

Manifesting self-compassion in 2021

Ethan Woodfill, Editor-in-Chief | January 3, 2021



Last January, I wrote about being more compassionate in 2020. I charged myself with practicing more empathy, kindness and respect. Neither I nor anyone else could have predicted the tragic, consequential and turbulent year 2020 turned out to be.

Over the past year, I found myself becoming jaded, witnessing a widespread sentiment of a lack of empathy, kindness and respect for others. For me, ignoring mask and social distancing guidelines equates to a blatant disrespect for other humans' health and safety. It translates to a disrespect for the grocery store cashier, delivery driver or other frontline workers who must make ends meet in an extremely dangerous and uncertain environment.

Compassion, by definition, requires a concern for others.

Where does individual liberty end and the safety of others begin? This question came into the spotlight this year, reminding me of a famous Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes quote: "The right to swing my fist ends where the other man's nose begins." Just as we are not allowed to smoke in many public spaces, we do not have the right to threaten the health of others for our own preferences.

Putting aside the mask debate, I found myself practicing compassion this year in a much different way than I thought I would. Mostly, I practiced compassion by staying at home for months, keeping in touch with my friends and family and practicing safe habits when out in public. This was hardly the kind of compassion I wanted to portray; I expected being friendlier among strangers — a difficult thing to do when you are actively trying to avoid strangers.

One thing I learned unexpectedly, though, is the importance of self-compassion.

2021



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2020 was isolating, lonely, and downright boring for most people — there's no question about it. With an abundance of loss and despair omnipresent in the media, it became very easy for me to delve into negative thoughts and anxiousness about the state of the world.

How will I ever get a job? When will I get to go out with my friends again? And, of course, is my scratchy throat COVID?

Self-compassion, I've learned, is hard. It is quietly neglected when there are plenty of immense problems in the world. When the problems seem so big, it can be quite arduous keeping perspective.

Towards the end of the year, I began an active habit of trying to keep perspective. I keep a gratitude journal, writing three things that I'm grateful for each day. Sometimes, it's hard to pick something different than my home or my family or my dog, but I have realized it can be ambiguous. Today, for example, I wrote hope.

I have also tried my hand at meditation, especially through yoga. Though I am quite possibly the lankiest, least flexible person, I find that focusing on your breath and shifting your perspective inwards is a necessary tool in this messed up world.

It is undeniable that 2020 brought us loss, grief, uncertainty and a new understanding — for me at least — that we cannot control everything. What we can control, though, is how we respond to challenging circumstances.

We cannot always control our thoughts, but by shifting our perspective and focusing on what we're grateful for, we can become more powerful.

This year, I am grateful for hope, and I am hopeful for a better year to come.

About the Writer



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Ethan Woodfill is a junior from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is an Environmental Science & Sustainability and Political Science double major with an...

1 Comment

One Response to “Manifesting self-compassion in 2021”

▪ News Editor on January 29th, 2021 6:34 pm



Ethan, this was an amazing read! 😊
Here's to a better 2021!

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