



Micro-Practices for Daily Compassion – The Two-Minute Revolution

TECHNOLOGIES OF THE HEART

Practice

Micro-Practices for Daily Compassion — The Two-Minute Revolution

The Heart of Peace Foundation

50 min read

Twelve science-backed micro-practices for daily compassion — 1 to 5 minutes each, mapped to the Five Veils and compassion dimensions.

■ PRACTICE

She is standing in the kitchen at 6:47 AM. Three children under eight. The baby is crying. The four-year-old has just thrown a bowl of cereal at the wall. Milk is pooling along the grout lines. The six-year-old is asking a question — she cannot hear it over the crying, but the urgency in his voice tells her it matters to him, and that she is about to fail at caring about it. Her jaw is tight. Her shoulders are somewhere near her ears. The day has not started and she is already behind.

She has tried meditation. She tried it for three weeks — twenty minutes in the morning, before the children woke — and it worked, briefly, until the baby's sleep schedule shifted and the twenty minutes evaporated. She tried a meditation app: the calm voice telling her to find a comfortable position felt like a joke written by someone who has never cleaned oatmeal out of a heating vent. She tried journaling. She tried yoga. She tried waking up at 5 AM. Each attempt lasted between four days and two weeks before the architecture of her actual life absorbed it without a trace.

Then someone told her about micro-practices for compassion. Not a program. Not a course. Not twenty minutes of anything. Just this: before you respond to the next moment — any moment — take one breath and silently say, *May you be at ease*. Directing it at whoever is in front of you. The crying baby. The cereal-throwing four-year-old. The urgent six-year-old. Even yourself.

One breath. Five words. Two seconds.

She tried it that morning. Not because she believed it would work, but because it was so small that not trying felt harder than trying. One breath before lifting the baby. *May you be at ease*. One breath before kneeling to meet the six-year-old's eyes. *May you be at ease*. One breath before answering the question she could now, somehow, hear.

Nothing dramatic happened. The cereal was still on the wall. But something shifted — a tiny gap between stimulus and response that had not been there before. A pause the size of a single breath, in which she was not reacting but choosing. And in that pause, she was not a woman drowning in the morning. She was a woman practicing compassion, two seconds at a time.

That was three months ago. She has not missed a day. Not because she has extraordinary discipline, but because the practice is so small that there is nothing to miss. It fits in the gap between the cereal hitting the wall and her hand reaching for the paper towels.

This is the two-minute revolution. And it is available to you right now.

Key Takeaways

- **Micro-practices are 1-5 minute compassion exercises** woven into moments you already have — not added to a schedule you are already failing to keep
- **The smallest sustainable practice beats the largest unsustainable one.** Two minutes daily for a year changes more than sixty minutes attempted once and abandoned after a week (Fogg, *Tiny Habits*; Clear, *Atomic Habits*)
- **Twelve practices are organized by time of day** — morning, transitions, and evening — so you can start with whatever part of your day needs the most care
- **Each practice targets a specific veil or compassion dimension** — so if you know where you struggle, you can choose precisely the practice that addresses it
- **Habit stacking** — attaching a new practice to an existing habit — is the most reliable way to make compassion automatic rather than effortful
- **The compassion compound effect** means that micro-practices accumulate neurally over time: small doses of compassion literally reshape the brain's empathy and regulation circuits (Davidson & Begley; Hanson, *Hardwiring Happiness*)
- **No prerequisites are required.** You do not need to meditate, believe in anything, or have any prior experience. If you can breathe, you can begin.



Twelve micro-practices mapped across morning, transition, and evening moments.

Drop by drop fills the pitcher.

— Spanish proverb (translated)

Key Takeaways

- *Compassion micro-practices require as little as two seconds — a single breath paired with a silent phrase — making them compatible with even the most demanding daily schedules.*
- *Behavioral science research shows that the critical variable for lasting habit formation is consistency of repetition, not duration; the smallest reliable version of a practice outperforms an ambitious version performed sporadically.*
- *Neuroscience studies demonstrate measurable changes in empathy-related brain regions after as few as two weeks of brief, consistent compassion training in participants with no prior meditation experience.*
- *Twelve distinct micro-practices, each lasting one to five minutes, are mapped to the Five Veils of separation, allowing practitioners to target whichever dimension of compassion is most active in their present circumstances.*
- *Intrinsic rewards — small immediate shifts in warmth, sufficiency, or relief — arise naturally from each practice, closing the habit loop without the need for external incentives.*
- *Daily accumulation of these small acts functions as a vote for a compassionate identity: over time, the practice ceases to be a performed behavior and becomes a default orientation toward others and oneself.*

The Smallest Sustainable Practice

There is a metaphor that has lived in contemplative traditions for centuries, though no one seems to know where it originated. A single pebble, dropped into a river each day, changes nothing visible. The water flows over it, around it, past it. The pebble is insignificant. But drop a pebble in the same spot every day for a year, and the river bends. Not because any single pebble was powerful, but because consistency reshapes the channel through which everything flows.

This is not a metaphor about willpower. It is a metaphor about the default mode network.

Neuroscientist Richard Davidson and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have spent decades studying what happens inside the brains of people who practice compassion. Their most striking finding is not about the monks who have meditated for 50,000 hours — though those brains are remarkable. It is about the beginners. In a landmark 2008 study, participants with *no prior meditation experience* practiced compassion meditation for just thirty minutes a day for two weeks. Functional MRI scans showed measurable increases in activation of the insula and temporal parietal junction — brain regions associated with empathy and perspective-taking — when participants viewed images of human suffering. Two weeks. Thirty minutes. Measurable neural change.

But here is what makes this relevant to you, standing in your kitchen at 6:47 AM with milk on the floor: you do not need thirty minutes.

BJ Fogg, the Stanford behavioral scientist whose *Tiny Habits* framework has reshaped how we understand behavior change, argues that the critical variable is not duration but consistency. The minimum viable dose of a new behavior is shockingly small — as small as two seconds. Fogg's research demonstrates that a behavior performed consistently after an existing trigger (what he calls an "anchor moment") becomes automatic faster than a behavior that requires scheduling, planning, or motivation. The tiniest version of a practice — performed reliably — beats the ambitious version performed sporadically. Every time.

James Clear, in *Atomic Habits*, describes the same principle from the angle of identity formation. Every time you perform a small act, you cast a vote for the kind of person you are becoming. A single two-second lovingkindness phrase does not, by itself, transform you into a compassionate person. But it casts a vote. And votes accumulate. After enough votes, you are not performing compassion — you are a person for whom compassion is the default. The behavior has become identity. The **compassion lineage** traces how this kind of accumulated care has shaped human communities across centuries.

This is what the woman in the kitchen discovered without knowing the science: the practice was so small that it bypassed every defense her busy life had erected against self-improvement. It slipped under the radar of the part of her mind that said *I don't have time for this*. Because she did have time. She had two seconds. Everyone has two seconds.

