

Genuine Compassion

Desired Outcomes (8)



Definitions:

Genuine: Authentic, not counterfeit

Compassion: Deep awareness of suffering and wish to relieve it



PATIENT COMPASSION, LOURDES, FRANCE
Loving kindness given freely to many by many without expectation

Words of Wisdom:

- There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle – **Albert Einstein**
- I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience and compassion. These three are your greatest treasures – **Lao Tzu**
- To feel affection for people even when they make mistakes is uniquely human – **Marcus Aurelius**
- The best name for God is compassion – **Meister Eckhart**
- If you judge people, you do not have time to love them – **Mother Teresa**
- If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion – **Dalai Lama**

Relationship Happiness Habits :

The word compassion is said to be derived from Latin, meaning 'co-suffering.' However, genuine compassion has to be something more real than just offering to share the sufferings of others, particularly if you believe that a key role for you in life is to help others to help themselves. Maybe it is better to think of compassion as being more about greater empathy, understanding and co-creation rather than co-suffering. Compassion is seen in some animals but maybe it is something that is very special and a little unique in humans.

We live in a modern age of great speed and individuality. Media technology allows us to see images of the great suffering of others from the comfort of our homes. It also enables us to conveniently switch off that reality when it becomes too much. Such technology and disparity can allow us to see ourselves as more separate from one another than we are in reality. The challenge of genuine compassion is to see ways to co-create a better reality for all because we can also see that we have more in common than in separateness. It has been said that genuine compassion comes from a place of empathy, as one Rabbi once said "Kindness gives to another, compassion knows no other." Compassion can be seen to be working at both an individual (you and me) and at a global level (us and oneness).

As Lou Gerstner from IBM once said, "No machine can replace the human spark of spirit, compassion, love and understanding." Another way of looking at the word compassion is 'with passion.' This is a reminder that genuine compassion requires us to be fully committed and engaged in the act of giving compassion to others. It is important to have a deep awareness of the state of another to be compassionate (whether it involves suffering or not). Genuine compassion is more than pity. Empathy allows us to feel what another person feels. Compassion is more detached, we can know what they are feeling but we don't have to feel it ourselves. It can be seen as 'being in a state of co-creation' where compassion can provide the help another person needs to move beyond their suffering into a healthier state.

Many religions talk about genuine compassion being a key part of living a happy life (even if, sometimes, doctrine and practice seem to be different). Compassion is a common religious theme:

- In Christianity, Jesus Christ's life is held up as a living example of the art of compassion. The Gospels explicitly say that compassion should extend to all, even to the extent of loving one's enemies
- In Buddhism, the ultimate purpose or wish of the Buddha too, was to relieve the suffering of all



- ▶ living beings everywhere. One day Ananda, his assistant, asked him “Would it be true to say that the cultivation of loving kindness and compassion is a part of our practice.” Buddha replied “No, but it would be true to say that the cultivation of loving kindness and compassion is all of our practice”
- Compassion is also one of the three central virtues of Hinduism and a key teaching in Islam and Judaism
- Lao Tzu listed compassion as one of the three greatest treasures in life.

Kristin Neff in his book ‘Self-Compassion’ described compassion in terms of three components. Self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. The interesting part of his approach is the inter-connection between these three components. The model describes how awareness of others promotes compassion. The need for self-compassion before compassion for others is recognized and the model also describes how compassion can extend to all if it is to be genuine. The link between awareness of others and mindfulness of ourselves and others is also well described in the model.

The theme of self-compassion is an important one and links well with Skillful Habits™ like ‘learning to love yourself unconditionally.’ Genuine compassion is not about ignoring oneself or putting one’s needs on hold whilst looking after others. Real compassion involves being in a place where you can accept yourself and be gentle on yourself and to use that loving kindness to help others to help themselves. When we accept imperfection in ourselves it opens up a space where we can do the same for others. If we all did just that simple thing, then the world would probably be a very different place.

The concept of common humanity involves recognizing that the “suffering” and personal inadequacy that we go through is part of the shared human experience - something we all go through rather than being something that happens to ‘me’ alone or to ‘them’ alone. We all have our imperfections and that is a part of being human. In addition, our thoughts, feelings and actions are impacted on by a variety of external factors such as genetics, parenting, culture, history, environment and the behaviour/ expectations of others. Recognising this interaction as being part of the experience of all human beings, is an important part of being genuinely compassionate.

Genuine compassion means that we can have compassion for anyone regardless of their apparent failings. When we really understand that we are all just spiritual beings having a physical experience this is possible, even with some of the worst perpetrators of human destruction e.g. Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong. It is when people forget who they really are that they do the things they do. Genuine compassion simply recognizes their unskillful behaviour for what it is.

As Andrew Cohen once said “Compassion is when you do something good without any expectations.” Genuine compassion is much more than just giving money, philanthropy and/or doing charitable works. As Martin Luther King famously said, “Philanthropy is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice which make philanthropy necessary.” Compassion involves a passionate desire to work with others to help them to help themselves to a better life, whatever that is for them. The personal fulfillment that comes from that co-creation, giving, passion and involvement is what makes it all worthwhile.

Good Questions to Ask

- Do you feel like you are a compassionate person? When was the most memorable time that someone showed you great compassion? Why did they do it? What would you have done?
- Do you think that the human race would have survived without compassion?
- When have you showed a moment of great compassion? How did it make you feel?
- Have you ever got angry with someone for doing something that you have done before? How did it make you feel?
- Would being more compassionate make you feel more or less fulfilled? What happens when lots of small acts of kindness and compassion come together?



Where are good sources of information and support?

- **Google:** compassion; self-compassion; the illusion of separation; mindfulness and compassion
- **Good Books:** Self-Compassion - Kirstin Neff; The Lost Art of Compassion - L. Ladner; Loving What Is – Byron Katie
- **Good websites:** www.charterforcompassion.org; www.zenhabs.net; www.extuition.com
- **Related Skillful and Unskillful Habits:** pointless competitiveness; learning to love yourself unconditionally; finding good not bad in others; self-awareness & self-acceptance; seeing others as a mirror of yourself

Smart Thoughts

“All religious traditions carry basically the same message, that is love, compassion and forgiveness. The important thing is that they should be part of our daily lives” – **Dalai Lama**

5 things you can do to change this habit

- Do you see yourself as compassionate? Why?
- Think about how it feels when someone else is compassionate to you
- Ask yourself how open is your heart? For yourself? For others?
- Meditate on what compassion really means for you
- How could you really, really help others to help themselves?

For more detail and information about this habit see:
<http://www.extuition.com/self-discovery/desired-outcomes>

