

## **The Radical Compassion Challenge**

**by Lisa Browning**

I have realized, especially over the last week, how much I over-extend myself, without taking the necessary self-care precautions. I promised myself I'd stop doing that ... and I have! I am paying a lot more attention to myself, and to my needs on any given day, in any given moment.

And so, at 4am today, as thoughts of how much I still have to get caught up on threatened to overtake me, I stopped myself. I turned to self-compassion. Interestingly enough, one of those things I had to catch up on was *The Radical Compassion Challenge*, offered by *Sounds True* ([www.soundstrue.com](http://www.soundstrue.com)). I received an email about this 10-day challenge a couple weeks ago, and thought it would be an awesome thing to do. So I signed up.

I completed Days 1 and 2, then life happened, and I fell behind. Today is Day 10. I started to watch the videos for Day 3 this morning, becoming more and more stressed about the remaining 8 days. The focus of Day 3 is Self-Compassion. No coincidences!

I decided not to overwhelm myself. If I don't have the time to invest right now, in watching 7 more hours of videos, I'm not going to feel guilty about it. What I did instead was take a half an hour, and write down a summary of each of the ten days, including the daily challenge and the reflection questions.

I also decided, rather than fret about what to write about, to include the summary here, for anyone who is interested in at least reflecting on the topics/questions. Even without the accompanying videos, I think it's a worthwhile exercise (and one that I will be engaging in as well, when time allows!).

### **The 10-Day Radical Compassion Challenge**

***Day 1: Arriving in Embodied Presence – breaking free from the trance of thinking and coming home to the here and now.***

**Challenge:** Pause and Breathe – Take three deep breaths when you find yourself becoming upset about or preoccupied with something.

#### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. When have you told yourself you're "not enough"?
2. How might you view these situations in a more empowering light?
3. How might you bring more compassion to yourself when self-doubt and self-criticism arise?

***Day 2: Lovingkindness – deepening self-acceptance and finding freedom from false inner narratives of personal inadequacy.***

**Challenge:** Do Something You Enjoy – Do something enjoyable on your own for at least five minutes, purely to savour the pleasantness.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. What is the mind?
2. How can we cultivate a healthy mind?
3. If awareness is so important in our lives, why do we need to “practice” to be present for life?

***Day 3: RAIN of Self-Compassion – addressing emotional suffering whenever it arises.***

**Challenge:** Write a Letter of Compassion – Write a letter of compassion from your future *bodhisattva* self to the place in you that is struggling with difficult emotions like hurt, fear, loneliness or shame.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. Where in your life do you need to cultivate more “Momma Bear” self-compassion to draw boundaries, say no, or motivate change?
2. Where in your life is yin and yang self-compassion out of balance?

***\*\* Notes \*\****

*Bodhisattva means enlightened being.*

***Day 4: RAIN of Self-Forgiveness – shifting from unworthiness and self-blame to self-forgiveness and self-acceptance.***

**Challenge:** Self-Forgiveness – Reflect on the following question – Who do you sense could most help you to forgive yourself?

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. What is the most extraordinary act of mercy that somebody has ever shown you?
2. And what is the most extraordinary act of mercy that you have ever shown yourself?

***\*\* Notes \*\****

*RAIN is an acronym that stands for Recognize, Accept, Investigate, Nurture*

***Day 5: Compassion Toward People We Know – awakening compassion for someone close to you.***

**Challenge:** Extend Kindness – to someone you care about who is suffering in some way.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. What in your daily life convinces you that we have an instinct for compassion?
2. What is the subjective experience of compassion for you?

***Day 6: Widening Circles of Compassion – widening our circles of compassion to include colleagues, neighbours, acquaintances, and those you meet in passing.***

**Challenge:** Tell Them You Care – extend compassion to someone you don't know very well.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. The future is dark—is it the darkness of the tomb, or of the womb?
2. Why have you not yet tried to love?
3. How do you breathe each day?
4. How do you push each day?

***Day 7: RAIN on Blame – releasing blame and cultivating the empathy to move toward resolution and reconnection after conflict.***

**Challenge:** Have a Conversation – Reach out to someone with whom you've recently had a conflict – and have a conversation about it.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. How good are you about remembering to practice self-care and self-compassion when you're under stress?
2. What might be behind this?
3. How can you take steps to be more caring to yourself when you're in the midst of stressful circumstances?