Charles Duhigg's research on habit loops — cue, routine, reward — adds a third layer. Compassion micro-practices naturally produce their own reward: a small but immediate shift in how you feel. The lovingkindness phrase generates a micro-dose of warmth. The gratitude pause generates a micro-dose of sufficiency. The self-compassion break generates a micro-dose of relief. These are not manufactured rewards bolted onto the practice from outside. They are the practice's natural output. And because the reward is intrinsic and immediate, the habit loop closes effortlessly. Cue (the baby cries). Routine (one breath, five words). Reward (the warmth that arrives when you direct care toward another being, even silently, even for two seconds). This is **karma as attention** — what you practice consistently shapes what you perceive and what you become.

The pebble drops. The river begins to bend.

Why we fail at the big practices

Before we map the twelve micro-practices that form the core of this article, it helps to be honest about why the big practices fail for most people. Not because the practices are wrong — a forty-five-minute sitting meditation is a powerful thing. Not because the people are lazy — the woman in the kitchen is one of the least lazy people on the planet. But because the architecture of modern life is designed to resist sustained blocks of unstructured inner time.

The **contemplative toolkit** offers a full menu of practices at every depth level. Some of those practices require dedicated time — and they are worth the investment. But this article is for the person who has tried the full menu and found that their life keeps eating it. This article is for the person who needs a way *in* — a door small enough to walk through without rearranging their entire schedule.

Rick Hanson, the neuropsychologist who developed the HEAL framework (*Have a beneficial experience, Enrich it, Absorb it, Link it*), puts it directly: "The brain is changed by experience. And small experiences, taken in fully, change the brain as effectively as large ones." His *Hardwiring Happiness* protocol is built on the insight that the brain's negativity bias — its tendency to register threats faster and more durably than rewards — can be countered not by dramatic interventions but by deliberately savoring small positive experiences for as little as fifteen to thirty seconds. That is all the brain needs to begin converting a passing state into a lasting trait.

Fifteen seconds. Thirty seconds. Two minutes. The revolution is not about duration. It is about showing up.

Morning Practices: Setting the Inner Compass

The first minutes of the day are neurologically privileged. The brain is transitioning from the diffuse, associative processing of sleep to the focused, executive processing of waking life. During this window, attention is unusually receptive — not yet hijacked by the phone, the inbox, the to-do list. Whatever you plant in this window tends to color what follows.

This is not mysticism. It is basic attentional priming. What the brain attends to first establishes what psychologists call a "cognitive set" — a lens through which subsequent experiences are filtered. If the first input is the news, the cognitive set tilts toward threat. If the first input is email, it tilts toward obligation. If the first input is a deliberate orientation toward compassion, the set tilts toward care.

Four morning practices, each under five minutes. Choose one. Just one.

Practice 1: The Lovingkindness Phrase (2 minutes)

What it is: A single phrase from the [lovingkindness tradition](#) — repeated silently, directed first at yourself, then outward.

How to do it:

1. Before your feet leave the bed — or while waiting for the coffee to brew — close your eyes.
2. Silently repeat: *May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be at peace.*
3. Let the words land in the body, not the intellect. Feel the warmth of the wish, even if it feels awkward or false. (It will feel awkward at first. This is normal. Sharon Salzberg, who has taught lovingkindness for forty years, says the practice works whether you feel it or not — the repetition itself reshapes the neural groove.)
4. After thirty seconds, shift the direction outward. Bring to mind someone you will see today — a family member, a colleague, a stranger you pass regularly. *May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be at peace.*
5. Open your eyes. Begin the day.

Time: 2 minutes.

Veil addressed: **Separation**. The lovingkindness phrase is a direct antidote to the Veil of Separation because it practices the recognition that your wellbeing and another person's wellbeing are not competing interests. By wishing happiness for yourself *and* another in the same breath, you soften the boundary that the separation veil works so hard to maintain.

Dimension addressed: Resonance. If your **compassion assessment** revealed low resonance — difficulty feeling with others — this practice directly trains emotional connection.

The research: Salzberg's work at the Insight Meditation Society, combined with Barbara Fredrickson's laboratory research at UNC-Chapel Hill, demonstrates that as little as seven minutes of lovingkindness practice per day increases feelings of social connection, positive emotion, and purpose in life. Fredrickson's *Love 2.0* documents the physiology: the vagal tone — a measure of the parasympathetic nervous system's flexibility — increases measurably after just six weeks of lovingkindness practice. You are not just thinking kind thoughts. You are training your nervous system to default toward connection. The **generosity standard** explores how this orientation toward giving — even in silent, internal forms — becomes the baseline from which sustainable action grows.

Practice 2: The IMP Check-In (3 minutes)

What it is: A rapid self-inquiry drawn from the **Intention-Motivation-Purpose framework** — three questions that orient the inner compass before the day's demands set the direction for you.

How to do it:

1. Sit or stand quietly. One hand on the chest if that helps you land in the body.
2. Ask: **What am I seeking today?** Not the to-do list. The deeper reach. Connection? Contribution? Safety? Rest? Let whatever arises be the answer without editing it.
3. Ask: **Why does it matter?** Feel the motivation beneath the intention. Is it moving toward something you love, or away from something you fear? Neither answer is wrong. But knowing the difference changes the quality of the day.
4. Ask: **Who is this for?** The hardest question. Not who benefits from your productivity — but who your deepest energy is oriented toward today. Yourself? Your family? A project? The wider world?
5. No need to change anything. Just notice. The noticing is the practice.

Time: 3 minutes.

Veil addressed: **Self-Fixation.** The IMP check-in interrupts the automatic self-referential loop that the default mode network runs on autopilot. By asking "who is this for?" you momentarily loosen the grip of the self-fixation veil — the habit of constructing and maintaining an image — and open the possibility that today's energy might be oriented beyond the local ego.

Dimension addressed: Motivation. If your compassion assessment revealed low motivation — you recognize suffering but do not feel moved to respond — the IMP check-in reconnects action to purpose. The **Maslow Compass** can help you locate the deeper need beneath the surface goal.

The research: Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan) demonstrates that conscious contact with intrinsic motivation — the awareness of *why* something matters beyond external rewards — predicts not only performance but wellbeing and persistence. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, born in Auschwitz, found that connection to purpose was the single most reliable predictor of psychological survival under extreme conditions. You do not need extreme conditions to benefit from the same principle. You need three minutes and three honest questions. The **Maslow hourglass of being** offers a complementary map of how basic needs and transcendent purpose interweave across a human life.

Practice 3: The Gratitude Anchor (2 minutes)

What it is: Three things you are grateful for — spoken aloud or written — with one twist: at least one must be a person.

How to do it:

1. While brushing your teeth, making coffee, or during any existing morning routine, name three things you are grateful for.
2. Be specific. Not "my family" but "the way my friend laughed at the dog last night." Not "my health" but "the fact that my knees carried me up the stairs without pain this morning."
3. At least one of the three must be a person — and for that one, let yourself feel the warmth of the connection, not just the thought of it. Picture their face. Let gratitude become a felt sense in the chest, not just a cognitive exercise.
4. If you are writing, three sentences in a notebook is enough. If you are speaking, say them quietly to yourself.

