



07 - Compassion

This document is an extract from the full chapter, which is available for download in the table via this link: <https://raft2freedom.org/raft-to-freedom-downloads/>

There is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction - as well as the second, the third and the fourth - with an awareness imbued with compassion. Thus he keeps pervading above, below and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with compassion: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

- Brahnavihāra Suttas (AN 4.125-126), translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

In this first stage of our journey, having recognised that life is sometimes painful, difficult and disappointing, the question becomes how we respond. The four Brahnavihāras - Compassion, Friendliness, Appreciative joy and Equanimity - are the ropes that bind our raft together, and compassion is the first strand: the wise, kind response to suffering that neither denies it nor adds resistance to it.

Compassion has two aspects: an instinctive empathy that lets us recognise pain as shared, and an active compassion that moves us to respond with care - towards others, and just as importantly, towards ourselves. Self-compassion is not self-indulgence; it loosens the grip of shame and self-judgment that so often deepens our suffering and fuels the patterns of escape and self-sabotage this workbook addresses, replacing them with the courage to be present instead.

This chapter's practice offers a short way to meet difficulty with kindness in the moment. Held alongside the foundational planks of the Five Gifts, compassion prepares us to carry pain honestly as we turn, next, to the four anchors of mindfulness.

Self-reflections

Consider your typical responses when faced with difficulty or suffering, your own or others':

- 1 What is my habitual reaction to physical, mental or emotional pain? ([view card](#))

- 2 When I see suffering in others, what feelings arise most strongly - examples include empathy, pity, aversion, overwhelm, a wish to help? [\(view card\)](#)
- 3 How do I typically react when I make a mistake or experience a setback? Is my inner voice harsh or kind? [\(view card\)](#)
- 4 What does self-compassion mean to me? Does it feel accessible, difficult, or unfamiliar? [\(view card\)](#)
- 5 Can I recall a time when responding to difficulty with compassion, from myself or someone else, made a real difference? Can I offer myself that same compassion? [\(view card\)](#)
- 6 If a close friend were in my position right now, what kind words would I offer them? Can I offer myself the same? [\(view card\)](#)
- 7 How can I be more present with someone else's pain - or my own - without immediately trying to fix it? [\(view card\)](#)

Journaling prompts

Use your journal to explore compassion more deeply:

- 1 **Acknowledging your pain, difficulties and disappointments:** write about a specific difficulty you are currently experiencing. Try to describe it simply, without excessive judgment or storytelling. Then experiment with offering yourself a phrase of compassion, such as "this is really difficult right now - may I meet this with compassion." Write about how this feels.
- 2 **Compassion versus other responses:** think of a recent challenging situation. What was your initial reaction - compassion, or something else, such as anger, fear, self-pity or blame? How did that reaction affect the situation and your own well-being? How might responding with compassion have changed things?
- 3 **Obstacles to self-compassion:** what gets in the way of offering yourself compassion - beliefs such as "I don't deserve it" or "this is self-indulgent", fear of letting yourself off the hook, or habitual self-criticism? Explore these obstacles gently.
- 4 **The rope metaphor:** reflect on how compassion, especially self-compassion, could act as a rope binding your own efforts together on your path to freedom. How might it provide strength and flexibility when facing challenges, preventing your raft from falling apart under stress?
- 5 **Just like me:** choose someone you find difficult, and write the three "just like me" lines for them - they want to be happy, they have known pain and loss, they are doing their best. What shifts, if anything, as you write it?

- 6 **Two wings:** where in your life do you notice more wisdom than warmth, or more warmth than wisdom? What would it look like to bring the other wing more fully into that part of your life?
- 7 **An unmet need:** think of a recent craving or urge. Instead of treating it as an enemy, ask it gently: what unmet need are you pointing to? Write down whatever answer arises, without needing to act on it.

For a printable reminder to carry this stage's practice into daily life, see the Self-Compassion card: <https://raft2freedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/appropriate-response-self-compassion.png>

Remember to remember

Compassion, particularly self-compassion, is the first strand of the strong, resilient rope that binds our raft together. It is the wise, kind and appropriate response to the recognition of dukkha - the inherent pain, difficulties and disappointments of life laid bare by Gotama's first realisation. Instead of adding layers of resistance, judgment or despair, compassion allows us to meet suffering with an open heart and the intention to alleviate it.

Let this quality of compassion be your constant companion as we continue through the first stage of our journey. It is a powerful resource, always available, helping us hold the truth of our lives with courage and grace, and preparing us for the work of Abandoning that lies ahead.

*Unlike self-criticism, which asks if you're good enough,
self-compassion asks: what's good for you?*

- Kristin Neff, *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself* (2011)

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