

## Session 4 – Practicing Loving-Kindness

### Objectives

- identify stages of “progress” on the path to self-compassion, including disillusionment,
- learn about the difference between loving-kindness and compassion,
- evoke a felt-sense of loving-kindness and compassion.

### Before Our Session

Please go over any material from Session 3 that you haven't had a chance to look at, or that you feel you don't quite have a handle on.

### Compassion and Self-Compassion

- Compassion may be defined as *sensitivity to the pain or suffering of another, coupled with a deep desire to alleviate that suffering* (Goetz, Keltner & Simon-Thomas, 2010).
- *Self-compassion* is simply compassion directed toward oneself—*inner* compassion.

### Loving-Kindness and Compassion

- According to the Dalai Lama
  - Loving-kindness is “the wish that all sentient beings may be happy.”
  - Compassion is “the wish that all sentient beings may be free from suffering.”
- When loving-kindness bumps into suffering (and stays loving), it’s compassion.
- A meditation teacher from Myanmar once said, “When the sunshine of loving-kindness meets the tears of suffering, the rainbow of compassion arises.”
- Both loving-kindness and compassion are the practice of good will.

### Loving-Kindness Meditation

Loving-kindness meditation uses phrases that can be tailored to cultivate either loving-kindness or compassion. Phrases that point toward *happiness* may be considered *loving-kindness* phrases (“May I be happy. May I live with ease”) and those that address the *experience of suffering* in a loving way are considered *compassion* phrases (“May I be free from fear. May I accept myself as I am”). Loving-kindness phrases tend to evoke joyful feelings, whereas compassion phrases tend to elicit an attitude of care, comfort, and encouragement. In MSC, we consider any meditation that uses phrases, regardless whether they are loving-kindness or compassion phrases, to be a “loving-kindness meditation.”

## During the Session

Opening topic: Loving Kindness Meditation

Opening Meditation: Loving Kindness for a Loved One

Discussion: How is Your Practice Going?

Topic: Loving-Kindness and Compassion

Topic: Practicing with Phrases

Informal Practice: Finding Loving Kindness Phrases

## Liz Notes

“When the sunshine of loving-kindness  
meets the tears of suffering  
the rainbow of compassion comes out”  
~ A meditation teacher from Myanmar

\*\*\*\* Compassion implies common humanity \*\*\*\*

\*\*\* self-compassion is the emotional attitude of mindfulness when we  
meet suffering \*\*\*

\*\* be careful of what we say to ourselves because we are listening \*\*

\*\* “a sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment  
to try to alleviate and prevent it. Self-compassion is simply  
compassion directed inward. It is a humble enterprise— remembering to  
include ourselves in the circle of compassion.” \*\*

Caroline mentioned Christina Feldman, Dharma teacher.

There are 3 core practices of MSC 1) Affectionate Breathing, 2)  
Loving-kindness for Ourselves and 3) Giving and Receiving Compassion.

## After the Session

New Home Practice from Session 4 - The Language of Loving Kindness

- Loving-Kindness for a Loved One (script on next page)

If you're looking for some structure for your practice this week, you might like to try the following:

- Alternate listening to the Affectionate Breathing and the Loving-Kindness for a Loved One recorded meditations each day.
- Journal each day about what you noticed, what you felt, what was challenging, what was pleasant. You might use the framework of the stages of progress to reference your experiences (ie are you feeling striving, disillusionment or true acceptance, and exploring that stage).

### From Mindful Self-Compassion workbook, Chapter 13

**Self-compassion practice typically goes through three stages:**

- Striving
- Disillusionment
- Radical acceptance

### Reading to Support Session 4

Mindful Self-compassion workbook chapters 9 & 13

### Loving-kindness Meditation and PTSD

Community Stories: Healing a Soldier's Heart 11/28/2011 29:34

Loving-Kindness Meditation is a method practiced all around the world. At the Seattle division of the VA Puget Sound Health Care System, a pilot program is using this method to help veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder

<http://www.seattlechannel.org/CommunityStories?videoid=x23995>

## LOVING-KINDNESS FOR A LOVED ONE

- Allow yourself to settle into a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down. If you like, putting a hand over your heart or another location that is soothing as a reminder to bring not only awareness, but loving awareness, to our experience and to ourselves.
- Bringing to mind a person or other living being who naturally makes you smile. This could be a child, your grandmother, your cat or dog—whomever naturally brings happiness to your heart. Letting yourself feel what it's like to be in that being's presence. Allowing yourself to enjoy the good company. Create a vivid image of this being in your mind's eye.
- Now, recognize how this being wishes to be happy and free from suffering, just like you and every other living being. Repeating softly and gently, feeling the importance of your words:
  - May you be happy.
  - May you be peaceful.
  - May you be healthy.
  - May you live with ease.
- You may wish to use your own words to capture your deepest wishes for your loved one, or continue to repeat these phrases.
- When you notice that your mind has wandered, returning to the words and the image of the loved one you have in mind. Savoring any warm feelings that may arise. Taking your time.
- Now, adding yourself to your circle of good will. Creating an image of yourself in the presence of your loved one, visualizing you both together.
  - May you and I (we) be happy.
  - May you and I (we) be peaceful.
  - May you and I (we) be healthy.
  - May you and I (we) live with ease.
- Now, letting go of the image of the other, and letting the full focus of your attention rest directly on yourself. Putting your hand over your heart, or elsewhere, and feeling the warmth and gentle pressure of your hand. Visualizing your whole body in your mind's eye, noticing any stress or uneasiness that may be lingering within you, and offering yourself the phrases.
  - May I be happy.
  - May I be peaceful.
  - May I be healthy.
  - May I live with ease.
- Finally, taking a few breaths and just resting quietly in your own body, accepting whatever your experience is, exactly as it is.
- Gently opening your eyes.

© Christopher Germer & Kristin Neff. Mindful Self-Compassion. July 2015. All rights reserved.

## The Path to Loving-Kindness: Choose Your Phrases – Sharon Salzberg

I read this a while back and added it to this document – it's not from class

Loving-kindness is meant to be done in the easiest way possible so that the experience springs forth most gently, most naturally. To do it in the most easiest way possible means first to use phrases that are personally meaningful. The traditional phrases as are taught, at least this one classical translation of them, begins with oneself:

May I be free from danger, may I know safety. Danger in that sense is both inner danger from the force of certain mind states, and outer danger. So, May I be free from danger. May I have mental happiness. May I have physical happiness. May I have ease of well-being—which means may I not have to struggle terribly, day by day, with livelihood, with family issues.

***Let your mind rest in the phrases. You can be aware of the phrases either with the breath or just in themselves—the focus of the attention is the phrases. Let your mind rest within them. The feelings will come and go.***

May I be free from danger, may I have mental happiness, but really, you should use any phrases that are powerful for you. They need to be meaningful not just in a very temporary way—May I get to this course okay—but something profound that you would wish for yourself and wish for others. Thoughts are very important in doing loving-kindness—not to struggle to get a certain kind of feeling. Let your mind rest in the phrases. You can be aware of the phrases either with the breath or just in themselves—the focus of the attention is the phrases. Let your mind rest within them. The feelings will come and go.

Sometimes it will feel quite glorious, it will be extraordinary.

Sometimes, many times, it will be very very ordinary, very dry or very mechanical—but it doesn't matter. It doesn't mean that nothing is happening or that it's not working. What's important is to do it, is to form that intention in the mind because we're uniting the power of loving-kindness and the power of intention and that is what will produce the effect of that free flow of loving-kindness.

### Loving-Kindness Takes Time

The first time that I ever did loving-kindness practice was without a teacher. We first opened up the center; a group of us decided to do a self retreat here for a month and I had never done loving-kindness before although I had heard about it. I thought it was a perfect opportunity to do it.

I sat up in my room and I knew that it was done in successive stages and I began by dedicating a week of sending myself loving-kindness. All day long, I would go around the building—sitting in my room, sitting in the hall—saying the whole thing, may I be happy, may I be peaceful, may I be liberated, and I felt absolutely nothing.

At the end of the week, something happened to someone in the community and a number of us, quite unexpectedly, had to leave the retreat. Then I felt doubly bad—not only did nothing happen but I never even got beyond myself, which was really selfish.