Time: 2 minutes.

Veil addressed: **Scarcity.** Gratitude is the most direct antidote to the scarcity veil because it practices the perception of abundance — not as a denial of real difficulty, but as a widening of the aperture to include what is already sufficient. The brain's negativity bias is a spotlight: it illuminates what is missing, broken, or threatening. Gratitude is a floodlight: it illuminates the full scene, including what is whole.

Dimension addressed: Recognition. If your compassion assessment showed low recognition — difficulty noticing suffering or goodness in others — gratitude practice is an attention-widening exercise. By deliberately scanning for what is good, you train the brain's attentional system to register a wider band of experience, including the subtle signals of others' emotional states that recognition depends on.

The research: Robert Emmons' gratitude research at UC Davis demonstrates that a simple gratitude practice (three items, three times per week) increases subjective wellbeing by 25% and reduces depressive symptoms. The person-focused element draws on Fredrickson's *positivity resonance* research — the finding that the most potent positive emotions arise in moments of genuine interpersonal connection, not in solitary pleasures. The **thermodynamics of compassion** describes how this warmth, once generated, tends to radiate outward and sustain itself rather than dissipate.

Practice 4: The Compass Setting (3 minutes)

What it is: A brief orientation exercise drawn from the **Maslow Compass** — setting a conscious direction for the day based on which dimension of human flourishing is calling you.

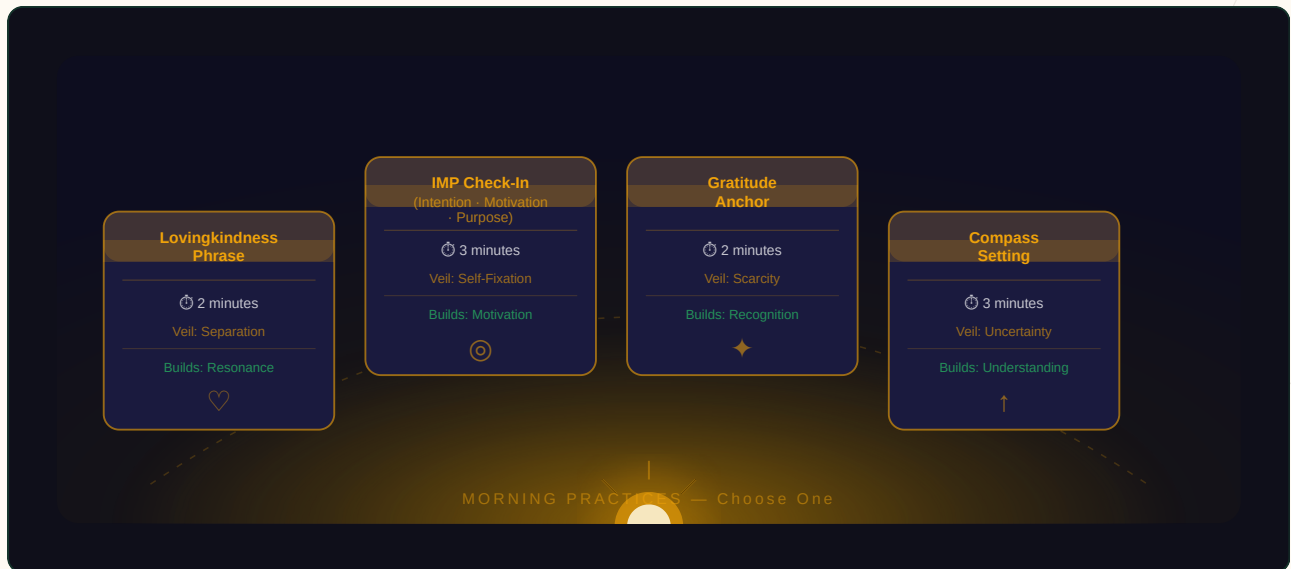
How to do it:

1. Close your eyes briefly. Scan the inner landscape without analysis.
2. Ask: **What is the one thing I most need today?** Not what the schedule demands — what *you* need. Safety? Belonging? Creative expression? Meaning? Contribution?
3. Whatever arises, name it silently. *Today, I need belonging. Or: Today, I need to contribute something real.*
4. Set one micro-intention aligned with that need. "I will make eye contact and smile at three strangers." Or: "I will send one message of genuine appreciation." Or: "I will spend five minutes on the thing that matters most to me before the urgent things eat the morning."
5. Release it. Do not monitor it. The compass has been set. Trust the direction.

Time: 3 minutes.

Veil addressed: **Uncertainty.** The compass setting does not eliminate uncertainty — it makes peace with it by providing a single clear direction that does not depend on knowing the future. The **uncertainty veil** thrives on the absence of orientation: when you do not know where you are going, every possibility becomes a threat. A compass heading — even a provisional one — converts the open field from threat to adventure.

Dimension addressed: Understanding. If your compassion assessment revealed low understanding — difficulty grasping *why* someone suffers — the compass practice trains you to ask "what does this person need?" rather than "what is this person doing?" It builds the habit of looking beneath behavior to the need driving it.



Four morning practices arranged in a sunrise arc, from lovingkindness to compass setting.

Transition Practices: The Hidden Portals

Here is a secret that contemplative traditions have known for millennia and that neuroscience has recently confirmed: the most powerful practice moments are not the ones you schedule. They are the ones that are already there, hidden in the natural transitions of your day.

The space between parking the car and opening the office door. The thirty seconds while the elevator climbs. The pause between hanging up a phone call and starting the next task. The walk from the desk to the bathroom. The moment after you close your laptop and before you pick up your phone.

These are what Thich Nhat Hanh called *practice portals* — moments of natural pause that the mind usually fills with planning, worrying, or scrolling, but that can be gently reclaimed as spaces for presence.

The Telephone and the Temple Bell

In the early days of the Plum Village community in France, Thich Nhat Hanh introduced a practice that visitors found bewildering. Whenever the telephone rang, no one answered it. Not on the first ring. Not on the second. On the third ring, someone would pick up — but only after using the first two rings as a mindfulness bell: two rings to stop, breathe, and arrive fully in the present moment before speaking.

"The telephone is a wonderful instrument of practice," he wrote in *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. "Each time it rings, it is a reminder to return to yourself."

This was 1975. The telephone has since multiplied into a thousand interruptions — notifications, pings, vibrations, alerts — each one a potential mindfulness bell, and each one, for most of us, a trigger for reactivity rather than presence. The principle has not changed. Only the number of bells has increased.

The transition practices below use these natural portals. They require no extra time because they occupy time you are already spending — but spending unconsciously. They are compassion practices disguised as ordinary moments.

Practice 5: The Threshold Pause (30 seconds)

What it is: A single conscious breath at any physical threshold — a doorway, a car door, an elevator, the moment before you enter a meeting or a room where someone is waiting.