***Day 8: Widening Circles to Those of Difference – extending care and compassion to vulnerable beings who might seem unreal, distant, or different.***

**Challenge:** Waking Up from Bias – Talk to a person who identifies differently than you.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. How do you remain mindful and in “wise relationship” to the challenges you see in your personal life or in the large scheme of things?
2. When do you find it more difficult to “stay sane” when provoked or agitated?

***Day 9: Feeling Appreciation – cultivating feelings of deep appreciation for ourselves, other people, and all of life.***

**Challenge:** Give Appreciation – Choose someone you care about and extend your sincere appreciation.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. How is it that generous listening can be used as a muscle of compassion?
2. What would civic structures need to do in order to model compassion?

***Day 10: Loving Ourselves Into Healing – seeing the truth of our shared vulnerability and essential goodness, and cultivating reverence for life.***

**Challenge:** Serve the World – Continue offering your kindness and compassion in service to a world that needs it!

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. What are some opposing viewpoints you could learn more about?
2. Can you identify where the common ground may be found?
3. When have you needed to create a common ground agenda?

## **The Beginning of My *Roots & Wings* Journey**

**by Danielle Betts**

I met Lisa while I was in high school. We met at a time when I believed that if I could help enough people I could fill the dark hole inside me without ever having to look into it. I tried to be part of Lisa's dreams, but barely knew why I got out of bed each morning. Despite all of that, Lisa always saw something in me that I never could. Here we are, about 4 years later, and I can finally - at least most of the time - say that I am worthy and enough. How is that so?

My mental health journey has been bumpy, but what has always gotten me back on my feet is art. When I can't find my voice, all I have to do is find a pen and paper and let my hand do the talking for me. When all I can do is drag my feet, I put some music on, and I just let it take over my limbs. By fully indulging in the beauty of life, specifically all its opportunities for expression and creativity, I was finally able to feel at home in my own body and feel in charge of my mind. When the world goes blurry, all you have to do is allow yourself to surrender to your thoughts and emotions, and through art, let them tell you what you need. Whether it is my anxiety, depression, ADHD, insomnia, or PTSD, art is there for me and I know it is there for you too.

I feel beyond grateful that Lisa has once again trusted me with something she is so passionate about. I am overcome with hope; I can feel its light run from my fingers all the way to my toes, making my heart beat and my mouth stretch from ear to ear. To be able to be part of someone else's dreams while also chasing yours: that's something very special. Creativity comes from such a raw and vulnerable part of us; it is no wonder that mental health and art go hand and hand. I am so excited to begin this *Roots and Wings* journey and see where it leads me and all of you. The main hope with this project is that you find a community here at *Roots and Wings*. I want you to know that when things get big and scary, you can come here, be creative, and through your art and that of others', the big and scary becomes small and manageable. I am ready to start this adventure with Lisa and you because this is just as much your dream as it is ours or else you wouldn't be here. So, officially, welcome to *Roots and Wings*; welcome to a better tomorrow.

*Earth without 'art' is just 'eh'.*

- Unknown

# *The Garden of our lives....*



## *This is the season*

the world begins slowly changing in  
response to some silent signal setting  
everything in motion,

moving faster and faster, like a race of  
everything being chased into life –

in all shapes and sizes and colours -  
taking their perennial place as though in a  
grand parade,

marching and dancing  
behind the musical fanfare of bands,

and brightly decorated wagons and prancing horses and whimsical clowns  
and twisting jugglers and comical walking ‘stick’ figures,

awakening the spirit of youth in young and old, as once again, for the first  
time, the festival of spring comes mystically alive under the magical baton of  
the enchanted ‘Grand Master’.

Isn't it hard to resist deep breathing into our spirits the energetic elixir of new  
life filling our bodies to the brim with the thrill of exciting change and  
promise of new potential?

And why not, isn't this what spring is telling us – showing us is possible –  
that we can now turn on backs on the dead of winter – and look ahead with  
renewed hope and opportunity to replant ourselves in the garden of a new  
and better life plan of our own choice and making?

Each of us has a ‘garden’ within us and just because it's been overtaken with  
unruly weeds, and random litter and looks abandoned – and our hearts feel

like rocky soil that hasn't been turned for years, doesn't mean it can't be brought back to life – to blossom, as it was made to do.

You see, we were born with that 'garden' in each of us. It was put there for a purpose we were intended to discover. It's been there all along waiting for us – to find it.

