

HOMILIES - Self-Compassion: Ground of Worth & Dignity

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Opening Words adapted from Martha Graham and Terry Patten

“There is a vitality, a life force and energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action. And because there is only one of you in all of time this expression is unique. And if you block it, if you don’t bring it into life, it will never exist through any other medium. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is, how valuable, how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep ... the channel open.” — Martha Graham

This responsibility to express our unique gifts and contributions is not only for ourselves. Our expression is something that the world needs and we have a responsibility to the world to bring into existence. If we understand unique self[-actualization] and soul-work in these terms, then we can access the kind of power we have when we care for something beyond ourselves, like [a young teenager igniting a global climate movement among her peers.] from Terry Patten, *A New Republic of the Heart*

Homily on Self-Compassion: Hardest Part of the 1st UU Principle

Last week we explored the 1st UU Principle: affirming and promoting the inherent worth and dignity of every person through the practice of Golden Eyes, seeing the inherent worth and dignity of others. Today, we turn Golden Eyes inward, wondering why it’s so hard to extend kindness toward ourselves, to affirm our own inherent worth and dignity.

Most of us have had experiences like the child in the story, falling on our faces as we try to step up for something that means a lot to us, as we take center stage.

It doesn’t go well or it doesn’t go the way we thought it would. The way we hoped for. And then, like hers, our feelings of embarrassment and disappointment don’t end there. Alarm bells ring in our limbic systems, creating a memory that goes deep, ready to protect us, to stop us from ever taking a good risk again.

And sometimes we take it a step farther, like the child in the story who was feeling ashamed. We make a leap from, “I made a bad entrance.” To, “I am a bad person.” We leap from a behavior that can be unlearned, to a self-judgment of damnation.

Self-Compassion is illusive because all this inner drama is largely invisible, repressed, pushed down out of sight.

Feeling vulnerable or ashamed, we don’t call it to anyone’s attention.

We don't know everyone else is also hobbled by their own harsh inner critics.
We don't know to look for help with our feelings, help to understand and comfort us.
We don't feel deserving of help.

Until very recently our culture didn't know how to think about or talk about emotional intelligence and emotional resilience. I'm excited by parents teaching their children that all their feelings matter, teaching them to name and share their feelings, teaching them to be emotionally self-aware, and to moderate intense feelings.

Meanwhile, all of us adults still have a lot to learn, in order to be emotionally resilient, self-aware and self-compassionate. Until we do, we are held hostage by inner critics that embody the fears of a three year old or six year old or ten year old.

These habit patterns cause suffering for us and for those around us.
They close down Golden Eyes toward ourselves.
And yet the good news is that we can slowly reprogram those voices.

When I hear that fierce inner five-year old trying to stop me from falling on my face again, I can feel her power. I can feel compassion for her suffering, my suffering from long ago.

Self-compassion opens my heart, overrides the fear alarm, and calms that inner critic.

Facing these patterns lurking within us is scary. They challenge our self-image.
It's more comfortable to focus Golden Eyes on the world outside our heads.
But until we do this inner work, we will always be running around trying to redeem ourselves in vain.

The Buddha said, "You can search throughout the entire universe for someone who is more deserving of your love and affection than you are yourself, and that person is not to be found anywhere. You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection."

The good news is that we are wired to wake up, to become aware of the shenanigans of our minds; the bad news is that we have to feel all that old suffering - so that our hearts open with compassion toward ourselves, self-compassion that transforms these habits breaks us open to ourselves and each other.

Margot Anand reminds us: "Loving yourself ... does not mean being self-absorbed or narcissistic or disregarding others. Rather it means welcoming yourself as the most honored guest in your own heart, a guest worthy of respect, a lovable companion."

Buddhist teacher Beth Roth writes, "Our relationship with ourself is considered the foundation for all other relationships. The ability to be a true friend to oneself, to love and respect oneself, to offer heartfelt wishes for one's own safety, health, happiness and peace, will determine the authenticity and ease with which we offer metta (Loving Kindness) to others.

"We cannot neglect this part of the practice. We must delve into it with complete sincerity. Inevitably, we come up against our resistance, our opinions and judgments about ourselves, all the ways we resent our mistakes and imperfections, and many examples of how we repeatedly fall short of our own expectations.

"Love for ourselves is not just for the personal traits and characteristics that we feel good about, the self we present to the world. Our task is to love ourselves completely, which means including all the things we don't like so much about ourselves. [All those fear-based habit patterns not quite integrated yet.]

As Oscar Wilde said, "It is not the perfect but the imperfect that is most in need of our love."

It seems paradoxical that in this culture so focused on individualism only now are we slowly awakening to the necessity of self-love: the power of compassion from wise hearts and humble vulnerability from our oh-so-human egos.

As spiritual teacher Terry Patten says, we are all deep souls, but also cartoon characters.

May we bring our beautiful hearts compassionately to those parts of ourselves most in need of love. May we behold ourselves with Golden Eyes.