How to do it:

1. As your hand touches the handle — any handle — pause.
2. One breath. Full inhale. Slow exhale.

3. Silently: *I am arriving*. Not "I need to be somewhere." Not "I am late." Just: *I am arriving*.

4. Open the door.

Time: 30 seconds.

Veil addressed: **Separation**. Every threshold is a boundary — and the pause at the boundary is a micro-practice of softening the hardness with which we cross from one space into another. When you arrive consciously, you arrive as a person — not as a role, a title, or a set of tasks.

Dimension addressed: Recognition. You cannot notice another person's emotional state if you have not arrived in the room. Most of us enter spaces while still mentally in the last space. The threshold pause brings your attention into the present — which is the only place recognition can occur.

Habit stack: Attach this to any doorway you use daily. Fogg's research shows that physical transitions are the most reliable anchor moments because they involve a distinct sensory cue (the hand touching the handle) that the brain registers automatically.

Practice 6: The "Just Like Me" Flash (1 minute)

What it is: A one-line recognition practice drawn from the **five veils micro-practice for Comparison** — adapted here for use with any person you encounter during a transition moment.

How to do it:

1. As you walk past someone — anyone: a colleague, a stranger, a barista — silently note one thing about them.
2. Then silently say: *Just like me, this person wants to be happy. Just like me, this person has known suffering.*
3. Let the recognition land. You do not need to do anything with it. You do not need to smile, speak, or change your behavior. Just let the seeing be enough.

Time: Under 1 minute.

Veil addressed: **Comparison**. The comparison veil converts every person you see into a data point in a ranking algorithm: above me, below me, threat, irrelevant. The "just like me" flash interrupts the ranking by inserting a horizontal recognition — *this person is not above or below me; this per-*

son is alongside me, navigating the same human condition. The **hidden wisdom within comparison** is the capacity for discernment — and this practice redirects that capacity from judgment to recognition.

Dimension addressed: Resonance. The flash practice is a micro-dose of empathic imagining — the deliberate act of feeling *with* another person rather than *about* them. Over time, it widens the circle of people whose emotional states you register automatically.

The research: A 2015 study by Kang, Gray, and Dovidio at Yale found that a brief "common humanity" meditation — structurally identical to the "just like me" practice — reduced implicit racial and age bias after just seven minutes of practice. The practice does not eliminate bias. It loosens its grip by activating the brain's perspective-taking circuits at the moment when the bias circuit would normally fire unchallenged.

Practice 7: The Savoring Pause (1 minute)

What it is: Rick Hanson's HEAL protocol, simplified to its essence — a deliberate fifteen-to-thirty-second pause to absorb a positive experience that would otherwise evaporate.

How to do it:

1. Notice any moment of okayness. Not ecstasy. Not bliss. Just okayness: the coffee tastes good. The sun is on your face. Someone held a door for you. Your body is not in pain right now.
2. Stay with the experience for fifteen to thirty seconds. This is the key — the brain needs at least twelve seconds to begin converting a passing state into a lasting neural change (Hanson).
3. Let the experience fill your body. Feel it in the chest, the belly, the hands. Let the goodness *land*.
4. Release and continue.

Time: 30 seconds to 1 minute.

Veil addressed: **Scarcity**. The scarcity veil operates by deleting positive experience — the brain registers what is missing more quickly and more durably than what is present. The savoring pause counteracts this by deliberately encoding sufficiency. It does not deny difficulty. It includes the full picture.

Dimension addressed: Tolerance. If your compassion assessment revealed low tolerance — difficulty staying present with discomfort — the savoring pause may seem unrelated, but it builds the nervous system's capacity to hold *any* strong experience without flinching. A system that can absorb goodness can also absorb difficulty.

The research: Hanson's *Hardwiring Happiness* documents the neuroscience: the brain's negativity bias means that negative experiences are encoded in long-term memory after a single exposure, while positive experiences require sustained attention (twelve seconds or more) to achieve the same encoding. The savoring pause is not positive thinking. It is neurological equity — giving good experiences the same encoding privilege that bad ones receive automatically.

Practice 8: The Compassionate Listening Reset (2 minutes)

What it is: A brief internal reset before any conversation — especially a difficult one — drawn from the **compassion-as-inner-clarity** distinction between empathy and compassion.

How to do it:

1. Before entering a conversation — particularly one where you expect tension, complaint, or emotional weight — pause.
2. Place one hand on your chest. This is not symbolic; it activates the vagus nerve through gentle pressure and shifts the nervous system toward parasympathetic engagement (Porges, polyvagal theory).
3. Silently set an intention: *I am here to understand, not to fix.*
4. Take two slow breaths. On the exhale, let the jaw soften. (The jaw is where most people hold emotional bracing. Releasing it changes the quality of listening.)
5. Enter the conversation.

Time: 2 minutes.

Veil addressed: **Self-Fixation**. When we enter difficult conversations, the self-fixation veil is at peak intensity — we are managing our image, preparing our defense, rehearsing our lines. The listening reset interrupts this by shifting orientation from self-presentation to other-reception. The **cycle of harm** often begins in moments when someone needed to be heard and was not. The **hurt people hurt people** dynamic reminds us that the difficult person in front of you is almost always carrying something they did not choose.

Dimension addressed: Understanding. True listening is not waiting for your turn to speak. It is the active attempt to understand *why* the other person feels what they feel — to see the cause beneath the complaint, the need beneath the demand. This practice trains that orientation.

Practice 9: The Red Light Practice (1 minute)

What it is: A transition practice for commuters — using any pause in movement (red light, stopped train, waiting in line) as a lovingkindness moment.

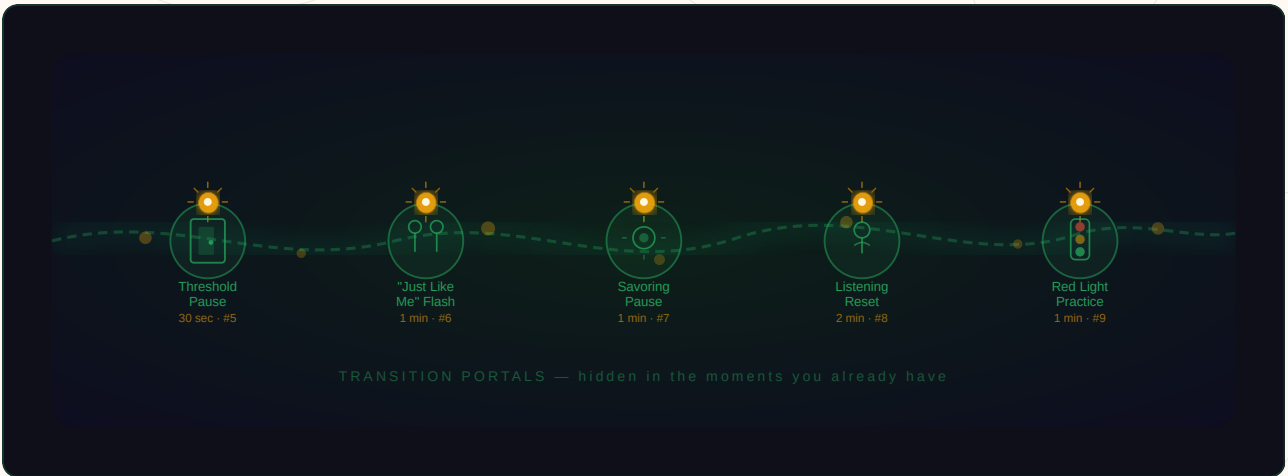
How to do it:

1. When you are stopped — red light, traffic jam, checkout line, waiting room — look at the people around you.
2. Choose one person. You do not need to know anything about them.
3. Silently: *May you be well. May your burdens be lighter today.*
4. Release and return to whatever you were doing.

