

CULTIVATING COMPASSION

While we are all born with the capacity to be compassionate, there is only one route to becoming a compassionate person. That route is learning and practice.

Compassion isn't a quality you can acquire from the outside world. There is only one way to get it, and that is to cultivate it within yourself.

To me, compassion is the heartfelt acknowledgement of a person's difficulties, struggles and challenges, no matter what those may be, who that person is or what they may have done. Along with this, there is also a genuine desire to, in some meaningful way, alleviate the distress caused by those difficulties, struggles and challenges.

When cultivating our ability to be compassionate, it's important to remember that the feelings we have and whatever help we give must be respectful. Otherwise our "compassion" becomes pity, and pity only pulls a person down.

The call to live compassionately is constant. It comes from every experience of human injustice that we have and all of life's inequities, be they big or small. As we learn and grow through our healing from these experiences, the more able we become to respond to them with compassion instead of one of our many ways of defence.

Compassion is an outgrowth of love. Connection, non-judgement and forgiveness are its hallmarks. It is one of the highest human qualities and as such continually asks us to reach higher and expand into our full potential to love and care.

The more healed and whole we become, the less need we have to pass judgement, the more able we are to forgive, and the more connected we become to ourselves and others. This is how we create the climate in which compassion thrives.

Compassion is not something you give out to other people so much as it is a human quality you express in your way of being. In order to fully express it you have to fully embrace it, and you cannot ever do that until you learn to have compassion for yourself. As we are often our own worst critics and harshest judges, this can be the hardest challenge of cultivating compassion. But remember, one of the things that makes it one of our highest qualities is that it does not come with conditions. Everyone is entitled to it.

Expanding your ability to be compassionate is a life long project steered by love. Healing takes you through learning that opens your heart so that whatever seeds



of compassion you cultivate can have room to grow. All they need is for you to tend them with dedication and loving effort.

© Sally Scott

Note: The peacock feather pictured above represents a universal symbol of compassion.