

Audio File Transcript

Self-Compassionate Letter for Shame

This practice is the self-compassionate letter for shame. So one way of learning to speak to ourselves in a compassionate way is by writing a compassionate letter to ourselves. Writing is slower than thinking, which makes it easier to gather our thoughts and also to guide them in the direction we would like to go. You can write a self-compassionate letter whenever you notice that you're being self-critical and that you would like to switch to self-compassion. A self-compassionate letter can be written in at least three different ways. The most common way is to write a letter to yourself or to a younger version of yourself from the perspective of your compassionate self. So writing a letter from yourself to yourself. Another option is to write a letter to a friend whom you imagine to be struggling like you. And that allows your natural compassion for a friend to flow. And the third way is to write it from the perspective of a compassionate friend to yourself. But in general, the direction of compassion is less important than our ability to activate the energy of compassion, finding words that capture warmth and goodwill and kindness. So these instructions are instructions that direct compassion from a compassionate part of ourselves to Ourselves are a part of ourselves that needs compassion.

So if you'd like to do this practice, please find a comfortable chair and something to write with. And then settle into your chair, feeling the comfort of your chair, maybe taking a few deep breaths. Just to focus, come into the present moment. And then to have something to write about, I'd like you to reflect on a situation that you criticize yourself for. And maybe for the sake of this exercise, let it be a past event. A situation that's only mildly or moderately upsetting. Perhaps an event that involved your own behavior. So maybe, for example, you were introduced to somebody and you promptly forgot their name. And then you have to address them again. Maybe you were at a fancy restaurant, knocked over a glass of wine. Maybe you went to a formal occasion, under-addressed or uncomfortably late. So think of an event that still makes you cringe a bit and you criticize yourself for it. And now in response to that discomfort, let's connect with compassion. So please offer yourself some compassionate touch. Perhaps putting your hand on the part of the body that feels the most uneasy about this situation. And feel the sense of touch and the warmth of your hand. You can even massage that part of your body. And as you do this, also drop into your own inner, innate compassion. You can do that by recollecting your compassionate friend who is always within you, that source of wisdom and compassion. And savor the feeling of that company, that quality of compassion that's in all of us.

And as you connect with your inner compassion or your compassionate self or your compassionate friend, remember that this part of you genuinely loves you and wants the best for you. This part of you knows you, maybe even better than you know yourself and is wise. Part of you also knows that shame is painful and doesn't want you to suffer. And this part of you loves you just as you are. So from that perspective, start writing a compassionate letter to yourself. So allow your words to flow automatically and spontaneously without second guessing yourself directly from your compassionate heart, but making your words reflect an awareness of what you went through. In other words, address the embarrassment or shame that you feel, the awkwardness of the situation from the perspective of compassion. So your letter could begin with words like, I know how much you have suffered from shame. I know how you continue to suffer when you think of this situation, but there is something I would like you to know. And then allow the words of your inner compassion to flow. And please write for as long as you wish. Often 5 minutes is enough.

And then when you're done, take some time to read and linger with the words that you've written. Take some time to feel the transformative power of compassionate language, even compassion that's flowing from your own heart. Give yourselves permission to be moved by your own words, by your own compassion. Feel it. Bathe in it a little while. And at some point, if you'd like another dose of compassion, you can tuck this letter away and you can reread it in the future. You can put it in a book that you might open later and discover it. And you can always also write a new letter to yourself when you find yourself engulfed in shame and self-criticism. You can practice just like this from your compassionate self. I know how much you've suffered, but there's something I would like you to know. And if it's hard to write to yourself, imagine a friend who had just gone through what you might have gone through and write from your own compassion to that person. And if you're a visual person, you could always draw a picture instead. You can imagine yourself being embraced by someone. You can put that down as an image. So finding a way that works best for you to capture this quality of compassion in response to self-criticism. Thank you.