Time: Under 1 minute.

Veil addressed: Separation. Traffic and waiting rooms are peak separation environments — everyone is isolated in their own bubble of impatience, scrolling, or frustration. The red light practice punctures the bubble, briefly, with a silent act of connection.

Dimension addressed: Motivation. If your compassion assessment showed low motivation — you see suffering but do not feel moved to respond — this practice is a micro-dose of generosity in action. Even a silent wish is an offering. It exercises the muscle of response — the willingness to do something, however small, when you notice another person.



Five ordinary moments — doorways, parking lots, red lights — transformed into compassion portals.

Evening Practices: Metabolizing the Day

The evening is where the day is digested. What was taken in — the interactions, the stresses, the small kindnesses, the unresolved tensions — gets processed, stored, or released during the hours between the last task and sleep. Most of us do not participate in this process consciously. We hand it over to Netflix, alcohol, scrolling, or the anxious rehearsal of tomorrow's problems. The day is swallowed without being tasted.

Evening micro-practices are not about adding one more thing to an exhausted schedule. They are about metabolizing what is already there — converting the raw experience of the day into something the body and mind can use, release, or carry forward wisely.

Christopher Germer, author of *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*, describes self-compassion as "the practice of giving yourself the same care you would give a good friend." The evening is when this practice matters most — because the evening is when the inner critic is loudest, the catalogue of failures most vivid, and the gap between who we were today and who we wanted to be most painfully visible.

Practice 10: The Self-Compassion Break (3 minutes)

What it is: Kristin Neff's three-step self-compassion break — the single most researched micro-practice in the self-compassion literature. Adapted here for evening use, to metabolize the day's accumulated self-judgment.

How to do it:

1. Sit or lie down. Bring to mind a moment from the day that was difficult — a mistake, a failure of patience, a conversation you wish had gone differently.
2. **Step 1: Mindfulness.** Acknowledge the pain. Silently: *This was hard. This hurt.* Not dramatizing, not minimizing. Just naming.
3. **Step 2: Common humanity.** Silently: *I am not the only one who struggles like this. This is part of being human.* (This is the **oneness** principle applied to self-compassion — the recognition that your suffering is not evidence of your uniqueness but of your membership in the human family.)
4. **Step 3: Self-kindness.** Place both hands over your heart. Silently: *May I be kind to myself in this moment. May I give myself the compassion I need.*
5. Stay with the warmth for thirty seconds. Then release.

Time: 3 minutes.

Veil addressed: **Self-Fixation** — but from the opposite direction. Where morning self-fixation constructs and defends an image, evening self-fixation attacks and punishes the image that failed. The self-compassion break addresses both by shifting from image-management to self-care. The **hidden wisdom within self-fixation** is the capacity for introspection — and Neff's protocol redirects introspection from self-attack to self-understanding.

Dimension addressed: Tolerance. The self-compassion break directly trains the capacity to stay present with discomfort — specifically the discomfort of your own imperfection. Joan Halifax, in *Standing at the Edge*, identifies this capacity as the foundation of sustainable compassion: you cannot stay present with others' suffering if you cannot stay present with your own.

The research: Neff's research at the University of Texas at Austin, spanning over two decades and hundreds of studies, demonstrates that self-compassion is more strongly correlated with psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and sustained helping behavior than self-esteem. The self-compassion break specifically has been shown to reduce cortisol levels and activate the brain's caregiving circuits (the same circuits activated by compassion for others) within minutes.

Practice 11: The Micro-Tonglen (3 minutes)

What it is: A simplified version of the Tibetan tonglen practice — breathing in difficulty, breathing out relief — adapted from Pema Chodron's accessible instructions in *When Things Fall Apart*.

How to do it:

1. Bring to mind someone who is suffering. This can be someone you know personally, someone you heard about today, or even yourself.
2. On the inhale, imagine breathing in their pain — visualize it as dark, heavy smoke entering your chest. (This feels counterintuitive. That is the point. You are practicing the willingness to move *toward* suffering rather than away from it.)
3. On the exhale, imagine breathing out relief, warmth, light — whatever form of ease feels natural. Send it toward the person.
4. Continue for ten breaths. Inhale suffering. Exhale relief.
5. On the final breath, expand the scope: breathe in the suffering of all beings who are feeling something similar right now. Breathe out relief for all of them.

Time: 3 minutes (10 breaths).

Veil addressed: **Separation**, powerfully. Tonglen is the most direct counter-practice to the separation veil because it reverses the instinct that separation depends on: the instinct to take in what is pleasant and push away what is painful. By deliberately breathing in the unpleasant and sending out the pleasant, you practice the permeability of the self-other boundary at the most visceral level — the breath.

Dimension addressed: Motivation. If you recognize suffering but feel paralyzed — if your assessment revealed high recognition but low motivation — tonglen directly trains the response muscle. You are *doing* something with the suffering you perceive, even if the doing is invisible. You are metabolizing it through your own compassion and sending back something useful. This is **generosity at its most essential** — giving not from surplus but from presence.

A note about safety: Tonglen can bring up strong emotions, especially when practiced with personal grief or trauma. If the practice feels overwhelming, scale back: use a less personal object of suffering, shorten to three breaths, or switch to the self-compassion break. As Christopher Germer writes, "Self-compassion is the foundation of compassion for others." You cannot pour from a

cracked vessel. Repair first, then pour. The **five radical realizations** offer a wider philosophical grounding for why this willingness to meet suffering — your own and others' — is the heart of wisdom practice.

Practice 12: The Gratitude Close (2 minutes)

What it is: The evening bookend to the morning gratitude anchor — a brief practice of reviewing the day through the lens of what was received, including from yourself.

