

COMPASSION
UU Community Church of Santa Monica
Heart to Heart Circles
August 2015

Chalice Lighting

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

Sharing Silence 3 minutes

On Our Hearts 20 minutes

This is a time to check out of your day-up-to-now. What do you need to put aside in order to be fully present in the circle this evening?

Covenant

Our covenant includes a description of how we want to be with each other, ground rules for our time together, and our expectations for members of the group.

Adapted from Heart to Heart by Christine Robinson and Alicia Hawkins

I commit myself:

1. to give attendance at meetings a real priority knowing that my presence is important to the group;
2. to let the leader know if I will be absent or need to quit;
3. to participate with my group in two service projects, one for our church community, and one for the wider community
4. to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others;
5. to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others;
6. to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart;
7. to refrain from cross-talk, judging, problem solving, or giving advice; and to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn.

Readings

Compassion derives from the Latin *patiri* and the Greek *pathein*, meaning 'to suffer, undergo, or experience.' So 'compassion' means 'to endure [something] with another person,' to put ourselves in somebody else's shoes, to feel her pain as though it were our own, and to enter generously into his point of view."

-Karen Armstrong, Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life

True compassion, is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

To become fully human means learning to turn my gratitude for being alive into some concrete common good. It means growing gentler toward human weakness. It means practicing forgiveness of my and everyone else's hourly failures to live up to divine standards. It means learning to forget myself on a regular basis in order to attend to the other selves in my vicinity. It means living so that "I'm only human" does not become an excuse for anything. It means receiving the human condition as blessing and not curse, in all its achingly frail and redemptive reality.

- Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection*

We can reject everything else: religion, ideology, all received wisdom. But we cannot escape the necessity of love and compassion....This, then, is my true religion, my simple faith. In this sense, there is no need for temple or church, for mosque or synagogue, no need for complicated philosophy, doctrine or dogma. Our own heart, our own mind, is the temple. The doctrine is compassion. Love for others and respect for their rights and dignity, no matter who or what they are: ultimately these are all we need. So long as we practice these in our daily lives, then no matter if we are learned or unlearned, whether we believe in Buddha or God, or follow some other religion or none at all, as long as we have compassion for others and conduct ourselves with restraint out of a sense of responsibility, there is no doubt we will be happy.

-Dalai Lama XIV

Millions of people need to take pharmaceuticals every day just to cope with daily life. Insecurity, anxiety, and depression are incredibly common in our society, and much of this is due to self-judgment, to beating ourselves up when we feel we aren't winning in the game of life. So what's the answer? *To stop judging and evaluating ourselves altogether.* To stop trying to label ourselves as "good" or "bad" and simply accept ourselves with an open heart. To treat ourselves with the same kindness, caring, and compassion we would show to a good friend—or even a stranger, for that matter.

-Dr. Kristin Neff, *Why Self-Compassion Trumps Self-Esteem*

Zigong: Is there one word which may serve as a rule for all one's life?

Confucius: Is not compassion such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.

Questions for consideration:

1. What are some ways in which you learned to be compassionate? What inspired you?
2. Think about someone with whom you struggle to have compassion. Why do you think that is? Now mentally substitute someone you cherish (offspring, parent, close friend) for the person with whom you struggle. How does that change your perspective?
3. Think of someone you cherish. Was there ever a time you didn't feel compassion? How did that affect your relationship?
4. Is compassion among the building materials in your spiritual path? Could our seven UU principles be edited down to one principle: practice compassion?
5. Brené Brown says we can talk about love and compassion until we sound like a greeting card store, but unless we're willing to have an honest conversation about what gets in the way of putting these into practice in our daily lives, we will never change. Never, ever." What gets in the way of your practicing compassion?

Sharing 60 minutes

Reflecting On Our Time Together

Please share your thoughts about the evening and if you gained any new insights on this particular topic.

Closing Words

For me, compassion is the most important factor in our lives. It is the first step. If we take this first step courageously, without fear, then all of our decisions and subsequent actions and their results will have a special beauty, spontaneity and power. Human calculations may be wrong, but actions born of true compassion can never be wrong because compassion is the law of nature, the power of God, the heart of creation. If we tune the individual mind with compassion, then we, as individuals, are no longer really performing actions, but are merely allowing creation to act through us. And this is the power of compassion. In truth, the spiritual path both begins and ends with compassion.

- *Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (Amma)*