



Charter for **Compassion**

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TWELVE STEPS  
TO A  
COMPASSIONATE  
LIFE  
Reading Group Guide

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Fetzer Institute

**TED**Prize

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*Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* Reading Groups  
are affiliated with the Charter for Compassion.  
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*Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*  
**Reading Group Guide**

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## Acknowledgments & Credits

We are indebted to Karen Armstrong for initiating the Charter for Compassion, for her passionate and tireless work to “make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world,” and for giving us *Twelve Steps* to guide and inspire us to live more compassionately.

We offer heartfelt thanks to those who’ve contributed greatly to the work of the Charter for Compassion in communities around the world and to those who informed the development of *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* reading groups, including: Susan Bradbury, Bellingham Compassion Movement, Bellingham, Washington, US; Skye Burn, Bellingham Compassion Movement, Bellingham, Washington, US; Rev. Guo Cheen, Compassionate Action Network, Seattle, Washington, US; Lynn Green, Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education, Vancouver, British Columbia, CA; Rennie Keates, Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education, Vancouver, British Columbia, CA; Meghan Lyons, AIESEC, Karachi, PK; Jannet Nordemann, Canadians for Compassion, London, Ontario, CA. A special thank you to facilitators who generously shared great ideas they used in their groups: Julan Al-Yassin, Dubai, UAE; Rev. Guo Cheen, Seattle, Washington, US; Cynthia Didion, Lincoln, Nebraska, US; Vicki Kensinger, Palmyra, Pennsylvania, US; Fiona McDougal, Wellington, NZ; and Jennifer O’Sullivan, Alexandria, Virginia, US.

We are also indebted to the Compassionate Action Network ([my.compassionateactionnetwork.com/](http://my.compassionateactionnetwork.com/)), Compassionate Seattle, and the International Institute for Compassionate Cities (<http://www.compassionatecities.org/>) for their groundbreaking work to bring compassion into our daily lives.

We thank you, too, for your important part in this effort. Each of us can play a significant role in making our world more compassionate.

## Credits

The guide was developed by Roselle Kovitz, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* Reading Groups Coordinator, with invaluable contributions from Pam Kilborn-Miller, Charter for Compassion Project Manager, Gillian Gonda and Amy Ferguson of the Fetzer Institute, Skye Burn, and Kim Thornton. Ilene Cooper, Children's Books Editor at Booklist Magazine compiled *Make It Better: Books about the Golden Rule and Compassion for Children*. Group Guidelines and The Importance of Listening suggestions were originally developed by Kim Childs.

Thank you!

## Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* Reading Groups. This guide is designed to help you organize, promote, and facilitate your own reading group.

In 2008, Karen Armstrong won the 2008 TED Prize and with it her “wish to change the world.” Karen sought to create a Charter for Compassion. Thousands of people contributed to the process and the Charter was unveiled around the world in November 2009 ([www.charterforcompassion.org](http://www.charterforcompassion.org)). One year later, the Charter has inspired community-based acts of compassion all over the world. From Seattle to Karachi, Houston to Amsterdam, in schools, houses of worship, city governments, and among individuals everywhere, the message of the Charter is transforming lives.

Reading Groups are contributing to this transformation. Well over 400 people have downloaded this guide, so far. Thanks to volunteers throughout the world, we have groups in at least eight countries, including Canada, England, Ireland, New Zealand, Qatar, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States, with more being added regularly.

Our societies are informed by the words we use and the actions we take as individuals, in our institutions, and in our communities. Expanding our understanding of compassion and discussing it with others are important steps toward activating the Golden Rule around the world. You are key to making this happen!

## Goals

Reading groups will use the book *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* book to seed discussions that produce the following results:

- Foster a greater understanding of compassion.
- Identify ways to regularly practice compassion in personal and public ways.
- Affirm and act on the Charter for Compassion at [charterforcompassion.org](http://charterforcompassion.org).

