**Have Mercy**

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“If you want *others* to be happy, practice compassion.

If *you* want to be happy, practice compassion.”

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Think of the things you love most and how you treat them ever so gently: babies, animals, expensive clothing and possessions, or cherished family mementos. A wise person knows how to treat her/himself in the same gentle way.

As spiritual companions, we are physically and emotionally attuned to the needs of others. We innately know when and how to provide care and comfort when our dear ones need it. Unfortunately, when we are in need of comfort ourselves, we’re prone to keep going and going; not stopping long enough to give ourselves what we need in the moment to be physically, emotionally, or spiritually nourished.

As human beings, we are not really taught how to be self-compassionate; to be as tender and understanding toward ourselves as we are encouraged to be toward others. Instead, many of us adopt attitudes of toughness. We tend to be self-critical, self-doubting, and judgmental. We expect much more of ourselves than we do of others.

Self-compassion is a learned skill of extending tenderness in moments of suffering. Self-compassion simply asks that we turn our natural propensity for kindness inward. The voice of self-compassion speaks to us and says, “Remember, you are a human *be*-ing, not a human *do*-ing. What you are experiencing *is* difficult. Stop, breathe, be kind to yourself in this moment because this is*hard*.”

In truth, self-compassion may be the most powerful mindset any person can embrace. To cultivate peace in our households (and the world in general), first, we must learn to walk peaceably with ourselves. We cannot exhibit true compassion for others, including our children and partners, if we have not cultivated it for ourselves first.

I recall a certain truth-telling practice I did as a girl with neighborhood friends. “Cross my heart and hope to die ...” ­We took the “cross your heart” part pretty seriously. When you crossed your heart, you were making a solemn vow that could not be broken because the heart is the seat of trusted truth. (Thankfully, we didn’t take the “hope to die part” seriously at all.)

When we embark on a spiritual path, we are naturally always trying to do our best. We are not perfect people. We are people who play multiple roles and are beyond busy, so there will be times when we are off-balance and errors are made. Things said. Situations or people neglected. At times we may feel less than kindly toward ourself— self-critical, judgmental, or disappointed.

When this happens to you, take a deep breath and make an adult-sized promise to yourself: *a promise to thrive and love yourself more.*

Place your hand over your heart. Bring your awareness to your heart center. Feel the warmth of your hand covering your heart with understanding.

*On the inhale, breathe in a feeling of kindness.
On the exhale, breathe out your disappointment.
Breathe in understanding, breathe out concern.
Breathe in self-forgiveness, breathe out relief.*

Continue in this way until you return to a feeling of equanimity and balance.

Receive what your wise self knows: *You are doing the very best you can.*

Receive what your faithful heart says: *You are divinely loved.*

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