I was running around upstairs in the flurry of having to leave. I was standing in one of the bathrooms and I dropped a jar of something, which shattered into a thousand pieces. The very first thought that came up in my mind was: “You are really a klutz, but I love you.” And I thought, “Oh wow! Look at that.” All those hours, all those phrases where I was just dry and mechanical and I felt like nothing was happening. It was happening. It just took a while for me to sense the flowering of that and it was so

spontaneous that it was quite wonderful. So: Not to struggle, to try to make something happen. Let it happen. It will happen.

Our job, so to speak, is just to say those phrases, to say them knowing what they mean but without trying to fabricate a feeling, without putting that overlay on top of it, of stress. Let your mind rest in the phrases, and let the phrases be meaningful to you.

I'd like to talk about sending a loving-kindness to the neutral person and a little bit about sending loving-kindness to somebody who we have difficulty with as we send a message to a neutral person.

### Sending Loving-Kindness to the Neutral Party

The first task of course is to find one—sometimes that's very interesting. I find that very often as soon as we either meet somebody or even think about them, if we haven't met them, we have a judgment about them: I like them I don't like them.

If you can find a neutral person, sometimes there's a great refreshment in sending them loving-kindness because there's no story about them.

See if you can understand that this person wants to be happy just as each one of us wants to be happy and open, extend that force of loving-kindness towards them.

### Sending Loving-Kindness to the Difficult Party

After we do that for a little while, move on, just briefly, to sending loving-kindness to somebody that we have difficulty with. This is a very interesting place because it's very difficult. It's a very powerful place because that person, in some ways, symbolizes the difference between love or loving-kindness, which is conditional, and that which is on uncondition that which goes beyond having our desires met, having affection returned, having people treat us well. It is that person that defines the line between that which is finite and that which is infinite. Yet it's not easy. Very often to think of this person and you enmity, or anger, or fear, whatever. As a suggestion, when we begin that part of the practice, in the spirit of doing it in the easiest way possible, it's probably better to start with somebody where there's mild irritation rather than the person who has hurt you most in your life.

And slowly begin to open in levels of difficulty. Sometimes when we send loving-kindness to a difficult person, we do feel all of these other feelings, like anger. If possible, see if you can let go of it. Return the recitation of the phrases. If it's too strong, then you can drop the loving-kindness. Pay careful attention to the feeling until it begins to subside some, very much with the sense of compassion for oneself: You don't need to judge it. Now when you can you can pick up the loving-kindness again, perhaps with an easier person.

### Guided Loving-Kindness Practice

**To begin, take a comfortable seated position.** Let's begin by sitting comfortably, closing your eyes.

**Find phrases you'd like to use to offer good wishes.** Taking a few deep breaths, relaxing the body, finding the phrases that reflect what you wish most deeply for yourself. Very gently repeat them.

**Bring someone to mind who's been kind to you.** If you have someone come to mind who has been a benefactor to help in some way, for whom you feel respect or gratitude, either hold an image of that

person, or say their names in your mind. Direct that force of loving-kindness towards them, wishing them safety, happiness, and peace. Very gently, one phrase at a time, let the mind rest in the phrase.

And if a good friend comes to mind, someone who you care about, there's mutual caring, hold a sense of this person, direct the phrases towards them, wishing for their happiness and their well-being.

**Bring a neutral person to mind.** Ideally it would be somebody here of course because you have an opportunity to run into them, to observe how a feeling of loving-kindness develops over the course of time. If someone here or if not here then someone in your life who you don't have a strong sense of liking or disliking. See if you can bring that person to mind. Extend the feeling of loving-kindness towards them—just as we all want to be happy, so this person also wants to be happy. If nobody comes to mind in this category, then you can just stay with a good friend.

**If it feels workable, bring to mind someone with whom you experience difficulty.** If there's somebody that you have difficulty with, perhaps not very grave difficulty at this point—someone with whom there's conflict, there's tension. There's unease, there's dislike. Remembering that his person, too, just wants to be happy—that out of ignorance, we all make mistakes that create harm or suffering, and that causing suffering inevitably will bring suffering to that person. See if you can extend that force of loving-kindness towards them. To send loving-kindness does not mean that we approve or condone all actions, it means that we can see clearly actions that are incorrect or unskillful and still not lose the connection.

*To send loving-kindness does not mean that we approve or condone all actions, it means that we can see clearly actions that are incorrect or unskillful and still not lose the connection.*

**Calling someone to mind with whom there's difficulty, repeat the phrases towards them.** If you can find one good thing about this person, in the midst of everything else, if you focus on that one good thing, just reflect on it for a moment, you'll find that there's a feeling of drawing closer, opening up, and all the rest can be seen in that light.