## Starting a Group

- **Obtain the book:** Ask your local bookstores if they would provide a discount for a bulk purchase for your reading group. (Note: The paperback version will be released in late December, 2011.) People in Canada and the US can also order directly from the publisher at a discount (40% off a minimum order of \$200 retail for either the paperback or hardback version):
  - ✓ (in US) Review and complete Random House’s One-time Event Order (download from [www.charterforcompassion.org/readinggroups](http://www.charterforcompassion.org/readinggroups)) or call Random House Customer Service at 1.800.733.3000. Mention you are ordering for a book club event.
  - ✓ (in Canada) Call Random House of Canada’s Special Sales Department at 1.905.624.0672. Mention you are ordering for a book club event.
  - ✓ Other languages: A Spanish language version of *Twelve Steps* will be available in September, 2011.
- **Choose a location:** Find a place to host the group (homes, places of worship, libraries, coffee houses, community centers, workplaces). The room should be quiet and private, to facilitate sharing.
- **Schedule meetings:** Determine how often you’ll meet. We suggest meeting for 60-90 minutes to two hours once a month for one year, devoting one meeting to each step.

*Idea from the field:*

In Lincoln, Nebraska, two meetings are devoted to each step. The first focuses on discussing the chapter content and how each member will implement that step in their life. In the second, members share the results of their action(s), what worked, and the challenges they faced when acting on that step.

- **Invite participation:** Ask people to join you—friends, family, colleagues, members of groups or organizations—or recruit more broadly, using the customizable flyer or news release downloadable from [www.charterforcompassion.org/readinggroups](http://www.charterforcompassion.org/readinggroups).

## Promoting Your Reading Group

- **Identify your audience:** Identify whom you'd like to recruit and how best to reach them.
- **Promote within your organization:** If your audience is part of a specific organization, church, school, or business, customize the flyer (at [www.charterforcompassion.org/readinggroups](http://www.charterforcompassion.org/readinggroups)) and post it around your building. Use internal communications such as a newsletter, e-blast, announcements at events, Facebook and Twitter sites, to get word out.
- **Promote to the public:** If you are recruiting group members from the general public, post flyers and information in real or virtual places your audience frequents.
- **Contact the media:** Identify appropriate media contacts (such as book reviewers, local or regional news reporters) at local newspapers, radio, and TV stations. Customize and distribute the news (download from [www.charterforcompassion.org/readinggroups](http://www.charterforcompassion.org/readinggroups)) to your designated media contacts. Follow up with a phone call to each contact.
- **Ask for help:** Book stores and libraries might be willing to promote your group to their customers and patrons.

## Facilitating Your Group

- **Establish group guidelines:** Use or modify the group guidelines on the following page.
- **Select and tailor discussion questions:** Review, use, and/or modify the discussion questions for your group, beginning on page 8.
- **At your initial meeting:** Introduce the purpose of your reading group and share the guidelines and the importance of carefully listening to each other (see The Importance of Listening on page 6). Ask members to introduce themselves and share a question, challenge, or personal story of compassion, as a way of getting acquainted.
- **At your subsequent meetings:** Ask members to share their experiences practicing the suggested actions from the previous step.
- **As you near the end of the 12 steps:** Ask the group if any or all of them would like to continue meeting and/or determine how, as a group, they'd like to put compassion into action.

*Ideas from the field:*

- **Praxis Circle:** In Seattle, Washington, the Praxis Circle concept, which recognizes that each person expresses themselves and shares differently, is being used. After introductions, two questions from the Reading Group Guide are posed. For 3–5 minutes each person writes down thoughts about the questions. In pairs, they then share their reflections for 10–15 minutes. For another 15+ minutes, the entire group reconvenes to share what they learned.

- **Google Groups:** In Alexandria, Virginia, and Palmyra, Pennsylvania, Google groups were set up to encourage members to share experiences and information between meetings. “Tabs” were created for book recommendations, excerpts from books that members are reading, poetry, links to articles and videos, and monthly *Twelve Steps* discussion questions and actions.
- **Use of video segments:** In Alexandria, Virginia, there was a great response to screening the clip of [Krista Tippett](#) talking about compassion during the Charter’s one-year anniversary event. There are lots of videos on the Charter site that can be mined for reading groups.
- **Provide a copy of the Charter:** In Wellington, New Zealand, everyone was provided with a copy of the Charter and the “Golden Rule” from all the different faith traditions.
- **Scarboro Golden Rule Meditation Exercise:** A [Scarboro Meditation exercise](#) was used to close a discussion group in Dubai, UAE, and could be used for Step 5: Mindfulness.

## Reading Group Guidelines

Guidelines or shared agreements among group members help to keep conversations orderly, respectful, and conducive to honest sharing. Feel free to customize this list or generate your own guidelines.

Introduce the guidelines at the first meeting and refer to them as needed.

