

Most of us encounter difficult people in our lives. These difficult people may show up in many places including our family, our workplace, in the media and even our church. Dealing with difficult people can seem like struggling with a roaring lion. Coping with a difficult person may be frustrating, maddening and sometimes even frightening. The truth is, we cannot reason with an unreasonable person. However, there are some proven techniques to manage such dicey situations better. We can maintain inner peace by freeing the lion within ourselves and having compassion for ourselves and the difficult person with the lion's mask on in front of us.

Here are keys to handling difficult people and empowering ourselves to stand in strength in the presence of a roaring lion.

The key step is to **Notice Suffering**. It may seem crazy to consider that someone who is being difficult or frightening is suffering. The truth is that from the Buddhist perspective, we are all suffering until we are free from greed, defensiveness, hatred and self-centeredness. These are qualities that all of us get to overcome to become enlightened or to embrace our God-self fully. The reason that a person roars like a lion is that they are suffering. What if their roaring is a call for help?

The second key is to **Be Mindful**. Be mindful that the pain we feel is within ourselves. What are we allowing ourselves to feel as a result of the lion's roar? What is our emotional response? If we look closely, we will probably realize that we are feeling vulnerable. The vulnerability is at the core of our common humanity. This realization can help motivate us to change our erroneous thoughts and beliefs. Meditation is a great tool to become more mindful.

The third key is to **Notice Commonalities**. Instead of recognizing the differences between yourself and the roaring person, recognize the things that you have in common. We all crave attention, affection, recognition, happiness and love. Here are five useful *commonality* statements. Realizing that we share them with others helps us to have empathy for others. It is powerful to speak these statements with others.

*Just like me, you are seeking happiness in your life.*  
*Just like me, you are trying to avoid suffering in your life.*  
*Just like me, you have known sadness, loneliness, and despair.*  
*Just like me, you are seeking to fill your needs.*  
*Just like me, you are learning about life.*

The fourth key is to **Practice the Golden Rule**. Treat others as you want to be treated. Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you. Stop yourself from making that brilliantly wounding remark. Responding to injustice with hatred and contempt will simply increase antagonism.

The fifth key is to **Have Compassion for the Person Behind the Roaring Lion Mask**. When you find yourself wanting to avoid another person's sorrow, remember what it felt like to feel alone with sadness and do not turn away. Difficult people live rent-free in our minds. The question before us is: *how do we deal with our tenants?* When we cultivate compassion, we are treating ourselves with compassion as much as we are developing concern for the well-being of others. When we exclude others from our compassion, we are creating a split, within us and between us. This split limits the expansive reach of the heart and takes us away from our highest possibilities. When we hate we are becoming enemies of our love. Compassion defuses the power of an oppressor to harm us emotionally. As the Buddha said, *Hatred never ceases by hate; by love alone does hatred cease.* Jesus echoed that by imploring us to *love our enemies*. When we cultivate compassion, we are healing ourselves and the world.

Affirmation: *As I let go and let God, I take the path of a peacemaker.*