

The Peppermint Principle is the ideology that even with limited or unlikely resources for the task at hand, compassionate cooperation of a cohesive group can harness potentiality to solve challenges, generate productive ideas and strengthen community engagement for building more peaceful, inclusive communities.

The Peppermint Principle Discussion Guide

The purpose of this discussion guide is to exercise the mind and heart toward strengthening greater compassionate cooperation for collaborative idea generation, problem solving and forming stronger personal and interpersonal relations. Through compassionate cooperation individuals, work groups and communities will harness the potential for more harmonious interactions on the personal and community levels fostering a higher quality of life for all.

The questions and activities can be engaged for individual contemplation or group discussion.

Chapter 1 - Welcome to Sangha

1. The Chief believed the way of their ancestors to be a gift rather than a price to be paid. What are some of the traditions that have been handed down in your family from parents, grandparents, great grandparents or as far back as you can go?
 - a. Looking at your list classify them one by one as: gift, burden, blessing or curse.
 - b. If you are willing, make a conscious decision as to which you choose to continue, or which you choose to discontinue. What you carry forward will affect the generations that come after you.
 - c. Where and how will you begin to implement the changes you have identified?
2. The way of keeping peace was a “meeting” in the hut to resolve disputes. Why do you think their method worked?
 - a. Is there anything you can take from their method to bring peace, consensus or harmony to situations you are involved in?
 - b. Could this type of “meeting” be made effective for larger challenges? If so how? If not, why not?
 - c. Do you find any significance to the hut as contributing toward the effectiveness of the meeting?
3. The author describes Sangha from the “view of the landing” overlooking the village. Call to mind a situation where you found value in taking your gaze of the situation from a wider perspective, a new point of view, different position.
 - a. What was the result?
 - b. Did you learn anything about yourself in the process of gaining a higher viewpoint?
 - c. What are some of the ways and methods that can be engaged to gain a wider perspective or different view of a situation?

4. The author speaks of Mother nature: “Mother Nature always amazes me when I take the time to really notice her...She almost seems to enjoy displaying her natural state, even in the most unsuspecting places.” How often do you take the time to notice nature?
 - a. When did you last watch a sunrise or sunset?
 - b. Describe something in nature that you found amazing, breathtaking?
 - c. Have you traveled to a place where you found its natural beauty to be especially memorable? Where? When?

Chapter 2 - Winners Versus Losers and Everybody In-between

1. The peppermint candy was in short supply for the group of 25 children, what is your first reaction to limited supply and high demand? When supply is limited who often gets left-out?
 - a. Who were the “obvious winners” and why?
 - b. Who were the “obvious losers” and why?
 - c. How would you categorize those who were the “In-between” group?
2. When did you last, or have you ever found your self in a situation where others may have categorized you as “winner” or “loser”?
 - a. What were your thoughts/feelings at the time about being “winner”? “loser”?
 - b. What are your thoughts/feelings as you look back on those experiences?
 - c. What are your thoughts of what it means to be “a person In-between the category of winner and loser?”
3. The children in the circle with the little girl in the plaid dress seemed to have no concern over the “winner versus loser” mindset. Why?
 - a. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt everyone in the circle was on common ground and equal for the task at hand?
 - b. What situations can you think of where competition was off the table in group dynamics?
 - c. What situation can you think of where everyone in the group would champion and rejoice in everyone’s success?

Chapter 3 - The Audacity to be Different

1. To what do you attribute the calmness of the girl in the plaid dress in her assuredness that everyone in the circle would comply with sharing-equally?
 - a. Can you think of a time when you were leading a situation and you felt assured everyone in the group, on the team, in the household, would comply in sharing-equally?

- b. Describe a situation when you were part of a group and felt confident that everyone in the group knew the rules, and that they would comply?
 - c. When people know the rules, what could be some of the reasons they choose not to comply?
2. The author states: “The moment was not just about candy but the thing we all crave as human beings—connection.” Discuss your understanding of this statement.
- a. What are some of the ways you fill your personal “craving” for connection?
 - b. When did you witness how pure teamwork could be effective in fulfilling a mission, project or activity? How did you feel being a witness to, or a part of it?
 - c. Describe “the audacity to be different” as displayed by the children in the circle with the girl in the plaid dress. Where and when in your life have you exercised “the audacity to be different”?
3. What qualities of leadership did you notice in the girl in the plaid dress?
- a. Can you think of a leadership situation where the leader *did not* exercise qualities that invited cooperation, harmony and teamwork? What were some of the outcomes?
 - b. Have you ever been in a situation where someone in the group took the meeting off course with anger, shouting, unpleasant behavior? What was the result?
 - c. The girl in the plaid dress was clearly the leader and she spoke not a single word during the passing of the candy. Can you relate to silence by the leader as an effective state of successful group dynamics?
 - d. Imagine a project or activity you are involved with. What affect might a willing, compassionate, cooperative mindset of everyone involved have on the group process for idea generation or problem solving? What would it take to establish this level of cohesive collaboration?
4. Why was their such a cooperative spirit among the children in the circle?
- a. How was compassion part of their process?
 - b. When you think of “cooperative compassion” does any situation or experience come to mind? If so, explain.
 - c. Discuss the idea that it takes courage to exhibit compassion, integrity and confidence in a situation where scarcity could be an issue.