- We agree that any personal information shared in this group is confidential.
- We intend to balance sharing and listening, allowing everyone to participate, and we’ll pass whenever we wish.
- We will allow others to speak without interruption.
- We will assume good intentions on everyone’s part, agree that we may disagree at times, and learn together about respecting differences.
- We intend to begin and end our conversations on time and participate in all group meetings.
- We will listen attentively.

## The Importance of Listening

*Simply put, there is nothing, nothing in the world that can take the place of one person intentionally listening or speaking to another.*

—Jacob Needleman, Philosopher and Author

Listening is important to practicing compassion. At the first meeting, take a few minutes to discuss the value of deeply listening to each other (see suggestions below). During this discussion you might share experiences when you and your group members really felt heard or when you or your members listened to someone who needed to be heard.

In addition to listening to individuals, it’s important to listen to what is emerging from the discussion. The group will not only be sharing ideas, insights, and stories, but they will also be giving form to an intangible essence: compassion. Short periods of silent reflection, especially following periods of intense discussion, give this essence a place in the conversation.

- Listen with an open mind and heart.
- Even when we feel impatient to speak, we will allow others to speak without interruption.

- Accept that the speaker’s feelings are valid, no matter what we think. We will refrain from “correcting” the speaker’s feelings.
- Listen with no agenda other than to be a sounding board for someone who needs to speak.
- Imagine that we are speaking and listening to ourselves.
- Listen without trying to solve or fix a problem unless feedback or advice is sought.

### **A Word from Karen Armstrong**

The work of the Charter for Compassion and this book is born from Karen Armstrong’s commitment to provide *practical* and *actionable* ideas that can indeed transform our world. Armstrong offers these words of advice to reading groups:

*I suggest that at the end of each session, each person resolves to introduce one regular practice into his or her life. This resolution should, for example, be “realistic.” It has to be something that you can feasibly include in your daily routine; it should be challenging, but not so demanding that you give it up after a few days; it is no good saying, for example, “I am never going to say another unkind word to anybody in my life ever again” ~ because this just isn’t going to happen. It should be something really concrete: “I am going to go out of my way to perform one act of kindness each day to somebody (make a list of candidates!) who really annoys me.”*

*The resolution should also be practical. It shouldn’t be something vague, such as “I am going to open my heart to the whole world.” That is meaningless unless it becomes a concrete reality in your life.*

*Be creative and inventive; there is no need to stick slavishly to these suggestions: think of ways in which your actions can become a **dynamic and positive force for change**, not just within yourself but in the world around you. Make each resolution a regular part of your life, and by the end of the course you will have twelve new habits that should be effecting a transformation within yourself and your immediate environment.*

## Discussion Questions and Actions

The following are suggested discussion questions and actions to use in your reading group. Most are taken directly from *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*. Select and use whatever questions and actions fit your style and/or your group.

### *Step 1: Learn About Compassion*

#### Discussion Questions:

1. In the preface, Armstrong writes that our “egotism is rooted in the ‘old brain,’ which was bequeathed to us by the reptiles that struggled out of the primal slime some 500 million years ago” (p. 13). Even though we’ve developed a “new brain” endowed with the power of reason, our instincts for survival “are overwhelming and automatic; they are meant to override our more rational considerations” (p. 14). Why is it important to the practice of compassion to understand the functions of our old and new brain?
2. “The Buddha’s crucial insight was that to live morally was to live for others” (p. 40). Why was it not enough for the Buddha to attain “the very highest states of trance” and practice “fierce asceticism” to attain enlightenment? What was missing?
3. Confucius believed that “when people are treated with reverence, they become conscious of their own sacred worth, and ordinary actions, such as eating and drinking are lifted to a level higher than the biological and invested with holiness” (p. 42). He also believed in “a constantly expanding series of concentric circles of compassion” from family, to community, state, and world (p. 43). In what ways do Confucius’ beliefs apply to our world today?
4. Armstrong writes that compassion is central to the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. What stories, quotes, or passages stood out for you in this chapter? What stories or myths in your cultural, religious, family, or other traditions emphasize compassion?