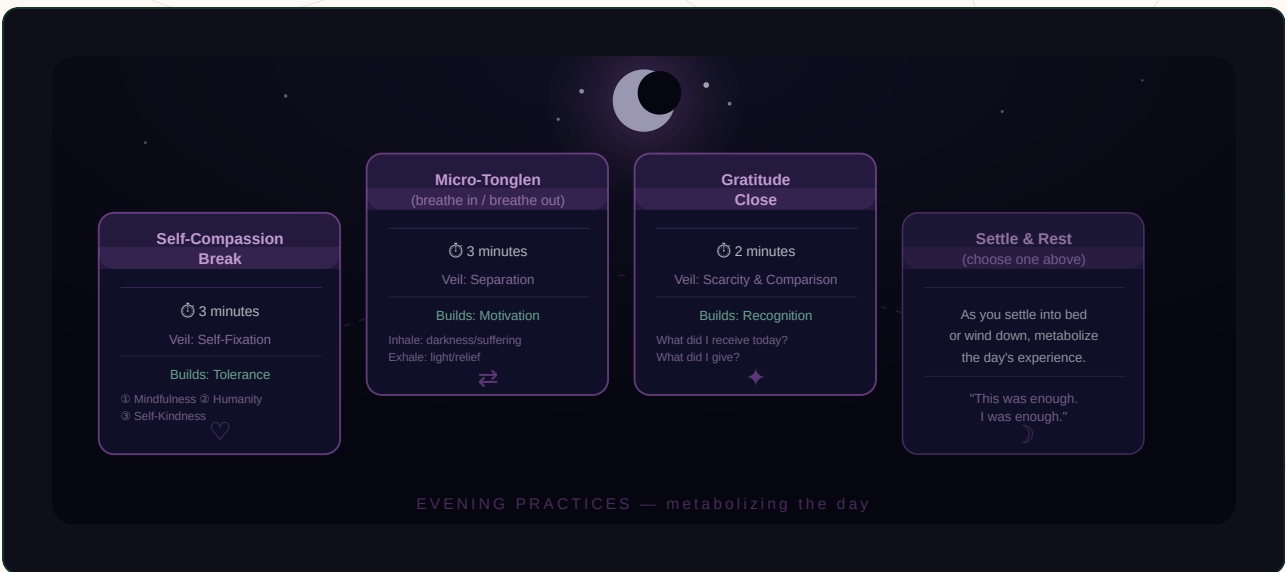
How to do it:

1. As you settle into bed — or during any evening wind-down moment — review the day with one question: *What did I receive today?*
2. Not what you accomplished. Not what you checked off. What was *given* to you — by life, by other people, by your own effort.
3. Name three things. A meal someone cooked. A conversation that mattered. A moment of beauty you almost missed. Your own persistence through a hard afternoon.
4. For the final item, include yourself: *What did I give today?* Name one thing you offered — a kindness, a task completed with care, a moment of patience. Let yourself receive credit for it. Not pride. Just acknowledgment.
5. Silently: *This was enough. I was enough.* Let the day close.

Time: 2 minutes.

Veil addressed: **Scarcity** and **Comparison**. The evening is prime territory for both veils — scarcity whispers *I didn't do enough* while comparison whispers *others did more*. The gratitude close addresses both by shifting from deficit to receipt, from ranking to acknowledgment.

Dimension addressed: Recognition. Evening recognition is retrospective — training the brain to notice, in review, the goodness it may have missed in real time. Over weeks, this retrospective recognition begins to operate in real time: you start noticing acts of kindness and moments of sufficiency as they happen, not only when you review them.



Four evening practices arranged in a moonlit arc, closing the day with care.

The Veil-Specific Practice Guide

If you have read the [Five Veils](#) article — or if you simply recognize which pattern runs most loudly in your own mind — you can use this guide to choose the practice that targets your primary veil directly.

Each veil hides a truth. Each practice is a small dose of that truth.

The Veil of Separation hides the truth of connection.

- *Primary practices:* Lovingkindness Phrase (#1), Threshold Pause (#5), Red Light Practice (#9), Micro-Tonglen (#11)
- *The antidote pattern:* Any practice that directs care toward another person — even silently, even anonymously — thins the separation veil by exercising the neural circuitry of connection.

The Veil of Scarcity hides the truth of sufficiency.

- *Primary practices:* Gratitude Anchor (#3), Savoring Pause (#7), Gratitude Close (#12)
- *The antidote pattern:* Any practice that deliberately registers what is already here — what is whole, adequate, sufficient — widens the aperture that scarcity narrows.

The Veil of Self-Fixation hides the truth of flow.

- *Primary practices:* IMP Check-In (#2), Compassionate Listening Reset (#8), Self-Compassion Break (#10)
- *The antidote pattern:* Any practice that shifts attention from self-monitoring to presence — from "how am I doing?" to "what is happening?" — loosens the self-fixation veil's grip.

The Veil of Comparison hides the truth of intrinsic worth.

- *Primary practices:* "Just Like Me" Flash (#6), Gratitude Close (#12)
- *The antidote pattern:* Any practice that replaces vertical ranking (above/below) with horizontal recognition (alongside) counteracts the comparison veil. The **spectrum of compassion** is not a hierarchy — it is a landscape.

The Veil of Uncertainty hides the truth of openness.

- *Primary practices:* Compass Setting (#4), Savoring Pause (#7)
- *Additional practice:* The "I Don't Know" practice from the **Five Veils** — silently saying "I don't know" in response to anxious future-oriented thought, and letting the not-knowing stand without resolution.
- *The antidote pattern:* Any practice that makes peace with not-knowing — that converts the open future from threat to possibility — thins the uncertainty veil.

The Dimension-Specific Practice Guide

If you have taken the **Compassion Assessment** — or if you have read the **spectrum of compassion** and recognized which dimension of your compassion feels weakest — this guide maps practices to specific dimensions.

Compassion is not one thing. It has **multiple dimensions**, and each dimension can be trained independently. You do not need to be strong in all dimensions to begin. You only need to know where to start.

Low Recognition — You miss the signals. Suffering or goodness in others does not register because your attention is elsewhere.

- *Primary practices:* Gratitude Anchor (#3), Threshold Pause (#5), Gratitude Close (#12)

- *The training pattern:* Attention-widening. These practices expand the bandwidth of what you notice by deliberately directing attention toward what you might otherwise miss.

Low Resonance — You notice but do not feel. The suffering registers cognitively but does not land in the body.

- *Primary practices:* Lovingkindness Phrase (#1), "Just Like Me" Flash (#6), Micro-Tonglen (#11)
- *The training pattern:* Empathic imagining. These practices train the felt sense of connection — they move compassion from the head to the chest. The distinction between **empathy and compassion** matters here: you are not training yourself to absorb others' pain, but to let it touch you without drowning you.

Low Understanding — You feel the suffering but do not grasp its causes. You want to help but do not know what would actually help.

- *Primary practices:* IMP Check-In (#2), Compass Setting (#4), Compassionate Listening Reset (#8)
- *The training pattern:* Cause-questioning. These practices train the habit of asking *why* — looking beneath the surface behavior to the need, the history, the structural conditions that produced the suffering. Understanding is where compassion becomes wise, not just warm.

Low Tolerance — You understand but cannot stay present. The suffering overwhelms you and you withdraw or shut down.