All the answers we will ever need are in that garden within each of us – just below the surface; so we can easily find it and them, by just looking and asking.

These 'answers' we seek, were not intended to be difficult to discover or dependent on anyone else – because we were all made the same with the same ability to see and to choose.

The only difference is we were each given the freedom to chose what to do with our garden using the effort we are willing to put into planting and growing and tending it.

The size of the garden and what we wish to plant and produce are entirely up to us and once we start digging in it, it will open itself to us and the richness of it's inner 'self' will flow out and into us, to enrich us and create the life of our dreams..

Just imagine the secrets it holds for you... and the joy of producing your first flower – one at a time. And if you can produce a flower you can produce enough for a bouquet or a garden of whatever you wish to grow.

The choice is always yours. Your garden doesn't determine what it will grow – you do. And it's only purpose is to produce for you and you are always free to choose whatever your heart desires so long as you are willing to 'own' it – work it, nurture it – love it. And if you do, you will reap far more than you can ever imagine.

This is spring and everything is coming to life; so why look within and begin to plant your own 'seeds' in your garden and give it a try.... You won't be

disappointed because nature is on your side....and will do it's part abundantly , if you do yours. It just needs a willing 'gardener' to close her eyes, look softly within and be open to the surprise that awaits her there.

*Happy Spring* – and here's to whatever dreams you decide to plant in your garden this year ...

*Bill*



*NOTE: The 'garden' in this piece is your inner life into which you can plant the seeds of your desire at any time, and I encourage you to use the spirit of spring – the season of new beginnings as your inspiration to change your life...*

Bill Brubacher, April, 2021



# **Here We Go Again**

## **by Colleen Heighington**

Oh well ... here we go again  
Another lock down is here ...  
Even when things seemed to be getting better  
New variants started to appear

Oh well ... such is life  
As we must not tire but carry on ...  
And one of these days, hopefully we will be singing  
A Covid-19 Victory Song

Until then ... chin up and lets keep on going  
Doing all of those things that we must do ...  
Don't get discouraged, better days ahead  
And put a smile on your face too

The vaccine is here, so please get one  
As it is the right thing to do  
I'm getting mine shortly ...  
And hope that the next vaccine shot ... goes to you

Oh well ... here we go again  
But one day ... we will flatten the curve as never before  
So keep on praying and hold onto hope  
And the worries and uncertainty of Covid-19 ... will be no more!!!!

## **Mental Health and Online Hackers**

**by Christine Nightingale**

One of the most terrifying experiences I have ever had is a major hack of my computer. It's a form of psychic rape in which every single relationship you have ...with potentially hundreds of people...becomes compromised when they receive a series of (apparently always two) messages.

The first message expresses a desire to get back in touch, and "softens up" the potential victim of the scam, including using terms hacked from a recent note the victim has written , and a request for an unspecified favour.

The second bulk email to all of your contacts (often after they have unwittingly responded to the first) asks for a gift of \$300 worth of credit cards or something similar.

As I had no previous knowledge of how such scams worked, I was frankly terrified to see that every relationship I had with online friends, family and business connections was immediately compromised.

Fortunately my second son, who moved back in with me three months ago, has a degree in Artificial Intelligence, and knew how to deal with the problem.

First, it is necessary to change the password for one's computer, which is done through the service provider. Second, all contacts (which are listed alphabetically on one's computer) are divided into groups of 100, as that is the maximum number which can be contacted at one go. (Ironically, this is to make hacking a computer more difficult.)

Then each group is collectively sent an e-mail explaining that the computer has been hacked, and to disregard any previous message(s) that day. After doing this with my son's help, I still found that a large number of people had somehow not been listed, so they had to be contacted individually.

Many replied to the first hacked email by saying, "Sure, what favour did you want?"

But as far as I know, once I had spent most of two days frantically responding to puzzled or irate emails, no one had actually fallen for the complete scam.

My son told me that Internet scams area multi-million dollar criminal business. Sometimes a scammer will target multiple computers at one time, with a large number of people being willing to help their supposed “friend in distress”. The email sent from my hacked computer said I was travelling with my niece and had run out of money, so could they please help. The number of my actual contacts who were willing to help was large, so it took many hours of explaining about the hack.

I was extremely distressed and unable to think straight, and I do not know what I would have done if my son had not been here to help.

I suspect that cyber crimes of this sort may be enabled by people being more homebound and isolated during Covid...and also, those who receive requests for help may be more willing than they usually would be to help.. I still have to contact my server provider and tell them about the hack. It is possible, my older son says, that the hacker still has a secret login to my computer somewhere , but the service provider can detect this and remove it.

This strikes me as a particularly low form of theft as ones friends and relatives are the targets, and the softer-hearted among them are the likeliest to send money to a friend in distress. So the generous and caring are the likeliest targets. Although of course the person ostensibly receiving the help also would feel terrible that they had been the unwitting route of a friend or relative being duped.

The weekend’s worth of explanatory email and phone calls and extreme stress was one of the most difficult things I have ever gone through. The scammers target one’s entire support system at one fell swoop.

So if you ever have reason to feel that you have been hacked, remember,

- 1) change your password
- 2) notify your contacts
- 3) notify your service provider (Microsoft, g-mail etc.)

## **What's in the News These Days**

**by Clay Williams**

I've been thinking a lot in the past few weeks about mental health articles in the news. There's quite a lot of news associated with Covid-19 and how it has affected the mental health of people around the world, and a lot of it is bad news. I'm sure you've seen the headlines. As part of a mental health advocacy group, I receive links to news articles in my inbox fairly regularly. It's news that is certainly relevant to what I'm doing, and it is definitely news about things that need action, but unfortunately there has been far more bad news than good. I'm not saying that the reporters are reporting only the doom and gloom; we are definitely in a difficult time right now, but I have to admit that I usually read only the headlines of the ones that are bad news, and read the full articles of those that are good news, or even "a little hopeful" news. It's kind of like the bad news about the mental health of Canadians during the pandemic is creating more bad news about our mental health. I mean, I'm ok with hearing bad news, I'm not a Polly Anna. But ongoing and repeating bad news definitely takes its toll. Especially since I'm kind of an action guy; when I hear about a problem, my mind almost immediately starts moving toward potential solutions. But the bad news I'm hearing about is so frequent and so varied that it just leads to frustration for me, and a feeling of being powerless. But maybe there's good in the bad news. Imagine the world 25 years ago. Imagine getting a call from someone doing a survey, or even talking with your family doctor, and being asked about your emotional state during the current situation. I think around that time that a lot of people would have responded with something like: "I'm fine" or "That's none of your business."

People would only admit they were struggling if they had a severe problem. But now we're seeing regular reports about incremental differences in mental health status. Not just the extremes of "I'm fine" and "I have severe depression disorder" but many shades and variations in between. And I think part of the good news about that is being able to feel, for the most part, that we can now admit to not being OK without having to go as far as standing at the brink of disaster.

So I guess the good part of bad news is that there is news, rather than silence; a problem to work on rather than an elephant in the room.

All this thinking about news also had me thinking about where I get my information. How do you get your news? From the local newspaper? A national newspaper? A printed magazine? Radio? Broadcast television? Do you seek out news online from a major broadcaster like CBC or CTV, or from a web service like Yahoo News or Microsoft? Or is news that is supplied to you by your social media feeds, curated with the help of the clicks of your previous choices.

I have a story about curated news. I'm not a cat person, I have almost always had a dog around the house. When a friend of mine told me that when she was a teenager she used to read a monthly magazine called Cat Fancy, at first I laughed because I thought it was a joke. When she told me that it was a real and serious thing, I couldn't resist doing a google search for Cat Fancy Magazine. The result of doing that search is that I now have far too many cat related posts coming up in my social media feeds.

It's pretty clear to most of us that social media platforms use our previous choices to determine what we see within and outside their apps, at least to some extent, depending on how you set your preferences. And we whine about it a little as we keep using Facebook and Twitter, but still

read the stories that are laid out in our “news feeds”. Social media platforms have a business mandate to keep us engaged so that we will see their advertisers, I’m sure you’ve seen the news about that. To a certain extent we are fed information that confirms the way we already think. And when you think about it, doesn’t our social circle do a similar thing? Our actual friends? We hang around with them because we have some things in common. Certainly not everything, but some things. We look to our friends for affirmation. Maybe that’s a topic to explore another time. Time to stop rambling, sorry. My point is that I think it’s important to recognize the source of your “news” so you can judge whether it’s the facts or the reporter’s opinion about the facts. My Dad told me years ago: “When someone gives you advice, think long and hard about the source of that advice.” This is especially applicable now, with so many sources of “advice.”