#### Actions:

1. Visit [charterforcompassion.org](http://charterforcompassion.org). Affirm the Charter and invite your friends to do the same.
2. Examine the teachings of your own religious or secular tradition about compassion.
3. Revisit this passage on page 63: “Each of the world religions has its own particular genius, its own special insight into the nature and requirements of compassion, and has something unique to teach us. By making room in your mind for other traditions, you are beginning to appreciate what many human beings, whatever their culture and beliefs, hold in common. So while you are investigating the teachings of your own tradition, take time to find out more about the way other faiths have expressed the compassionate ethos.”
4. For the next month, keep a journal of notes, passages, poems, thoughts on what you learn about compassion (p. 27).

## ***Step 2: Look at Your Own World***

### Discussion Questions

1. “Can you think of a twenty-first century equivalent to the *li* (ancient rites controlling egotism and cultivating compassion, described on page 40) that would make each member of the family feel supremely valued” (p. 71)?
2. “How can you make your family a school for compassion, where children learn the value of treating all others with respect? What would life be like if all family members made a serious attempt to treat one another ‘all day and every day’ as they would wish to be treated themselves” (p. 71)?
3. “What would be the realistic criteria of a compassionate company,” organization, school, or community” (p. 71)?
4. To whom in your life—home, work, school, etc.—would you give a Golden Rule prize and why (pp. 71–72)?

### Actions

1. Look at what’s happening in your family, school, workplace, religious community, penal institutions, etc. What teachings, practices, or policies contribute to a lack of compassion? Identify ways you might help bring them to light and/or change them—whether it’s writing a letter to the editor of the local paper, creating a curriculum on compassion, starting a mediation program in the schools, or whatever action resonates with you.

## ***Step 3: Compassion for Yourself***

### Discussion Questions

1. How has a lack of self-compassion affected your life? When are you least compassionate toward yourself? What traits do you most criticize yourself for?
2. We are all imperfect. We are all influenced by our reptilian brain that reacts instinctively to real or imagined threats and can cause us to behave badly. We are all influenced by environmental factors that affect our behavior toward others. And we all have a “dark side.” (pp. 78–79) How does knowing this help or hinder your ability to cultivate and practice compassion?
3. Armstrong discusses how suffering is a part of life, yet “in the West we are often encouraged to think positively, brace up, stiffen our upper lip, and look determinedly on the bright side of life” (p. 81). Discuss your experience navigating a difficult or tragic time in your life. What would have been most helpful to you at that time? How important was having someone just listen to or be with you? What is your experience offering help to others in difficult times? What helps or hinders you from being fully present when those around you face difficulties?
4. “When people attack us, they are probably experiencing a similar self-driven anxiety and frustration; they too are in pain. In time, if we persevere, the people we fear or envy become less threatening, because the self that we are so anxious to protect and promote at their expense is a fantasy that is making us petty and smaller than we need to be” (p. 88). What does it mean to remove yourself from the center of your world?

*Idea from the field:*

In Dubai, participants were asked to take the self-compassion test at [www.self-compassion.org](http://www.self-compassion.org), record their score, and then use the resources on the site, as well as tools they learned from one another, to increase their level of self-compassion over a two-month period. At the end of the two months, each participant will be encouraged to take the test again to gauge their progress.

Actions

1. Make a list of your positive qualities, good deeds, talents, and achievements.
2. Our own suffering often increases our compassion for others. Acknowledge the difficulties and suffering you've endured and how you used or might use your experience to help others. For instance, if you've experienced a serious illness or took care of someone who did, consider volunteering to help others navigate a similar circumstance.
3. Practice the Buddha's meditation on the four immeasurable minds of love, on page 85.

**Step 4: Empathy**

Discussion Questions

1. Commenting on the futility of the Buddha's father's attempt to shield him from suffering, Armstrong writes, "As long as we close our minds to the pain that presses in upon us on all sides, we remain imprisoned in delusion, because this artificial existence bears no relation to reality" (p. 91). What defenses do you use to shield yourself from suffering? Do these defenses help or hinder your capacity for compassion?
2. "Art calls us to recognize our pain and aspirations and to open our minds to others. Art helps us—as it helped the Greeks—to realize that we are not alone; everybody else is suffering" (p. 98). Discuss a piece of art, a performance, book, or movie that has helped you develop empathy toward others.
3. Armstrong shares the story of Patty Anglin who "always claimed that the misery she experienced in a harsh boarding school, where she had learning difficulties, prepared her for her life's work" (p. 101) caring for children abandoned by their parents. Was your choice of an avocation or vocation influenced by difficulties you experienced? Share your story.

