

Today's lesson is inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King's I Have A Dream speech which he gave on August 28, 1963, at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Many regard it as the greatest speech of the twentieth century. Though King was one of several featured speakers that day, *I Have a Dream* became synonymous with the aims of the march and the entire civil rights movement. His dream represented the dream of millions of Americans demanding a free, equal, and just nation.

The freedom that millions of Americans were desiring is still something that many of us are trying to find. Thich Nhat Hanh wrote *Freedom is not given to us by anyone; we have to cultivate it ourselves. It is a daily practice... No one can prevent you from being aware of each step you take or each breath in and breath out.*

The freedom we seek begins with being compassionate toward ourselves. When we are compassionate with ourselves we can be free enough to be truly happy and be compassionate in the world. The Dalai Lama spoke about this when he said, *If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.*

Our erroneous human thinking teaches us that:

- If we are self-compassionate we are self-indulgent.
- If we don't criticize ourselves we won't be motivated to do our best.
- If we are self-compassionate we are being selfish.
- If we are self-compassionate we do not have strong character.

Here are a few ways to have compassion for yourself:

1. Treat yourself kindly. Treat yourself like you would a good friend.
2. Be mindful of your thoughts and feelings.
3. Remember that others have the same thoughts and feelings as you do.
4. Turn within and ask your higher knowing to show you where you lack integrity, love, trust, compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance.
5. Do the following Self-Compassion Exercise.

Self-Compassion Exercise

- Allow yourself to think of a difficult situation and feel the associated stress and discomfort in your body. Say to yourself something like: *this hurts* or *this is uncomfortable*.
- Remember that others are challenged by their humanity. Keep in mind that you are not alone.
- Place your hands over your heart and say something like:
I am free to have compassion for myself.
I love myself.
I accept myself just as I am.

Tibetan Lama Yeshe reminds us, *Be gentle first with yourself if you wish to be gentle with others.*

Byron Katie wrote, *Do you want to meet the love of your life? Look in the mirror.*

Thich Nhat Hanh affirmed, *The amount of happiness that you have depends on the amount of freedom you have in your heart.*

Affirmation: *I am free! Praise God, I am free!*