

Compassion Story of the Month

With Brattleboro voting overwhelmingly to become part of the international Charter for Compassion, the Reformer and The Commons have agreed to publish a “compassion story of the month.” This is the thirty-third. Information on submissions from Brattleboro area residents is offered below.

12 Steps at the Time of Covid

By Douglas Cox

In 2017 the Town of Brattleboro joined the International Charter of Compassion. The Charter was founded by church scholar Karen Armstrong who noted that all world religions have some formulation of the Golden Rule and value compassion as a spiritual and social touchstone. Karen wrote "12 Steps to a Compassionate Life" (bolded below) as a guide to growing compassion in our selves and in our communities.

Here are some reflections on these 12 steps in light of our current time of crisis.

1. **The First Step: Learn About Compassion:** This is an opportunity to expand and clarify our understanding of Compassion and how it works in our human lives and in the natural world; to think about and find compassion in the light of each new day and the changes the days bring.
2. **The Second Step: Look at Your Own World:** We are experiencing the new reality of a more closely interconnected world. We are also given an opportunity to look at, and be reminded of, our personal world and the circle of friends and others on whom we depend.
3. **The Third Step: Compassion for Yourself:** We are seeing more clearly our fears and the limits of our control of events that shape our lives. We can practice acceptance of our foibles, failings and frailties, and fears and the limits of our power.
4. **The Fourth Step: Empathy:** We are brought face-to-face with the fears and suffering and loss in the lives of others near and far. And we are reminded that such suffering and loss could be ours. We can feel empathy.

5. **The Fifth Step: Mindfulness:** This is an opportunity to pay attention to people and things that, in normal times, we may have overlooked, or ignored. We have the time and perspective to pay attention.
6. **The Sixth Step: Action:** We are all making changes in our lives for the greater good of our selves, our neighbors and human kind. We can experience the empowerment of doing all that we can.
7. **The Seventh Step: How Little We Know:** We are doing the best we can on limited and often erroneous information and knowledge and wisdom. It is not always so clear as in this moment how little we know.
8. **The Eighth Step: How Should We Speak to One Another?** We can be clear about our fears and decisions in ways that can be kind and non-judgmental of others who feel and decide differently; we can speak honestly and kindly.
9. **The Ninth Step: Concern for Everybody:** The nature of a pandemic is that we are all in this together; my wellness depends on the wellness of all. This time may be an opening toward an ongoing concern and caring for others.
10. **The Tenth Step: Knowledge:** We can learn from this time and grow personally and as a society.
11. **The Eleventh Step: Recognition:** We can learn from this experience and see the world in a new way, finding principles and patterns of living that will serve us all well.
12. **The Twelfth Step: Love Your Enemies:** COVID-19 can be a gift to us, particularly we of privilege, an awakening to help us grow into more balanced, centered, compassionate wholeness in this world.

Submissions, from Brattleboro area residents, for future publication, not to exceed 650 words, should be emailed to: compassionstory@gmail.com or mailed to: Compassion Story of the Month, PO Box 50, Marlboro, VT 05344. Please include your name, address, phone number and email address. Earlier submitted stories will automatically be considered in subsequent months.