Actions

1. Spend a day "tuning into" how people around you are feeling.
2. It is often difficult to witness suffering and to engage with someone in distress, especially when we are preoccupied with our own concerns. Notice, over the next month, when you want to turn away. Instead, remember how it feels to be hurt, depressed, angry, helpless, and distraught. Then remember what it was like to have someone be kind and caring toward you. Offer that person a kind gesture (pp. 101–102).
3. Follow the instructions on page 102 to add three more stages to the meditation on the "immeasurable minds of love."

## ***Step 5: Mindfulness***

### Discussion Questions

1. For this session, it would be helpful to identify someone in your group or your community who regularly teaches or practices mindfulness and/or meditation. Invite that person to provide information about their practice and to lead the group in a guided meditation.
2. “The purpose of mindfulness...is to help us detach ourselves from the ego by observing the way the mind works.” (p. 105) Ask if anyone in your group who has practiced mindfulness techniques or who meditates would be willing to share how these practices have affected their life.
3. “This is not a meditation that we should perform in solitude, apart from our ordinary routines. In mindfulness we mentally stand back and observe our behavior while we are engaged in the normal process of living in order to discover more about the way we interact with people, what makes us angry and unhappy, how to analyze our experiences, and how to pay attention to the present moment” (p. 106). How often have you noticed your reactions as they arise, rather than allowing your emotions or reactions to control you? Spend the time between this meeting and the next practicing mindfulness and report on your experience during the next meeting.

### Actions

1. If you are not familiar with mindfulness meditation, check out one or more books listed in *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* Suggestions for Further Reading on page 215.
2. A number of online resources may be helpful. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Mindful Awareness Research Center has a series of downloadable meditations of varying lengths at <http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>. Set a time each day to try one or more of these meditations.

#### *Idea from the field:*

In Seattle, one group set a mindfulness bell (<http://www.fungie.info/bell/#>) to chime every 20 minutes during the discussion on mindfulness. Group members were encouraged to bring their attention back to their breath and to the moment each time the bell chimed.

## ***Step 6: Actions***

### Discussion Questions

1. Think of “spots of time” in your life “when somebody went out of their way to help” you. Share some of those stories (p. 112).
2. Also, share “the effects of the unkind remarks that have been a corrosive presence” in your mind (p. 113).
3. How often are you conscious of thinking or behaving in a hurtful way? Has this consciousness helped you to stop or shift your thoughts or actions?
4. How often are you aware of or do you act on the positive or negative version of the Golden Rule? How might you incorporate it more consciously in your life?

### Actions

1. “Make a resolution to act once every day in accordance with the *positive* version of the Golden Rule: “Treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself” (p. 114).
2. “Resolve each day to fulfill the negative version of the Golden Rule: ‘Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you’” (p. 114).
3. Visit <http://community.charterforcompassion.org/stories/> to read other’s stories of compassion and/or add one of your own.

### ***Step 7: How Little We Know***

#### Discussion Questions

1. Armstrong writes that “When we cling to our certainties, likes, and dislikes, deeming them essential to our sense of self, we alienate ourselves from the ‘great transformation’ of the Way, because the reality is that we are all in continual flux, moving from one state to another. An unenlightened person, [Chinese philosopher and mystic] Zhuangzi explained, is like a frog in a well who mistakes the tiny patch of sky he can see for the whole; but once he has seen the sky’s immensity, his perspective is changed forever” (p. 122). How do you interpret this lesson? How might you put it into practice?
2. Discuss what “Socrates meant when he said, “The unexamined life is not worth living”” (p. 129).
3. Discuss the concept of the mystery of life that was underscored in this chapter. How does acknowledging and honoring the mystery of life and of each other contribute to our capacity for compassion?
4. Do the exercise on page 129, “conducting a debate in which everybody argues for a position that is the opposite of what he or she believes. Then discuss your experience.”

### Actions

1. Follow the three steps Armstrong lays out on pages 128–130.

### ***Step 8: How Should We Speak to One Another?***

#### Discussion Questions

1. “Plato described dialogue as a communal meditation...[and believed] each participant should make a ‘place for the other’” (p. 132). How does this view of dialogue fit with current social discourse? How do we move toward this ideal?
2. “Confucius always developed his insights in conversation with other people because in his view we needed this friendly interaction to achieve maturity” (pp. 132–133). What do you think he means by this?
3. What habits do you bring to personal and professional discussions or arguments? Do you make a “place for the other” or simply try to advance your argument?