Our **Offertory** is the first verse of the song, "Metta," Loving Kindness.

May I be at peace and ease and know the joy of my true nature, know the joy of my true nature. May I be at one and well, within a sea of loving kindness, in a sea of loving kindness. May I be free from suffering. May I be safe from harm. Open in deep compassion, may I live the joy of loving kindness, my true nature, loving kindness my true nature

Mudra for Self-Compassion:

Emily Williams

Reading: “Praying What Is,” by Jan Phillips, in *Bulletins from Immortality* (adapted)
I am a child of the universe,

I am in the cosmos and the cosmos is in me,

Mind-at-Large broadcasts Intelligence day and night and I am its receiver, its vessel and transformer.

I am a co-creator of the Universe I belong to. Creation is inside me, longing for expression, bound by nothing but the thoughts I hold to.

I am saturated with Divinity, connected to everything, my atoms forged at the beginning of time.

The Universe inside me is Love on fire, Love expanding, Love attracting.

As I fold myself into the unfolding Cosmos,
I receive its power, its consciousness, its endless support.

Powers to heal are mine. Powers to create are mine. Powers to bring peace are mine.

I give thanks for my life, and use it for the benefit of all.

All praise to the Unknowable Mystery that permeates everything.

Alleluia and Amen.

Singing: “Metta,” verse 2

May you be at peace and ease and know the joy of your true nature, know the joy of your true nature. May you be at one and well, within a sea of loving kindness, in a sea of loving kindness. May you be free from suffering. May you be safe from harm. Open in deep compassion, may you live the joy of loving kindness, your true nature, loving kindness your true nature.

Homily: Why Self-Compassion Matters

Why does self-compassion matter? It matters first for oneself. And as Terry Patten reminds us, it also matters for the world.

First why it matters for oneself:

Shirley Nelson writes: “Self-love is synonymous with self-compassion. Both are key to mental health and well-being, and help keep depression and anxiety away. Research shows that having more self-compassion builds resiliency in the face of adversity and helps people to recover more quickly from traumatic experiences.

Self-compassion leads to self-kindness, an ability to speak kindly to oneself even when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate.

“By practicing self-compassion and cultivating exercises to help develop more awareness you will lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol and increase [your] heart rate variability which is your body’s physiological ability to deal with stressful situations.”

Shirley continues where Emily left us with the mudra for self-compassion. I invite you to join me and Emily in mudras Shirley describes:

Let’s begin with the intention of opening to self-compassion.

Then bring one hand on your chest, breathing the intention of kindness toward yourself.

Now bring both hands onto your chest, opening to your beautiful heart.

Now leave one hand on your heart and one hand on your belly, welcoming the heart’s guidance and the wise belly, your body’s sense of intuition.

Now reach across with both hands to rub gently up and down the opposite upper arm.

Developing self-compassion and living with compassion toward ourselves changes the brain and the blood chemistry for the better. And so we can say literally that self-compassion matters.

Yet the biggest gift of self-compassion is not for ourselves as individuals. It’s the interpersonal power self-compassion brings into our shared space: into our relationships, collaborations, and communities.

When we are energized by self-compassion, we can respond with resilience even to the uncertainties of pandemic and the daily rollercoaster ride of political power grabs and assaults on democracy. We can be present in the moment, with love and courage.

Self-compassion makes it possible for us to embody Love, to listen with our whole hearts and minds and bodies, so that we can give our gifts and talents to a world that needs resilient people who have calmed those scary voices, people who have learned to be kind and compassionate to themselves as well as to others, people seeing with Golden Eyes the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

When people grounded in self-compassion come together, we co-create new narratives, new possibilities for healing our communities and living responsibly in this interdependent world.

May we support one another in valuing, cultivating and living from self-compassion, so that we can truly honor our 1st UU principle, with Golden Eyes all around!

Closing Song: “Metta,” verse 3

May we be at peace and ease and know the joy of our true nature, know the joy of our true nature. May we be at one and well, within a sea of loving kindness, in a sea of loving kindness. May we be free from suffering. May we be safe from harm. Open in deep compassion, may we live the joy of loving kindness, our true nature, loving kindness our true nature.

Closing Words: from John O’Donohue and Galway Kinnell, adapted

From John O’Donohue;

So many people are frightened by the wonder of their own presence.

Many of us get very afraid and eventually compromise. We settle for something safe, rather than engaging the danger and wildness in our own hearts.

One of the greatest tragedies is the un-lived life.

May you have a reverence always for the immensity that is inside of you.

From Galway Kinnell: Sometimes it becomes necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness so it flowers from within of self-blessing.

May we all relearn our loveliness, our inherent worth and dignity, and flower from within of self-blessing.

May self-compassion support you in living from your heart, so that together we are helping to bend that moral arc of the Universe toward justice for all beings.

Extinguishing the Chalice

Closing the service, we extinguish the Chalice, embodying its light in Golden Eyes,
Shining in self-compassion,

Shining in one another,

Shining throughout the world.