

**TRAINING IN COMPASSION:
Zen Teachings on the Practice of Lojong
-- by Zen Master Norman Fischer**

POINT ONE - Resolve to Begin

1. Train in the preliminaries.

POINT TWO - Train in Empathy and Compassion: *Absolute* Compassion

2. See everything as a dream.
3. Examine the nature of awareness.
4. Don't get stuck on peace.
5. Rest in the openness of mind.
6. In Postmeditation be a child of illusion.

POINT TWO - Train in Empathy and Compassion: *Relative* Compassion

7. Practice sending and receiving alternately on the breath.
8. Begin sending and receiving practice with yourself.
9. Turn things around (Three objects, three poisons, three virtues).
10. Always train with the slogans.

POINT THREE - Transform Bad Circumstances into the Path

11. Turn all mishaps into the path.
12. Drive all blames into one.
13. Be grateful to everyone.
14. See confusion as Buddha and practice emptiness.
15. Do good, avoid evil, appreciate your lunacy, pray for help.
16. Whatever you meet is the path.

POINT FOUR - Make Practice Your Whole Life

17. Cultivate a serious attitude (Practice the five strengths).
18. Practice for death as well as for life.

POINT FIVE - Assess and Extend

19. There's only one point.
20. Trust your own eyes.
21. Maintain joy (and don't lose your sense of humor).
22. Practice when you're distracted.

POINT SIX - The Discipline of Relationship

23. Come back to basics.
24. Don't be a phony.
25. Don't talk about faults.
26. Don't figure others out.
27. Work with your biggest problems first.
28. Abandon hope.
29. Don't poison yourself.
30. Don't be so predictable.

31. Don't malign others.
32. Don't wait in ambush.
33. Don't make everything so painful.
34. Don't unload on everyone.
35. Don't go so fast.
36. Don't be tricky.
37. Don't make gods into demons.
38. Don't rejoice at others' pain.

POINT SEVEN - Living with Ease in a Crazy World

39. Keep a single intention.
40. Correct all wrongs with one intention.
41. Begin at the beginning, end at the end.
42. Be patient either way.
43. Observe, even if it costs you everything.
44. Train in three difficulties.
45. Take on the three causes.
46. Don't lose track.
47. Keep the three inseparable.
48. Train wholeheartedly, openly, and constantly.
49. Stay close to your resentment.
50. Don't be swayed by circumstances.
51. This time get it right!
52. Don't misinterpret.
53. Don't vacillate.
54. Be wholehearted.
55. Examine and analyze.
56. Don't wallow.
57. Don't be jealous.
58. Don't be frivolous.
59. Don't expect applause.

The third slogan under point three (*"Transform Bad Circumstances into the Path"*) is: **Be grateful to everyone.** Very simple but very profound.

My wife and I have a grandson. We went to visit him when he was about six weeks old. He couldn't do anything, not even hold up his head, much less feed himself. If he was in trouble, he couldn't ask for help. If suddenly he found his hand in his mouth and he began chewing on his hand, he didn't know what that was or who it belonged to. And if he liked the hand in his mouth and it fell out of his mouth, he couldn't figure out how to get it back in. He had no idea of anything in the world. He had his likes and dislikes, certainly, but he was powerless to do anything but experience them as the world changed every moment, not necessarily to his advantage. Unable to do anything on his own, he was completely dependent on his mother's care and constant attention. She fed him, cuddled him, tried to understand and anticipate his needs, took care of everything, including his peeing and pooping.

We were all at one time precisely in this situation, and someone or other must have cared for us in this same comprehensive way. Without 100 percent total care from someone else, or maybe several others, we would not be here. This is certainly grounds for gratitude to others.

But our dependence on others did not end there. We didn't grow up and become independent. Now we can hold up our heads, fix our dinner, wipe our butt, and we seem not to need our mother or father to take care of us – so we think we are autonomous. We think there is no longer a need to be grateful to others for our lives.

But consider this for a moment. Did you grow the food that sustains you every day? Did you till the soil, milk the cow, gather the eggs, kill the chicken? Did you make the car or train that takes you to work? Did you make the road? Extract the fuel? Sew your clothing? Build your house with lumber you milled? How do you live?

You need others every single day, every single moment of your life. It's thanks to others and their presence and effort that you have the things you need to continue, and that you have friendship and love and meaning in your life. Without others you have nothing. You may think, "Well, yes, but I work and I make money, and I pay for everything. So they are not taking care of me, it's my money that takes care of me. Even the highways and commuter trains: I pay my taxes." But suppose you have a lot of money and there is no one else in the world but you, you and your gigantic pile of money. How would you survive? Could you eat the money? Could you make a house for yourself inside the money? The money is only valuable because others exist. Money makes no sense without others. Its value exists because others exist.

But our dependence on others runs even deeper than this. Where does the person we take ourselves to be come from in the first place? Apart from our parents' genes and their support and care, and society and all it produces for us, there's the whole network of conditions and circumstances that intimately makes us what we are. How about our thoughts and feelings? Where does it come from? Without words to think in, we don't think, we don't have anything like a sense of self as we understand it, and we don't have the emotions and feelings that are shaped and defined by our words. Did we invent this language that constitutes ourselves? No, it is the product of untold numbers of speakers over untold numbers of generations. Without the myriad circumstances that provided us the opportunities for education, for speech, for knowledge, for work, we wouldn't be here as we are. And without all the people in our lives whom we know and who know us and love us and create complications for us and infuriate us, we would have nothing to think about, we would be very bored. More than bored: without others our consciousness would be shattered by loneliness.

So it is literally the case that there could not be what we call a person without other people. We can say "person" as if there could be such an autonomous thing, but in fact there is no such thing. There is no such thing as a person. There are only persons who have cocreated one another over the long history of our species. The idea of an independent, isolated, atomized person is impossible. And here we are not only speaking of our needing others practically. We are talking about our inmost sense of identity. Our consciousness of ourselves is never independent of others.

This is what nonself or emptiness means in Buddhist teaching: that there is no such thing as an isolated individual. Though we can say there is, and though we might think there is, and though many of our thoughts and motivations seem to be based on this idea, in fact it is an erroneous idea. Literally every thought in our minds, every emotion that we feel, every word that comes out of our mouth, every material sustenance that we need to get through the day, comes through the kindness of and the interaction with others. And not only other people but nonhumans too, literally the whole of the earth, the soil, the sky, the trees, the air we breathe, the water we drink. We not only depend on all of this, we are all of it and it is us. This is no theory, no poetic religious teaching. It is simply the bald fact of the matter.

So to practice **Be grateful to everyone** is to train in this profound understanding. It is to cultivate every day this sense of gratitude, the happiest of all attitudes. Unhappiness and gratitude simply cannot exist in the same moment. If you feel grateful, you are a happy person. If you feel grateful for what is possible for you in this moment, no matter what your challenges are, grateful, first, that you are alive at all, that you can think, that you can feel, that you can stand, sit, walk, talk – if you feel grateful, you are happy and you maximize your chances for wellbeing and for sharing happiness with others.

***-- Training in Compassion: Zen Teachings on the Practice of Lojong
(by Zen Master Norman Fischer), p. 53-56***