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## This Year Show Compassion – for Others and Yourself

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## This Year Show Compassion – for Others and Yourself

**By Yolanda Hood**

UCF Forum columnist

Wednesday, December 30, 2015

This is the year of melting.

Let me clarify. It is not the year of melting because we are having warmer-than-usual fall and winter seasons. This is the year of melting because I finally decided to allow myself to experience emotions, to experience them and to sit in them.

It was an epiphany, actually.

I chose to listen to Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh's "Teachings on Love" while getting ready for work. He spoke of compassion and how we must offer compassion to all those that are suffering, no matter how big or how little their suffering.

That's actually one of the guidelines I follow in my life. When dealing with people and making decisions I ask myself, "Is it compassionate?"

So, check. Got it.

But, then, he said that we must also have compassion for ourselves. Wait a minute. What? He said that we suffer too, but often do not give ourselves compassion. I dropped the cotton ball that was in my hand and hit the back button on my phone. Yes. He said that.

I don't know what, if anything, I was struggling with that day, but I began to cry. Of course, I was confused. Cry? I don't cry. I don't have time to cry. I have to go to work. I had to get moving.

But, then he said that it is ok to feel your emotions, to *allow* yourself to feel your emotions, to *feel* your suffering, just like you would for others. If you can't have compassion for yourself, how can you have compassion for others?

And, that is when the flood gates opened. I took a seat and I wept. Instead of thinking about how much time I was “wasting.” I just let myself feel the sadness and the pain. I let myself feel the strain on my facial muscles. I sobbed. I allowed myself to feel and to cry without reproach for the first time probably since I was a child. And, you know what? Nothing bad happened to me. As a matter of fact, I can honestly say my day was awesome after that.

This may not seem like a big deal to some. But, for those who are truly close to me, they know that I don't cry. I don't allow it. If I'm in physical pain, no tears. If I have been hurt by a loved one, no tears. If, I am overwhelmed and stressed, no tears. I have no time for tears. There is work to do, a daughter to take care of, friends and family who need me to stay focused and pulled together. As a single mom I have to stay strong—always.

But, as I continued to listen to Nhat Hanh on my way to work, I realized that I don't necessarily feel most of my emotions in a mindful way. I laugh a lot. I can find the humor in the most horrible of my situations. But, joy? Maybe not so much.

And, upon examining this, I realized that I don't feel my joy because I'm afraid of the proverbial shoe dropping and probably on top of my head. So, I decided that I would try feeling my joy and not the fear of what might happen if I'm too happy. Now, after a belly laugh with my daughter I pull her close and hug her because I am far more appreciative of the joy in that laughter, in that moment.

Anger? Same thing. Of course I get angry. Yet, how do I experience it? Instead of breathing my anger away the next time I was angry I decided to sit in it and feel it. I felt the squeeze in my gut. I felt my blood pressure rising. I felt my teeth clench and my hands forming fists. I allowed myself to be angry and just that.

I didn't think about anger as an emotional waste of my time. I simply experienced it. And, what happened next? I was able to let it go much more quickly, jam to the Ramones, and be at peace. True peace.

It is a simple lesson, this emotion and compassion thing, and not always easy to do. But, it does make a difference. I promise. If you take anything away from my musings this holiday season, take this:

During the holidays there is a plethora of smells, sights, sounds and emotions. Take a moment to just feel whatever it is that you're feeling and be in that moment before moving on. Show compassion for others at all times, and especially during the holiday season, but most of all don't forget to show compassion toward yourself, as well.

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