

USG SGM – Compassion – June 2020

(Drawn from Soul Matters materials – see the full June packet for more on this month's theme)

Introduction

Compassion might seem like one of our easier monthly themes. Images come to mind of people telling each other they are keeping them in their thoughts. It would seem to be all about emotional connection and empathetic feeling.

But then along comes a quote like this: “Compassion hurts. When you feel connected to everything, you also feel responsible for everything. And you cannot turn away. Your destiny is bound with the destinies of others.” -*Andrew Boyd*

Such a quote reminds us that compassion is not just niceness and thoughtful feelings. It's a deeper type of feeling that drives us to action. To feel the pain of another, well, the word “empathy” has that covered. But compassion takes it a step further. Compassion calls us to *do* something about that pain.

Chalice Lighting

Your acts of kindness are iridescent wings of divine love which linger and continue to uplift others long after your sharing. *Rumi*

Check-in: *Share your highs and lows since we last met, focusing on what drains you and what lifts you up. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.*

Spiritual Exercises

- A. **Guerilla Compassion:** During this time of Covid-19, suffering and struggle are ubiquitous. Whether it comes in the form of sickness and job loss or loneliness, stress and worry, suffering has taken up residence in so many of our homes. Compassion is needed now more than ever. And yet because of social isolation, it's harder than ever for us to extend our kindness and care to those who need it. Or is it? There are always creative, irregular and even sneaky ways to offer our compassion to others, to let them know they are seen and not alone. You might even call it “guerilla compassion.” Imagine leaving an unexpected vase of flowers on a neighbor's porch to brighten their day. Or stealthily going to the house of a neighbor who's been sick and surprising them with a pre-dawn weeding of their flower bed. Or maybe it's organizing a flash mob-like carpool that drives over and sings Happy Birthday, Happy Anniversary or Happy Graduation to that person who's been cheated out of a real celebration. All of these things can be done while honoring social distancing. None of them require the removal of our masks. All it takes is some creativity and guerilla tactics. So, what will your act of “guerilla compassion” be? (For some inspiration, follow the links at the end of this paragraph in the full Soul Matters packet.)
- B. **Self-Compassion by Counting Up Everything That's on Your Plate:** Set aside an evening. Make sure to wall off a good hour where you know you won't be interrupted by anyone. Take the mood seriously; turn on a favorite piece of music and pour a cup or glass of your favorite drink. Then pull out a pen and one sheet of paper. And spend the next 30 minutes writing down everything that is “on your plate.” Every responsibility. Every worry. Every source of stress. Every challenge. Every one that depends on you right now. Trust us; it will take at least 30 minutes. There is hardly anyone whose load is light. Even if you think yours is, you'll quickly realize it's not. And that's exactly the point. Somewhere between #9 and #14 on your list, you will say to yourself, “My God I'm carrying a lot!” And it will be right then that compassion for yourself will start to set in. Keep going. Keep adding to the list. As you do, it will become more than apparent - to your heart, not just your head - that you're not just deserving of compassion

but also admiration. That's right, there will be this moment when you finally allow yourself to be surprised at how well you are handling things. It will make all those perfectionist, self-punishing voices in your head seem just plain silly. Let yourself feel that. And in that moment, make yourself say something out loud to yourself. Tell yourself exactly the compassionate thing you would say to a friend whose list is as long as yours.

Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

The value of compassion cannot be overemphasized. Anyone can criticize. It takes a true believer to be compassionate. No greater burden can be borne by an individual than to know no one cares or understands. *Arthur H. Stainback*

If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete. *Jack Kornfield*

I still believe that having compassion for others is not the same as saying that the harm they cause is ok. Empathy is not exoneration. *Nadia Bolz-Weber*

How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these. *George Washington Carver*

Questions: *Pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go.*

1. What do you know now about compassion that you didn't know at 18 years old?
2. What was your primary self-care and self-compassion strategy as a child and then as a teenager? Is there a lesson/call/reminder in that for you today?
3. When were you healed by the compassion of an animal?
4. Is it possible that you are suffering from the subtle aggression of self-improvement?

Sitting in Silence: *Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts.*

Sharing/Deep Listening: *Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention.*

Reflection and Gratitude: *This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.*

Singing: Stand by Me, by Ben E. King

When the night has come

And the land is dark

And the moon is the only light

we'll see

No I won't be afraid

Oh, I won't be afraid

Just as long as you stand,

stand by me

So darling, darling

Stand by me, oh stand by me

Oh stand, stand by me

Stand by me

Video options:

Ben E King (with Spanish subtitles and actors from the movie)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuBnt2tZlY0>

Acapella with bass in Central Park <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDBgOyEN2OU>

Karen Gibson and the Kingdom Choir (at Megan and Harry's wedding)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyFILjdNqk8>

Playing for Change/Song Around the World <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Us-TVg40ExM>

Extinguishing the Chalice The purpose of the journey is compassion. When you have come past all the pairs of opposites you have reached compassion. *Joseph Campbell*