sadness and pain for people who were willing to do that to other humans, but also humbled and appreciative of the courageous women and men who were willing to take those steps just so I could go to a ballot box.”

Reconnection
For one student, the seminar was a chance to learn about his disconnected heritage. Jacob Smith, a senior studying global studies, was adopted as an infant into a white family, and as an African American growing up in predominately white Draper, Utah, he found himself in a world that kept him from feeling truly accepted. All he was expecting to gain by participating in the seminar was a little more knowledge about the civil rights movement and what it means to “be a member of the black community.” What he didn’t expect was to create lasting connections or feel the Spirit on the trip.

Going to Martin Luther King Jr.’s home and Ebenezer Church, where King served as assistant reverend to his father, gave Smith “the very tangible feeling of the spiritual beings that still live there.” For him, standing on those grounds united the worlds he’d learned about and the world he lives in. Looking back on his experiences with the seminar, Smith now understands that “there is a difference between intellectual and experiential understanding.” He says, “No matter how well read we are, we will not ever be able to truly understand what those powerful, driven heroes endured during their nonviolent war for rights. However, we can honor their sacrifices by striving to create these sought-after beloved communities wherever we can.”

Creating a Beloved Zion
Brigham Young University’s dedication to educating young people to “go forth to serve” is exemplified through the Civil Rights Seminar. Through their experiences in the program, students are gaining a more complete knowledge of American history, because in a Beloved Community, the story of one of us is the story of all of us. Thus, the final product of the seminar is the creation of a group of students and faculty who are all striving to create King’s Beloved Community, along with Zion communities, throughout their lives. As King said:

“The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men.”

In the gospel of Matthew, Christ commands us to love God first and then our neighbors as ourselves. We tend to focus on one part of the second commandment—loving our neighbors—but are we as committed to loving ourselves? Gary Burlingame, chair of the Department of Psychology, and Kara Cattani, clinical director of BYU Counseling and Psychology Services (CAPS), worked with colleagues to build a compassion-focused group therapy model. This technique helps students and others who are struggling with self-criticism and shame, which can lead to various mental health problems. Using the original compassion-focused therapy (CFT) model developed by Paul Gilbert, Cattani and Burlingame created their groups to help individuals both experience compassion and foster compassion for themselves and others. The work done in these groups is multifaceted, but below are a few examples of CFT techniques.

1. Imagining a Compassionate Other
We all need someone on our side, and CFT uses imagery to help individuals build a compassionate other who can give emotional and physical support. Therapists ask their patients to imagine an “ideal compassionate other” who can be fictional or a combination of many loving people like family, close friends, or even divinity. This compassion-ate other does not trigger guilt or shame but rather offers a sense of peace, love, and unconditional acceptance.

Although this can be challenging, with the support of a therapist, most people eventually succeed in creating a compassionate other that activates the soothing or parasympathetic nervous system. This is the first step in CFT. Burlingame and Cattani have found that using strategies to calm the body invariably works to calm the mind.

2. Shining a Light on Mindfulness
What can a flashlight teach us about focusing thoughts? A lot, according to Burlingame and Cattani. Patients suffering from depression and anxiety often feel like their minds are chaotic and out of control, but CFT teaches them that a wandering mind is normal. Therapists say the challenge is not to control or rid the mind of thoughts but rather to learn to focus (and refocus) our attention. To demonstrate this, a therapist will turn off the lights in a room and give members in a group session a turn at holding a lit flashlight. Members shine the flashlight at different parts of the room—the ceiling, a clock, the floor, a picture on the wall. After everyone has a turn, the therapist points out how most members’ eyes focused on whatever the flashlight illuminated. This reminds us that we are in control of what we focus on, and it teaches that if we’re depressed, our attention will invariably wander to sad and hopeless parts of our lives. While CFT acknowledges that negative thoughts are not the individual’s fault, it also shows group members that it is their responsibility to refocus the flashlight of their attention. At first group members may only be able to refocus for seconds, but with practice they can develop this skill, and refocusing often becomes easier.

3. Defending Yourself Against Your Inner Critic
When you think about a behavior you would like to change, notice what you say to yourself. Notice the tone of your voice and how your critical voice leaves you feeling. Does it motivate you? Does it frighten you? If you had a friend or a child with this same behavioral struggle, how would you talk to them about the problem? You deserve to receive the same patient, positive tone that you would likely share with your loved ones.

Cattani reports that “to date, the data on compassion-focused group therapy is promising.” Burlingame, Cattani, and their colleagues are studying its implementation and outcomes at both BYU CAPS and the Utah State Hospital. Most of their clients report an improved ability to combat stress and anxiety in order to feel calm and relaxed. Many also report that visualization and meditation skills were helpful in creating a sense of safety and self-compassion. One client’s comment nicely reflects the empowering aims of CFT: “It gave me a lot of insight into my own emotional needs, . . . what makes me feel safe [and] what kind of people I need to spend time with.”

BYU CAPS has created a class to teach students CFT techniques and also offers CFT groups for students each semester. Students who would like to learn more about participating in these groups can contact CAPS at 801-422-3035 for more information.