitleid* [means] feeling the misfortune of the other. There are times when our only response to another's pain is to share it. "Sorrow shared is sorrow halved," as an old German saying puts it. Unitarian Universalists seek to create caring communities in their congregations, a mutual ministry in grappling with life's vicissitudes. We realize that none of us can navigate life's treacherous waters alone.

Often our liberal religious tendency has been toward social reform rather than pastoral care, as if the two were unrelated. ... Often suffering simply comes from the burdens of life and death, and there is nothing to do but accept our fate gracefully and try to nurture others similarly afflicted.

The striking thing about ...compassion is that this feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another ...is accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause. Sympathy—feeling pity—turns into empathy—feeling with—and finally issues into action to serve the needs of the neighbor.

...As Unitarian Universalist minister David Rhys Williams wrote, "We are joined together by a mystic oneness whose source we may never know, but whose reality we can never doubt.... We are our neighbor's keeper, because that neighbor is but our larger self.... Behold, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, because thy neighbor is thyself."

Source: *With Purpose and Principle*, edited by Edward Frost.



## Three Things

Rev. Jan Taddeo

The storm outside echoes the storm raging within my soul. So many people in need...so much pain, so much grief. Too many causes and campaigns fill my mailboxes, sap my energy, beg for my money.

Three things I must do...only three things? You've got to be kidding—which three do I choose? Books and letters, magnets and movies implore me to dance as if no one is watching, learn seven habits and make four agreements, give generously, vote often, express myself! Yet hundreds, thousands, millions live with hunger and thirst, in poverty, enduring violence, and disease. Did Mother Teresa, Martin and Gandhi cry out with despair from the darkness of overwhelm? What three things did they choose?

Three things. Three things we must do. Is it to act in kindness, serve justice, love God and your neighbor even as you love yourself. But where do I start? So much thoughtlessness, hatred, and fear. Too little justice, too much selfishness. Where is God? Who is my neighbor?

Three things... seven principles, ten commandments, twelve steps... all number of things speak to us; and yet, we must choose. We must choose to do something, so three things may be the right number... not too few, not too many. But which three things shall I do? Will you do?

Here's an adage I've always liked: Don't just do something, stand there. Stand in the surf, or sit on a rock, or lay your body across the earthy loam... and be quiet. Very quiet. Do you hear it? That still small voice, the echo of your soul, reverberating with the call to your own true self to emerge. Then the calm within becomes the calm without. The storm blows over, the sun recovers its position of strength, and that glorious symbol of hope and unity emerges across the sky. At the end of this rainbow, a treasure... the three things you must do: Go outside yourself and know the needs of the world. Go within and discover your Life-given gifts. Then arch yourself like a rainbow bridge between the two and create a more beautiful world.

Source: <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/184445.shtml>

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology** threefold: (1) to recognize and appreciate the unknown and unknowable, (2) to become sensitive to overconfident assertions of certainty in ourselves and other people, and (3) to make ourselves aware of the numinous mystery of each human being we encounter during the day." The third element requires that we "make place for the other."

### 8. How Should We Speak to One Another?

The eighth step involves compassionate communication. Armstrong recommends that, "We should make a point of asking ourselves whether we want to win the argument or seek the truth, whether we are ready to change our views if the evidence is sufficiently compelling, and whether we are making 'place for the other' in our minds in the Socratic manner. Above all, we need to listen." As she observes, "True listening means more than simply hearing the words that are spoken. We have to become alert to the underlying message, too, and hear what is not uttered aloud." Effective communication is an art that is exceedingly difficult to master.

### 9. Concern for Everybody

Not only is our personal egotism a barrier to compassion, so is our "tribal" egotism. These are luxuries of ignorance that we can ill afford. Armstrong writes, "We have a duty to get to know one another, and to cultivate a concern and responsibility for all our neighbors in the global village." This requires that we engage diversity with pluralism, which is the respectful practice of dialogue and connection across culture, language, religion, political ideology, and more. Yet this is hampered by an upsurge in nationalism, patriotic chauvinism, and religious fanaticism. For Armstrong, we must "...begin to expand our horizons to make place for the more distant other.