### Actions

1. Read through Armstrong’s questions on pages 141–142 to help you analyze and be more mindful of the way you approach discussions and arguments.
2. During the time between reading group meetings, observe how you speak to others. Observe how those around you speak to each other and to you. Notice when your own emotions and reactions arise in each situation and how they affect your interactions.

## ***Step 9: Concern for Everybody***

### Discussion Questions

1. “Think carefully about the concept of a just war. Find some examples of a just war in the past and then ask yourself how many of our current conflicts fit the just-war criteria. Can you detect the tribal spirit in any of them? Is military action improving the situation or is it increasing hostility” (p. 147)?
2. “Can you apply some of Gandhi’s ideas to a modern conflict? How would a nonviolent campaign work, and what qualities of mind and heart would it require” (p. 148)?
3. Read Sufi philosopher Muid ad-Din ibn al-Arabi’s warning against religious exclusivity on page 155. Do you practice this kind of nonattachment to religion or beliefs? How can you maintain your own worldview of your religion or beliefs without becoming attached to them?

### Actions

1. Follow Armstrong’s suggestions on pages 148–149 for expanding your mindfulness practice to encompass the way you think and speak about people from other countries, cultures, ethnic groups, or religions.
2. “Incorporate a new Buddhist exercise into your mindfulness practice” on page 151, which is designed to “help you appreciate how dependent you are on people you have never met and who may live far away.”

## ***Step 10: Knowledge***

### Discussion Questions

1. Each of us has likely been the recipient of an ignorant remark about our nationality, religious or cultural traditions, physical or mental disability, etc. Share with the group something about yourself or your background that has been misunderstood and the reality behind that misunderstanding or ignorance.
2. Identify some of the nationalities, religions, cultures, etc., that are represented in your reading group. Share, as you feel comfortable, something about the backgrounds, traditions, and practices that define you, but that others may know little about. Use this time, and the safety of the group, to ask each other about your backgrounds, traditions, or practices.
3. Talk about what you don’t know about your own country, your own faith tradition, or your own culture, or what about them you would like to know more about.

### Actions

1. Follow Armstrong’s suggestions on pages 159–160 to “expand your sympathies” to those from other countries, religions, or cultures.
2. Complete the second exercise recommended for this step on page 162.

## ***Step 11: Recognition***

### Discussion Questions

1. Christina Noble's story on pages 164–166, illustrates how we are all inextricably connected to one another, from the pain and devastation of being abandoned as a child to seeing herself in street children in Vietnam. Discuss a moment in your life when you saw yourself, or your suffering, in another. Were you able to acknowledge it? Were you moved to act? If not, what held you back?
2. When Noble decided to help street children in Vietnam, some of her friends said that she alone couldn't make a difference. But, she said, "...when I was a child I only needed one person to understand my suffering and pain." (p. 166) Describe a time when one person's actions made a difference to you.
3. Reflecting on the story of Yaakov and Esau on pages 174–175, Armstrong writes, "If we want to achieve reconciliation, not only do we have to struggle with the enemy, but we have to struggle with ourselves. And in the struggle, this myth tells us, we may find ourselves blessed and embraced by the presence of something greater" (p. 176). Have you experienced this in your life? If you have, describe the experience.

### Actions

1. On pages 168–169, Armstrong invites us to allow media images of suffering to touch and move us. Reread this passage and follow Armstrong's instructions to employ the Golden Rule and act on these feelings.

## ***Step 12: Love Your Enemies***

### Discussion Questions

1. What do you think Gandhi meant when he said, "A love that is based on the goodness of those whom you love is a mercenary affair"? (pp. 181–182)
2. Armstrong points to the words and deeds of some of the world's great moral leaders in describing the difficult practice of loving our enemies. One of them, Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "Every word and deed must contribute to an understanding with the enemy and release those vast reservoirs of goodwill which have been blocked by the impenetrable walls of hate" (p. 182). How might you begin doing this? Have you been able to get past feelings of hurt, fear, or hatred to humanize an "enemy"? If so, how did you do it? If not, what holds you back?
3. Who inspires you to want to "love your enemies"?
4. How has participating in this reading group affected your life?