Chapter 4 – Watching Joy

1. The author said, “Integrity in seeming small matters is the foundation for integrity in large matters.” What is your definition of integrity? Give an example of integrity from your own experience.
 - a. Where do you see “fair-mindedness” modeled?
 - b. What are your thoughts around leaders taking preferential treatment in accessing resources?
 - c. Notice if there are any areas in your life where “fairness” would help transform the situation.
2. In the re-wrapping of the peppermint candy, the girl in the plaid dress applied great effort. Can you identify any value to her doing so?
 - a. What benefits can evolve from modeling care, appreciation and gratitude?
 - b. Can you think of a time when you intentionally established something as having value by the effort you applied?
 - c. Can you recall a situation when you intentionally set the tone you wanted others to follow?
3. Discuss the author’s statement “In that moment I realized what happens when we judge the cultural traditions, religious practices and rituals practiced by others from the ignorance of not having the depth of understanding behind the activity.” Can you think of a situation when you or others harshly judged another’s cultural traditions that you did not understand?
 - a. What do you do to learn more about the cultural traditions of others?
 - b. Do you have knowledge of anyone judging your cultural, social, economic traditions and practices without attempting to understand them?
 - c. Is there value to getting to know and understand the traditions, practices and customs of others in your community? If so, what might they be? How could you learn more about the customs and traditions of those in your community?

Chapter 5 – It’s Not Over Until They Sing

1. The author states: “It was time for us to give...Although giving was expected, I was sure that we all did it with joy.” Describe a situation where you gave a financial donation from the heart with great appreciation, gratitude and joy.
 - a. Can you compare the feeling of giving out of obligation versus giving with joy?
 - b. What part did the singing performance of the children have in the expectation of donations to be given to the children?

- c. Why do you think the girl in the plaid dress was not aggressive in trying to direct donations her way as did some of the others who had a donation box in hand?
2. When the older boy came out of nowhere to collect donations and jumped in front of the girl in the plaid dress, what are your thoughts about why she was able to remain calm?
 - a. What are your thoughts about her five supporters who “seemingly fearlessly” made their presence known to the older boy?
 - b. Why did the older boy then surrender and step aside without further commotion, when the five children were smaller and younger than he was?
 - c. When the girl in the plaid dress began to count the donations, the five were there with her. What if any significance was it that they all witnessed the funds being counted?
3. When the author came down from the landing she states: “What once had the look of poverty to me, had changed.”
 - a. Why did things look different?
 - b. Can you recall a time when your perspective changed after you looked beyond the outer appearance of a situation? If so, what did you learn from that experience. If not, can you imagine such a change taking place?
 - c. The author tells of a “richness of character” that she witnessed. Have you experienced this in someone else or others?
4. Discuss your thoughts about the author’s statement: “There is a certain amount of mental exhaustion that comes with wrestling in mind with the outer appearance of poverty and the stirring of conscience, when poverty is a visit, a tour.”
 - a. How do you describe poverty?
 - b. Have you ever witnessed what is thought of as severe poverty where people do not have the basics for survival? What did you feel during the experience? What did you feel after the experience?
 - c. Why do you think the author said, “I needed to reconcile in my mind the appearance of lack and how it relates to my ideas about being poor.”?
5. This chapter closes with the statement of the Peppermint Principle as: “Compassionate cooperation of a cohesive group can demonstrate great possibilities even with limited resources.”
 - a. List what might be determined as great possibilities demonstrated by The Six, using their limited resource—a single piece of candy.
 - b. Using the candy as a metaphor for something you are working on in your life, family, work group, community what is the resource you have on hand for that opportunity?
 - c. How do you see “compassionate cooperation” assisting in getting things done in a productive and harmonious way?

Chapter 6 – Great Lessons from Precious Moments

1. The author stated: “The group was there on a mission to see that the water system was installed that would help to change lives for the better.”
 - a. Discuss the idea of compassion as part of serving to “help change lives for the better.”
 - b. If you have served for a charitable cause, why did you do it?
 - c. Is there truth to the ideal that serving to help others, opens the heart toward greater compassion?
2. The author discusses time spent with the officials of Sangharabougou saying, “It was a time of connection and community as we sat and talked for hours about their lives and they inquired about ours.”
 - a. What are the benefits or rewards of time spent in “connection and community” with others?
 - b. Have you had the experience of time spent in “connection and community” with those you did not know? What is your assessment of the value of the situation?
 - c. If there were opportunities in your home, work group, community where people could spend time in “connection and community” could there be any value to those involved, or for the community at large?
3. In the closing section of the chapter and book, the author said, “The Peppermint Principle urged me toward believing that great life lessons emerge from precious moments of compassionate, cooperative, connection with others.”
 - a. Describe something from the book where you felt compassion. Describe a personal experience from your life where you were moved to compassion.
 - b. In your interactions with others, do you generally feel a “spirit of cooperation” with people you know? What about with those you do not know?
 - c. Can you describe a situation where you felt grateful for the connections you have with others? Name some of those experiences. Name some of the people you have felt a connection with.
4. Discuss your thought around the ideal of success when a group approaches solving problems, generating new ideas or building community from an attitude and approach that centers around compassionate and cohesive cooperation.
 - a. Can you imagine the idea of compassion, cooperation and connecting with others as a strategy for improving relationships and strengthening the ability to work together?

- b. How might idea generation be enhanced with compassion, cooperation and connecting with others improve the quality of the ideas and their subsequent implementation?
 - c. The girl in the plaid dress had everyone in the circle engaged. How could full engagement support some project or idea you are working on in a group? What are some of the things that leaders can do to engage everyone in the group?
5. The author states, “small things can teach big lessons”.
- a. Can you think of a time when a small thing or small amount of resources allowed you or others to accomplish something of great value?
 - b. How does perspective factor into a willingness to try something big, from a seemingly limited amount of resources?
 - c. What personal lesson or message do you take from this story where one single piece of peppermint candy gave great satisfaction to six children?

In essence:

Compassionate cooperation of a cohesive group can demonstrate great possibilities—even with limited or unlikely resources.