

# 7 PRACTICES TO CULTIVATE *Compassion*

## Morning ritual

1

Greet each morning with a ritual.



Try this:

"Today I am fortunate to have woken up, I am alive, I have a precious human life, I am not going to waste it. I am going to use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others, to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, I am going to have kind thoughts towards others, I am not going to get angry or think badly about others, I am going to benefit others as much as I can."

Words from the Dalai Lama

## Empathy practice

2

The first step in cultivating compassion is to develop empathy for others. Many of us believe that we have empathy, and on some level, nearly all of us do. But many times, we are centered on ourselves and we let our sense of empathy get rusty.



Try this:

Try to imagine the pain that those close to you may be going through. Try to imagine the detail as much as possible. After doing this practice over time, you can try moving on to imagining the suffering of others you know, not just those who are close to you.

## Commonalities practice

3

Instead of recognizing the differences between yourself and others, try to recognize what you have in common. At the root of it all, we are all human beings. We need food, shelter and love. We crave attention, recognition, affection, and happiness. Reflect on these commonalities you have with every other human being, and ignore the differences.



Try this:

\*You can do this when meeting friends and strangers. Do it discreetly and try to do all of the steps with the same person. With your attention focusing on the other person, tell yourself:

**Step 1:** "Just like me, this person is seeking happiness in his/her life."

**Step 2:** "Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in his/her life."

**Step 3:** "Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness and despair."

**Step 4:** "Just like me, this person is seeking to fill his/her needs."

**Step 5:** "Just like me, this person is learning about life."

## Relief of suffering practice

4

Once you can empathize with another person, and understand their humanity and suffering, the next step is to want that person to be free from suffering. This is at the heart of compassion.



Try this:

Imagine the suffering of a person you've met recently. Now imagine that you are the one going through that suffering. Reflect on how much you would like that suffering to end. Reflect on how happy you would be if another person desired your suffering to end – and acted upon it. Open your heart to that human being and reflect on that feeling. *That is the feeling you want to develop.* With constant practice, that feeling can be grown and nurtured.

"If you want others to be happy,  
practice compassion.  
If you want to be happy,  
practice compassion."

– Dalai Lama

## Act of kindness practice

5

Take exercise 4 a step further. Again, imagine the suffering of someone you know or met recently. Imagine again that you are that person, going through that suffering. Now imagine that another human being would like your suffering to end— perhaps a parent or another loved one. *What would you like for that person to do to end your suffering?* Now reverse roles: *you* are the person who desires the other person's suffering to end. Imagine that you do something to help ease the suffering, or end it completely.



Try this:

Practice doing something small each day to help end the suffering of others, even in tiny way. Even a smile, a kind word, doing an errand or chore, or just talking about a problem with another person. Practice doing something kind to help ease the suffering of others.

## Those who mistreat us practice

6

When we encounter someone who mistreats us, instead of acting in anger, withdraw. Later, when you are calm and more detached, reflect on that person who mistreated you.



Try this:

- Try to imagine the background of that person – what that person might have been taught as a child.
- Try to imagine the day or week that person was going through, and what kind of things might have happened to that person.
- Try to imagine the mood and state of mind that person was in — the suffering that person must have been going through to mistreat you that way.

\*Understand that their action was *not about you*, but about *what they were going through*.

## Evening routine

7

Take a few minutes before you go to bed to reflect upon your day.



Try this:

- Think about the people you met and talked to, and how you treated each other.
- Think about your goal that you stated this morning: to act with compassion towards others. *How well did you do? What could you do better? What did you learn from your experiences today?*