### Actions

1. Use Armstrong's guidance on pages 184–185 to direct your meditation on the immeasurables to an "enemy."
2. Follow the directions on page 186 to "investigate your enemy." Notice how you feel before and after the exercise. Do you view your "enemy" any differently? What has changed?
3. Share a personal story of compassion at [charterforcompassion.org](http://charterforcompassion.org).

## **Make it Better: Books about the Golden Rule and Compassion for Children**

Preschool through Grade Five.

Compiled by: Ilene Cooper, Children's Books Editor at Booklist Magazine, <http://booklistonline.com/>

*All the World.* By Liz Garton Scanlon. Illus. by Marla Frazee.

2009. Simon & Schuster/Beach Lane, \$17.99 (9781416985808). PreS–Gr. 1.

Little ones will get a chance to feel a part of the larger world and understand how we are all connected in this lovely book with eye-catching, child-appealing illustrations.

*Cookies: Bite Size Life Lessons.* By Amy Krouse Rosenthal. Illus. by Jane Dyer.

2006. HarperCollins, \$12.99 (0-06-058081-X). PreS–Gr. 1.

Cookies provide the framework for this clever book, but the focus is really life lessons. Each spread features a word and a definition, which are further explained in an engaging picture. For instance, “Cooperate means, / How about you add the chips while I stir?”

*Do Unto to Otters. A Book about Manners.* By Laurie Keller. Illustrated by the author.

2007. Holt, \$16.95 (0-8050-7996-3). K–Gr. 3.

Mr. Rabbit is worried about his new neighbors, the Otters, until a wise bird offers the advice, “Do unto Otters . . . A humorous look at the Golden Rule.

*Gathering Sparks.* By Howard Schwartz. Illus. by Kristina Swarner.

2010. Roaring Brook, \$16.99 (9781596432802). PreS–Gr. 3.

The concept of repairing the world is explained as a Grandfather and his grandchild look at the stars. Grandfather explains God made 10 vessels to carry light across the sky. If they had stayed intact, “the world would have been perfect,” but they became increasingly fragile and broke apart. Now, it’s up to us repair the world.

*Get Happy.* By Malachy Doyle. Illustrated by Caroline Uff.

2011. Bloomsbury, \$14.99. (978-8027-2271-3). PreS-Kindergarten.

Sweet, round-faced children give their young listeners good advice: “Squabble less. Share more . . . Grab less. Give more!” Pithy text and great messages.

*The Golden Rule.* By Ilene Cooper. Illustrated by Gabi Swiatkowska.

2007. Abrams, \$16.95. (0-8109-0960-X). K-Gr. 4.

A boy discovers the Golden Rule and his grandfather explains that this simple yet profound sentiment appears in almost every religion and culture. Beautifully illustrated, the art captures the essence of a rule that is simple yet not easy and golden because of the way it shines.

*Kindness Is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler.* By Margery Cuyler. Illus. by Sachiko Yoshikawa.

2007. Simon & Schuster, \$16.99 (0-689-87344-1). PreS–Gr. 1.

Mrs. Ruler is frustrated with her kindergarten class. They have been acting out all week, so she reminds them “kindness is cooler” and charges each student to perform five acts of kindness.

*Paulie Pastrami Achieves World Peace.* By James Proimos. Illus. by the author.

2009. 40p. Little, Brown, \$15.99 (9780316032926). K–Gr. 3.

Paulie is “nothing special . . . no more special than you are,” but things change after he begins showing kindness to animals and even “reading to trees.” Soon, Paulie moves on to people, making amends with

his sister and sharing his lunch with a classmate; and when he discovers that cupcakes can resolve disputes, his peace-making ambitions grow.

*Sneaky Weasel.* By Hannah Shaw. Illus. by the author.

2009. 32p. Knopf, \$15.99 (9780375856259); lib. ed., \$18.99 (9780375956256). K–Gr. 3.

When nobody comes to Weasel’s birthday party, he wants to find out why. He’s reminded by his classmates that his mean actions have repercussions, and he decides to better. The meaning and value of friendship get a solid treatment in this smartly illustrated book.

*Thank You God, for Everything.* By August Gold. Illus. by Wendy Anderson Halperin.

2009. Putnam, \$16.99 (9780399240492). PreS–Gr. 2.

Gold, the spiritual director of Sacred Center New York, notes that the happiest people see everything in their lives—both the good and the bad—as reasons to be thankful. Her goal here is to “show young readers how to develop their own thankful eyes.” A diverse group of children do just that in the meaningful text and attractive art.