Understanding different national, cultural, and religious traditions is no longer a luxury; it is now a necessity and must become a priority." We cannot confine our compassion to our own tribe however we define it to be. We must reach out, and keep reaching out to the stranger, the foreigner, the enemy.

### 10. Knowledge

Because we know so little, we must work to cultivate knowledge with the awareness that much of the information that flows to us is biased, including the partisan propaganda of the right and left. The objective of the tenth step is to develop "a healthy distrust of what the Buddha called hearsay." This requires

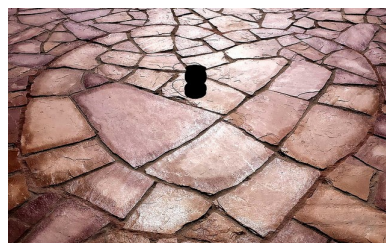
two movements: to take seriously some things which we do not believe to be true, and to question what we do believe to be true, given the influence of our hidden assumptions and our

invisible prejudices. This requires, writes Armstrong, "...engaging in a Socratic dialogue with yourself, overcoming the limitations of the unexamined life and the dangers of habitual tribal thinking."

### 11. Recognition

Given the amount of suffering in the world, it is easy to experience it as simply too much. Metaphorically, many pull up the drawbridge and close the gate as a response to the *compassion fatigue* defense/excuse. True compassion, however, is so much more resilient, especially when moments of recognition occur.

When this happens, not only do we see someone else's pain, we look into his or her eyes and we see our self. There is no "them," for "they" are "us." Armstrong concedes that, "From a purely rational perspective, this statement makes little sense," but based on empathy it makes all the sense in the world. She writes, "Extend your hospitality to



(Continued on page 8)

# Small Group Discussion Guide

## Theme for Discussion Compassion

**Preparation prior to Gathering:** (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** "We humans do not understand compassion. In each moment of our lives, we betray it. ...We know ...its worth, yet in knowing we then attach to it a value, we guard the giving of it, believing it must be earned.... Compassion is priceless in the truest sense of the word. It must be given freely. In abundance." *Steven Erikson*

**Chalice Lighting** (James Vila Blake) (adapted) (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page one.

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

**Reading:** "Compassion is ...the strength that arises out of seeing the true nature of suffering in the world. Compassion allows us to bear witness to that suffering, whether it is in ourselves or others, without fear; it allows us to name injustice without

hesitation, and to act strongly, with all the skill at our disposal." Sharon Salzberg

**Living the Questions:** Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. What frame of mind and heart do you need to be in to be compassionate?
2. To be centered and live compassionately, what do you need to address within yourself?
3. How might your compassionate actions help to heal another person? How might they help to heal you?
4. What was a powerful experience through which you received compassion from someone else?
5. When did you extend compassion to someone else in a significant way?
6. Have you ever experienced compassion fatigue? What did it feel like? What caused it? What did you do about it?
7. How does a compassionate organization act?
8. How do we teach compassion, generally, and, specifically, to our children?
9. What is the role of the congregation in supporting compassion?
10. How can the work of justice extend compassion?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

### Extinguishing Chalice

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison)

*We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

### Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles  
(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*



# Love Your Enemies

(Continued from page 7) **Faith & Theology** them, and 'make place for the other' in your life. It is a powerful way of developing 'concern for everybody.'"

## 12. Love Your Enemies

The idea of loving our enemies may seem hopelessly naïve, yet hating our enemies is fraught with problems as well. Armstrong writes, "We have witnessed the result of hard-line policies inspired by a righteousness that can see only the worst in the enemy. We have seen the danger of ruthless retaliation that drives people to despair, ignores their needs, and refuses to take their aspirations seriously. We have become aware that when people feel that they have nothing to lose, they resort to hopeless, self-destructive measures." According to the Dalai Lama, our enemy is valuable to our enlightenment. He writes, "If you can cultivate the right attitude, your enemies are your best spiritual teachers because their presence provides you with the opportunity to enhance and develop tolerance, patience, and understanding." Source: Touchstones

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