- *Primary practices:* Savoring Pause (#7), Self-Compassion Break (#10)
- *The training pattern:* Grounding and capacity-building. Before you can stay present with difficulty, your nervous system needs the experience of being able to hold *any* strong sensation — including pleasure — without flinching. The savoring pause builds this capacity from the positive side; the self-compassion break builds it from the difficult side.

Low Motivation — You recognize, feel, understand, and tolerate suffering, but do not take action. The bridge between caring and doing feels broken.

- *Primary practices:* Red Light Practice (#9), Micro-Tonglen (#11), Compass Setting (#4)
- *The training pattern:* Micro-generosity. These practices exercise the response muscle — the willingness to do something, however small, when you notice suffering. Even a silent wish is an act. Even a breath directed toward someone's ease is an offering. As the **108 Framework** suggests, the smallest unit of compassionate action is still action.

Designing Your Practice: Habit Stacking and the Weekly Rhythm

You now have twelve practices, mapped to five veils and five dimensions. The question is not "which one should I do?" It is "which one fits most naturally into a moment I already have?"

This is the core insight of habit stacking — the method developed by BJ Fogg and popularized by James Clear. You do not create a new behavior by adding it to your schedule. You create it by attaching it to something you already do.

The Habit Stacking Formula

Clear's formula is simple:

After I [CURRENT HABIT], I will [MICRO-PRACTICE].

Examples:

- *After I pour my morning coffee, I will do the Lovingkindness Phrase.*
- *After I park my car at work, I will do the Threshold Pause.*
- *After I sit down at my desk, I will do the IMP Check-In.*
- *After I put my phone on the nightstand, I will do the Self-Compassion Break.*

The current habit is the anchor. The micro-practice is the passenger. The anchor provides the cue; the practice provides the compassion. No calendar reminders needed. No meditation cushion required. Just a behavior you already perform, and a two-minute passenger riding alongside it.

Fogg adds a crucial refinement: **start with the tiniest version**. If the Lovingkindness Phrase feels like too much, start with a single repetition: *May I be at ease*. One line. After coffee. That is the practice. You can expand later — and you will, because tiny practices naturally grow when they are not forced. But the minimum viable practice must be small enough that you can do it on your worst day, your busiest morning, your most exhausted evening. If you can do it only on good days, it is too big.

The Weekly Compassion Rhythm

For those who want more structure — and some people thrive on structure — here is a weekly rhythm that cycles through all five compassion dimensions across seven days. This is not a prescription. It is an example of how the practices can be organized to ensure that no dimension is neglected over time.

Monday — Recognition Day. Morning: Gratitude Anchor. Transitions: Threshold Pause (extra attention to noticing who is in the room). Evening: Gratitude Close. The [chapter on paying it forward](#) shows how recognition — seeing others clearly — is the first step in the generosity chain.

Tuesday — Resonance Day. Morning: Lovingkindness Phrase. Transitions: "Just Like Me" Flash (aim for three people). Evening: Micro-Tonglen.

Wednesday — Understanding Day. Morning: IMP Check-In. Transitions: Compassionate Listening Reset (before any conversation). Evening: Reflect on one person you encountered and ask: *What might they be carrying that I cannot see?* The [collaboration geometry](#) maps how this kind of mutual understanding becomes the architecture of genuine partnership.

Thursday — Tolerance Day. Morning: Compass Setting. Transitions: Savoring Pause (three moments of okayness, deliberately absorbed). Evening: Self-Compassion Break.

Friday — Motivation Day. Morning: Compass Setting with a specific generosity intention. Transitions: Red Light Practice (aim for five silent wishes). Evening: Review — *What did I offer today?*

Saturday — Integration Day. Choose whichever practice called to you most strongly during the week. Do it with a bit more spaciousness — three minutes instead of two, five instead of three. Let the practice breathe.

Sunday — Rest Day. No formal practice. Instead, carry a single question through the day: *What is already compassionate in me, without any effort at all?* Notice the compassion that is already happening — the natural care, the spontaneous warmth, the effortless kindness that does not come from any practice but from your original nature. The [fractal life table](#) maps the full landscape of human flourishing; on rest day, you simply inhabit whatever part of that landscape is alive in you.



A seven-day compassion rhythm wheel, from recognition on Monday to rest on Sunday.

The Compassion Compound Effect

There is a financial concept called compound interest — the principle that small, regular deposits grow exponentially over time because each deposit earns interest on all previous deposits. Albert Einstein is (probably apocryphally) reported to have called it the eighth wonder of the world. The

principle applies to compassion with striking precision.

Each micro-practice is a deposit. Each deposit changes the brain slightly — not dramatically, not in a way you will notice on any single day, but measurably. Davidson's research shows that compassion practice strengthens the neural pathways connecting the prefrontal cortex (executive function, decision-making) with the limbic system (emotion, motivation). Each practice strengthens the pathway. And a stronger pathway means that the next practice is easier, more natural, more automatic. The deposit earns interest. The [AI mirror](#) explores what happens when these same patterns of attention and care are reflected back through technology — and what that reveals about our own minds.

Hanson's HEAL framework describes the mechanism: when you *have* a beneficial experience (the warmth of lovingkindness, the relief of self-compassion, the connection of "just like me"), then *enrich* it by staying with it for fifteen seconds or more, then *absorb* it by letting it sink into the body — you are converting a state into a trait. A passing experience into a lasting neural structure. A moment of compassion into a compassionate brain.

This is the compound effect: each micro-practice makes the next one slightly easier, slightly more natural, slightly more automatic. Over weeks, the practices begin to fire without the deliberate cue. You catch yourself pausing at a threshold without deciding to pause. You notice yourself directing a silent wish at a stranger without remembering that this is a practice. The two-minute revolution has become the background hum of your nervous system.

Barbara Fredrickson's research on positivity resonance — documented in *Love 2.0* — reveals the interpersonal dimension of the compound effect. When you practice compassion toward others, even silently, it changes the quality of your subsequent interactions. Your facial expressions soften. Your vocal tone warms. Your eye contact lingers slightly longer. These are not conscious changes — they are the behavioral downstream of a neural upstream. And the people you interact with register them, unconsciously, and respond in kind. Your silent practice changes not only your brain but the social field around you.

This is why the woman in the kitchen did not stop after the first morning. Not because she had discipline. Because the practice worked — immediately, subtly, undeniably. The two-second pause created a gap. The gap created a choice. The choice created a different morning. And the different morning created a different mother, who created a different atmosphere, which the children — who do not know the word "micro-practice" and would not care if they did — could feel.

The pebble drops. The pebble drops. The pebble drops. And one morning you notice that the river has changed course.

The IMP Micro-Audit: Three Questions for Any Moment

Before we close, one more tool — the simplest of all, and perhaps the most powerful.

The **IMP framework** — Intention, Motivation, Purpose — can be used as a rapid audit at any point in the day. Not as a formal practice but as a flash of self-awareness: three questions that take ten seconds and that reveal, instantly, the quality of what you are about to do.

