



CULTIVATE A COMPASSIONATE HEART

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In unprecedented times, many emotions, differences of opinion, and responses arise.

When we feel uncertain, there is a tendency to go into reactivity mode, which is normal and understandable when we are triggered by circumstances that make us feel unsteady and possibly unsafe; what we may not realise is that another person's experience might be quite different from our own around the same event.

As we face situations that are challenging and confusing, the need to bring a compassionate heart, to respect what another feels without harsh judgement or negating their thoughts or expression, as well as honour our own experience is vital.

Particularly with circumstances like COVID-19, when some of us are feeling braver than others out in the world, a hug or handshake may feel very comfortable for one person, but alarming for another who may have a compromised immune system, or perhaps has to go home to an elderly parent.

Equally, someone's deep solidarity for the Black Lives Matter movement, or their passion for environmental causes may be very present, but perhaps the way they help or voice their support is different to yours.

When tensions are heightened, and feelings of sadness, anger and fear are alive within us, we don't always remember what another may be going through, or that they could have other struggles they are facing right now that we know nothing about.

How can we bring love, compassion, kindness, unity and equality into our lives, to stand up and say how we feel, to show up for the planet, and for each other?

CULTIVATE COMPASSION

Firstly, having compassion for ourselves and what is present internally is essential.

To be able have compassion for others, we need to develop it within ourselves first, so if you're judging yourself harshly, or numbing out, (and we all have those certain behaviours that help us to avoid what is going on underneath), we disconnect from ourselves, and it is difficult to be touched by the difficulties that others may face.

By honouring your emotions, not ignoring personal struggle, but tending to yourself with self-care and kindness with questions like:

"How can I look after myself in this moment and what can I do to support myself?"

Speaking to yourself kindly:

"Life is really tough right now, and I'm hurting, and that is okay."

Caring for your own inner needs, to give yourself time to process the feelings that are arising within, helps you to trust what is really here for you, and will make you more able to have empathy and appreciation for another's circumstances.

Secondly, the capacity to understand that we are all having a human experience, then we can see this as an opportunity to unite us, rather than divide us further.

Then we can turn our compassion to the people that really need us right now, to the ones that might not have a voice, or the ability to help themselves, and share that kindness and care with them.

MINDFULNESS IN ACTION

If you notice reactivity rising within you, take a moment to pause, and to breathe.

When we're in survival mode we can tend to fly into behaviour that we may later regret, which can make us feel even worse. Yet, if we give it a little time and space, to get present and to notice what is really here for us, we can be more responsive; to know that what we're doing and saying is coming from the place that we really want it to, and in the way that it's going to be of the most benefit.

Before you act, if something is very important and you have the opportunity to do so, give yourself time, and even the overnight test to process it so you can move forward with considered action.

Our emotions can spur us into doing extraordinary things, and into creating great change, but allow it to be from deep knowing, trust for yourself, and with a compassionate heart.

I always like to ask the question:

"What would love do right now?"

LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION

Meditation is powerful as it helps you access the part of your brain which is less reactive and more responsive. It helps us have more compassion, patience, and understanding; it also assists us to feel more bonded to others and develop a sense of belonging.

In many ways we are conditioned for separateness, our survival system overrides the part of the brain that is activated for love; yet though meditation we can consciously move out of those habitual thoughts, fears and worry, and cultivate a warmth, kindness and appreciation for others.

The more we practice, particularly contemplative meditations like Loving Kindness, the more we are able to cultivate those qualities that are innate within us.

This helps us to gain the understanding that in our hearts our most basic need and desire is to be happy and to be loved, and to honour that for all of humanity and beings in the world.