

## Compassion is the key

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Treat yourself kindly so that others will do the same

Have you heard of 'spots of time'? Wordsworth wrote these words when he asked, "If we could create spots of time for others and in so doing, for ourselves?"

My father had passed away and a teacher of mine visited me to be with me in my hour of grief. Being young, suddenly feeling lonely, having lost someone who I never imagined would leave me, I wept and despaired. My teacher did not decry my thoughts or my feelings. Instead, he helped me to speak, to pour out all my anguish.

Slowly, the corrosive thoughts began to abate and were replaced by thoughts of thanks, first towards my teacher, then towards my expired father and towards many more people.

The spot of time my teacher created for me was little, but an act of kindness nevertheless.

He shifted my pattern of thought. He did not fault my self-pitying, nor channel my negativity away from my distress. He was teaching me the art of self-compassion.

Cultivating compassion for me is like armour I wear to protect myself. When I turn less on myself, I turn less on others.

A teacher, John Prabhu, once told me, "You should do to yourself what you want others to do to you." I had always heard this quote differently and did not comprehend what he was saying. He then explained, bringing clarity to what self-compassion means. "How would you like to be treated by others, your friends, family and teachers," he asked, and I said "Kindly." "Do it to yourself then. If you treat yourself harshly, this is the way you are likely to be treated by others too," he said.

He also said, "You recognise flaws in some of your closest friends, yet this does not diminish your affection for them. Why should the flaws that you see in yourself diminish your affection for yourself then?"

I asked him if such preoccupation with myself would not make me self-obsessed. He laughed and said, "Instead of despising yourself for being what you construe as self-obsessed, be compassionate to yourself and remember that it is this perceived self-obsession, this need to be liked, to be valued and cherished, that links us with other people. If we cannot accept the reality of our own need to be liked, we are likely to dismiss and even ridicule these feelings in others."

He did not stop with this. He remonstrated with me and he said, as we parted for the day, "Remember you are not unique. You have failings, but so does everyone else. You also have talents and like every other person on this planet, you deserve compassion, joy and friendship."

Self-compassion does not mean letting myself off the hook every time I say or do something that wounds. It means I have to face up to me; my fears, my anxieties, and not recoil from myself with disgust or put myself down. It actually means putting myself in my proper place and sometimes even dethroning myself from the centre of my world and putting another there.

Sometimes, I realise that while I know all this to be true, when faced with rejection, I begin to wallow. I am held in thrall by the abuse I have heard. It is at such times that I draw sustenance from what my colleague and mentor P. C. Ramakrishna has often told me, "Pull up your socks man, you have to be ready for the next performance."

Lately, I have come to realise that self-compassion does not keep score of the wrongs nor does it take pleasure in the wrongdoings of others..

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