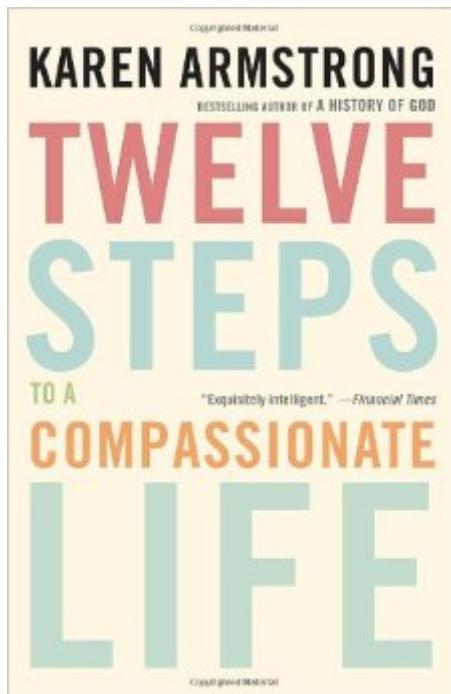


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Twelve Steps To A Compassionate Life



Synopsis

In this important and thought-provoking work, Karen Armstrong "one of the most original thinkers on the role of religion in the modern world" provides an impassioned and practical guide to helping us make the world a more compassionate place. The twelve steps she suggests begin with "Learn About Compassion" and close with "Love Your Enemies." In between, she takes up self-love, mindfulness, suffering, sympathetic joy, the limits of our knowledge of others, and "concern for everybody." She shares concrete methods to help us cultivate and expand our capacity for compassion, and provides a reading list to encourage us to "hear one another's narratives." Armstrong teaches us that becoming a compassionate human being is a lifelong project and a journey filled with rewards.

The First Step: Learn About Compassion
The Second Step: Look at Your Own World
The Third Step: Compassion for Yourself
The Fourth Step: Empathy
The Fifth Step: Mindfulness
The Sixth Step: Action
The Seventh Step: How Little We Know
The Eighth Step: How Should We Speak to One Another?
The Ninth Step: Concern for Everybody
The Tenth Step: Knowledge
The Eleventh Step: Recognition
The Twelfth Step: Love Your Enemies

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Customer Reviews

Karen Armstrong is a former Catholic nun who has written widely on religious issues. In 2007, Armstrong was awarded a substantial cash prize from a nonprofit organization known as TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) to promote ideas that could "make a difference" in people's lives. Armstrong opted to use the award to promote the development of compassion. She worked

with religious leaders from a variety of traditions to formulate and develop a "Charter for Compassion" that would "restore compassion to the heart of religious and moral life." The Charter was unveiled in Washington, D.C. in December, 2009. It is also available on the web together with an invitation to readers to sign on to and try to realize its principles. As part of her project, Armstrong also wrote this book "Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life" in which she explains the nature and importance of compassion and offers a 12-step plan for increasing the degree of compassion one achieves in one's own life. Armstrong begins with the Golden Rule in both its negative formulation: "Do not treat others as you would not like them to treat you"; and in its positive formulation: "Always treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself." As did the Jewish sage Hillel in a story Armstrong quotes when asked to explain succinctly the teachings of the Bible, Armstrong believes that "the rest is commentary" to be studied learned, and practiced. Armstrong's short book shows a great deal of erudition as well as wisdom. She has studied and learned a great deal from many religious traditions, including Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. She presents complex material in an effective manner. But the scope of the learning in this book is much broader.

I was very hesitant to read this book because I was afraid it would be filled with religious dogma. Specifically, Christian religious dogma since I knew Karen Armstrong was previously a nun. Being a Buddhist, I tend to eschew books that proselytize. But I read more about Karen and decided to take the plunge. How refreshing her book turned out to be! Let me say first off that I treasure books and try to keep them in pristine condition, barely opening the covers so I don't break the spine or hold it in any way that taxes the binding. I always clean my hands before touching a book. But while reading Armstrong's words, I found so many sentences profound, thoughts that shimmered with clarity that I found myself doing the unthinkable - taking a highlighter and highlighting noteworthy passages! Worse yet, I uncapped a pen and scribbled notes within the margins, thoughts that I want to remember for the next reading of the book for surely I will read this book many times over again. Armstrong points out that in today's world, peace is paramount. Never has our ability to wreck destruction upon each other been greater and yet religion, the thing that should compel us towards peace is actually a separating agent. Hostilities arise in the name of religion. Take a look at the present conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. History is blood-speckled with crusades and the like but Armstrong argues they really aren't about religion. The people in power merely invoke religion as the palatable face of the war, but the real reason is always something secular such as economics, border disputes or control of resources. Armstrong asserts that if you are truly a student

of religion, you see that while they differ in many ways they have a core that is universal.

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