

Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life by Karen Armstrong.  
Bodley Head 2011

In 2007, Karen Armstrong was awarded a TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) prize and asked the donors to help her establish a Charter for Compassion that would be contributed to by leading thinkers of the major faiths and its purpose would be to point to another way forward and an improved means of dialogue in a world where the faiths are increasingly polarised. The Charter was launched in 2009, embraced by all the faiths, and work continues throughout the world to put its principles into practice.

Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life represents Karen Armstrong's successful attempt to point towards a means whereby anyone can realise the inherent compassion that lies within them and work to enhance their personal and professional relationships as a result.

The book is divided into twelve chapters, with a preface and a 'Last Word'. Each chapter relates to one of the steps of the title and each shows the breadth and depth of Ms Armstrong's knowledge of and appreciation for the world's faiths. The cynic may doubt that human society is capable of taking any of the steps that she suggests, and the cynic may well be correct, for effort and honest attempts at self-improvement are required to make this work! But to allow the cynic's voice to drown out the rest of us would be to cave in rather pathetically to negativity and despair.

Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life is a manual for self-improvement, a study text, and a goad to faith communities to consider their modus operandi very carefully. It is another valuable contribution to inter-faith dialogue from a writer whose stature grows with every passing year.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh