

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). 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?