1. **What am I seeking right now?** (Intention)
2. **What is driving me?** (Motivation — love or fear? Approach or avoidance?)
3. **Who is this for?** (Purpose — self alone, or something wider?)

You do not need to change anything based on the answers. The asking is the practice. The **intention-motivation-purpose framework** is not about optimizing your inner life — it is about *seeing* your inner life, clearly, without judgment. And the seeing, as every contemplative tradition teaches, is already the beginning of freedom.

Use the IMP micro-audit before a difficult email. Before a parenting moment. Before a financial decision. Before a conversation you are dreading. Ten seconds. Three questions. A lifetime of increasingly honest answers. **The sacred joke** reminds us that the most earnest practitioners are often the ones most able to hold their practices lightly — because they know that the practice is a raft, not the shore.

Starting Tomorrow: Your One Practice

Here is what I would say if we were sitting together over coffee and you asked me where to begin.

Do not try to do all twelve practices. Do not design a weekly rhythm yet. Do not map your veils and dimensions. All of that is useful and it will be there when you are ready for it. But if you try to begin with the full system, you will not begin at all.

Choose one practice. The one that made you think, as you read it, *I could actually do that*. Not the one that impressed you most. Not the one that targets your weakest dimension. The one that felt smallest, most natural, most like something you would actually do tomorrow morning.

Write it down. Or say it out loud: "After I [existing habit], I will [practice]."

Do it tomorrow. Just once. Two minutes. And if you forget, do it the day after. And if you forget again, do it the day after that. The practice is not a test. It is an invitation — and the invitation does not expire.

The **dual challenge** of compassion — caring for yourself *and* caring for others — is not solved by grand gestures. It is solved by the accumulation of small ones. The **contemplative toolkit** offers the full range; this article offers the entry point. The **you didn't start this** article reminds you that the suffering you are working with has deep roots; micro-practices are how you tend those roots with patience rather than force.

Two minutes. One practice. Tomorrow morning.

That is enough. You are enough. And the revolution — quiet, invisible, reshaping the riverbed of your life one pebble at a time — has already begun.

Invitation

You are already compassionate.

You have always been. Before any practice, before any framework, before any article told you how. The care you feel when a child is hurt, the ache when a friend is struggling, the impulse to help a stranger — these are not learned behaviors. They are your original equipment. Twelve micro-practices do not *create* compassion in you. They clear the channel so the compassion that is already there can flow more freely.

Tomorrow morning, before the world rushes in, you have two minutes. Just two. Enough for one breath, one phrase, one silent wish directed at yourself or someone you love. It will not solve anything. It will not fix the cereal on the wall or the meeting at 10 AM or the uncertainty about the fu-

ture. But it will thin, by one breath's width, the veil between you and the life you are already living — the life that, beneath all the noise and hurry, has been waiting for you to arrive.

One breath. One practice. One pebble in the river.

Begin.

People Also Ask

What exactly are micro-practices for compassion? Micro-practices are brief compassion exercises — typically one to five minutes — designed to be woven into moments you already have rather than added to your schedule. They draw on established contemplative traditions (lovingkindness, tonglen, mindfulness) and behavioral science (habit stacking, the HEAL framework) to deliver small but neurologically significant doses of compassion training. The twelve practices in this article target specific **veils** and compassion dimensions, so you can choose based on your personal growth edge. The key insight from BJ Fogg's research: the smallest sustainable practice beats the largest unsustainable one.

How can I practice compassion in just two minutes? The simplest entry point is the Lovingkindness Phrase (Practice #1): before your feet leave the bed, silently repeat *May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be at peace*, then direct the same wishes toward someone you will see that day. Total time: two minutes. Sharon Salzberg's research shows that the practice works whether or not you feel the words — the repetition itself reshapes neural grooves over time. Other two-minute options include the Gratitude Anchor (#3), the Threshold Pause (#5), and the Gratitude Close (#12).

What is habit stacking for meditation and compassion practices? Habit stacking is a behavior-change method developed by BJ Fogg (*Tiny Habits*) and popularized by James Clear (*Atomic Habits*). The formula: "After I [current habit], I will [new micro-practice]." Instead of scheduling a separate meditation time, you attach the practice to something you already do — pouring coffee, parking the car, putting your phone on the nightstand. The existing habit provides the cue; the micro-practice rides alongside it. This bypasses the most common failure point — forgetting or not finding time — because the trigger is already built into your day.

How do tiny habits actually build compassion over time? Through the compassion compound effect. Each micro-practice produces a small neural change — strengthening the pathways between the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system that govern empathy, emotional regulation, and prosocial motivation (Davidson & Begley, *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*). Rick Hanson's research shows that the brain needs as little as twelve to fifteen seconds of sustained positive experience to begin converting a passing state into a lasting trait. Compound these deposits daily and the practices become increasingly automatic — compassion shifts from something you do to something you are.

What are the Five Veils of separation? The **Five Veils** are five habitual patterns of mind — Separation, Scarcity, Self-Fixation, Comparison, and Uncertainty — that continuously reconstruct the experience of being isolated. Each veil hides a truth (connection, sufficiency, flow, intrinsic worth, and openness, respectively), and each has a specific micro-practice antidote. They are not moral failures but neurological defaults inherited from 200,000 years of threat-detection hardware. Thinning any one veil reduces pressure on all five because they form a self-reinforcing system. The **hidden wisdom** within each veil can be reclaimed through practice.

How does the compassion compound effect work? The compassion compound effect is the principle that small, regular compassion practices grow exponentially because each practice makes the next one easier. Neurologically, each micro-practice strengthens the neural pathways that govern compassion, emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior. A stronger pathway means faster activation, lower effort, and more automatic engagement. Fredrickson's research (*Love 2.0*) adds the interpersonal dimension: as your neural compassion pathways strengthen, your facial expressions, vocal tone, and social behavior shift — and others respond in kind, creating a positive feedback loop.


What is the IMP framework and how do I use it daily? IMP stands for **Intention, Motivation, and Purpose** — the three invisible forces shaping every action. Intention is the arrow (what you are seeking), Motivation is the bow (what is driving you — love or fear?), and Purpose is the target (who is this for?). As a daily micro-practice, you can use the IMP Check-In (#2) each morning — three minutes, three questions — or the IMP Micro-Audit at any moment throughout the day: ten seconds, three questions, no need to change anything. The asking itself creates awareness, and awareness is the foundation of all compassionate choice.

Can brief meditation practices really change the brain? Yes, and the research is robust. Davidson's 2008 study showed measurable changes in brain activation (insula and temporal parietal junction) after just two weeks of compassion practice in beginners with no meditation experi-

ence. Fredrickson's research demonstrated increased vagal tone — a measure of parasympathetic nervous system flexibility — after six weeks of lovingkindness practice. Hanson's work shows that as little as twelve seconds of sustained attention to a positive experience begins the process of converting a state into a trait. The brain is changed by experience, and micro-practices are experiences — small, repeatable, and cumulative.

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