

Letting Go of Anger Through Compassion

Replace a grudge, for fifteen minutes, with a deliberate wish that the person who hurt you heals.



15 min practice + 5 min journal

Standard practice

Handwritten journal, dated & timed

GGIA difficulty: Moderate

1 Why you should try it

When we are hurt or betrayed by someone, it's understandable to feel angry and view the person in a negative light. However, persistently dwelling on these painful feelings can keep us stuck in a grudge, which is highly stressful and wreaks havoc on our physical and mental health.

One way to loosen the grip of anger and hostility is to change the way we think about the person who hurt us. Research suggests that when people view offenders as fallible human beings who behaved badly but have the potential to change, they experience emotional and physiological benefits, such as increased positive emotions and a more stress-resilient cardiovascular system.

2 The session — Prof. Magee's 15-minute protocol

Follow these timings, not the website's. Set a timer. One session = the 15 minutes below, then 5 minutes of journaling immediately after. At least 4 sessions in your 2-week window. You may repeat the same offense across sessions or work through several; it can also be used any time you catch yourself ruminating.

3'

3'

6'

3'

3 MIN Settle with "one"

Find a quiet place to sit. Relax, breathing in and out naturally. During each exhale, focus on the word "one." Keep your arms, legs, and body still.

3 MIN Recall the hurt

Identify a time in the past when another person hurt or offended you. Let the memory come without arguing your case. Notice what happens in your body — jaw, shoulders, chest, heart rate — and name it silently.

6 MIN Compassionate reappraisal

Now think of the offender as a human being who behaved badly. Even if the relationship cannot be restored, try to genuinely wish that this person experiences something positive or healing. Even though it may be hard, focus your thoughts and feelings on giving a gift of mercy or compassion. Consider: what pressures, fears, or wounds might have been behind their behavior? What would it mean for them to grow? Stay consciously aware of the thoughts, feelings, and physical responses you have as you cultivate compassion, kindness, and mercy for this person.

3**Return to the breath and compare****MIN**

Come back to "one" on the exhale. Check the body again — has anything loosened? You are not excusing the offense; you are declining to keep paying for it. Note one word for how you feel now.

Take care. This practice is for ordinary hurts and grudges. If the offense involved abuse or trauma, choose a different practice, or talk with the Counseling and Wellness Center first (718.940.5853, bkwellness@sjny.edu).

3**Then journal — 5 minutes, by hand**

- Top of the entry: **date and time**. Entries without both lose credit.
- Write for **5 minutes without stopping** (about 300 words). Messy is fine; stopping is not.
- Before / during / after: how did you feel at each point? Be specific — body, mood, thoughts.
- What surprised you? What felt fake, awkward, or easier than expected?
- **Prompt:** What did your body do during the recall versus the reappraisal? (The study measured exactly that — facial tension and heart rate.)
- **Prompt:** Did wishing them well feel like betrayal of yourself? Did that change by the end?

4**Evidence that it works**

vanOyen Witvliet, C., DeYoung, N. J., Hofelich, A. J., & DeYoung, P. A. (2011)

Participants instructed to think about a past offense in a compassionate way — to engage in what the researchers call "compassionate reappraisal" — reported greater empathy, forgiveness, positive emotions, and feelings of control, compared with participants instructed to ruminate on or suppress negative emotions about the offense. Compared with the rumination group, the compassionate reappraisal group also showed less eye-muscle tension (which is associated with intense emotion) and lower heart rate.

5**Why it works**

Instead of just trying to reduce the negative emotions associated with a hurtful event, this practice helps us replace them with feelings of compassion and forgiveness. It allows us to develop genuine empathy and concern for an offender, while still acknowledging the hurtfulness of the offense and the offender's need for growth or healing. Rather than relying on emotional suppression, which tends to be taxing, compassion can produce a deeper and more lasting shift in perspective. In some cases, this new perspective may help us better support the offender in making positive changes, or — if reconciliation is not possible or desired — help us find the strength to move on with our lives.

6 Know the research — for your presentation (APA 7)

In your presentation you will explain, **from memory and without notes**, the evidence behind each practice — who studied it, when, and what they found — plus something *not* written on the GGIA site or on this handout. Read these papers (SJNY library or Google Scholar), then follow their citations forward to find **your own article** — one more peer-reviewed study on this topic that is not the source study here (due Sun Dec 6). Take photos along the way; they are your slides.

vanOyen Witvliet, C., DeYoung, N. J., Hofelich, A. J., & DeYoung, P. A. (2011). Compassionate reappraisal and emotion suppression as alternatives to offense-focused rumination: Implications for forgiveness and psychophysiological well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6(4), 286–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2011.577091>

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