If you can't find even one good thing about this person, you can reflect on their wish to be happy.

**Expand your awareness to all beings, everywhere,** without distinction, without exclusion. May all beings be free from danger, may they have mental happiness, may they have physical happiness, may they have ease of well-being.

All living beings: may they be free from danger, may they have mental happiness, may they have physical happiness, may they have ease of well-being.

All creatures, known or unknown, near or far, some we like, some we don't like, some we're neutral towards.

All individuals... happy, suffering, causing suffering. Still they have this wish to be happy, to be free. May it be so. And all those in existence. Every being, all places, may they be able to realize the fruits of just what it is that we wish for ourselves.

**Adapted from a talk from Sharon Salzberg at the Insight Meditation Society. Listen to the full talk.**

## John O'Donohue

### “Beannacht / Blessing

On the day when  
the weight deadens  
on your shoulders  
and you stumble,  
may the clay dance  
to balance you.  
And when your eyes  
freeze behind  
the grey window  
and the ghost of loss  
gets in to you,  
may a flock of colours,  
indigo, red, green,  
and azure blue  
come to awaken in you  
a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays  
in the currach of thought  
and a stain of ocean  
blackens beneath you,  
may there come across the waters  
a path of yellow moonlight  
to bring you safely home.

(\*currach = type of Irish boat)

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,  
may the clarity of light be yours,  
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,  
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.  
And so may a slow  
wind work these words  
of love around you,  
an invisible cloak  
to mind your life.”

**For Belonging by John O'Donohue**

May you listen to your longing to be free.

May the frames of your belonging be generous enough for your dreams.

May you arise each day with a voice of blessing whispering in your heart.

May you find a harmony between your soul and your life.

May the sanctuary of your soul never be haunted.

May you know the eternal longing that lives at the heart of time.

May there be kindness in your gaze when you look within

May you never place walls between the light and yourself.

May you allow the wild beauty of the invisible world to gather you,

Mind you, and embrace you in belonging.

## Kindness ~ Naomi Shihab Nye – 1952 -

Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things,  
feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth.  
What you held in your hand,  
what you counted and carefully saved,  
all this must go so you know  
how desolate the landscape can be  
between the regions of kindness.  
How you ride and ride  
thinking the bus will never stop,  
the passengers eating maize and chicken  
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness  
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho  
lies dead by the side of the road.  
You must see how this could be you,  
how he too was someone  
who journeyed through the night with plans  
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,  
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.  
You must wake up with sorrow.  
You must speak to it till your voice  
catches the thread of all sorrows  
and you see the size of the cloth.  
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,  
only kindness that ties your shoes  
and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,  
only kindness that raises its head  
from the crowd of the world to say  
It is I you have been looking for,  
and then goes with you everywhere  
like a shadow or a friend.

## **Why We Cry: The Truth About Tearing Up**

**The lowdown on tears: Why some cry easily, others don't cry, and how to handle all those tears.**

<https://www.webmd.com/balance/features/why-we-cry-the-truth-about-tearing-up#4>

By [Kathleen Doheny](#)

It starts with a quivering lip. Or maybe blinking faster and faster to keep the wetness from escaping.

Before you know it, you're getting teary – again.

You may be one of those people who cry at the drop of a hat -- not to mention weddings, birthday parties, your kids' school plays, and the humane society public service announcements showing those adorable dogs in need of new homes.

Or you may be the type who can't remember when you last cried.

Either way, crying often catches the often-teary eyed or the usually stoic off guard -- striking at a time or place where you don't want to weep -- and others don't want to watch you weep.

Just ask New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick, normally stoic, who got teary as he announced the retirement of his star linebacker Tedy Bruschi. Or Hilary Clinton, whose tears one night on the 2008 presidential campaign trail were splashed across TV screens.

Football coaches and politicians crying in public may reflect a society that's evolving to become a bit more comfortable with emotion. But crying in front of people can still be awkward for the person crying and people around them.

What's behind our crying? Why do some people cry so much more or less readily than others? And what's the best way to handle all those tears? Is there a way not to cry when it's totally inappropriate, such as in response to your boss declining that request for a raise? Researchers and therapists who study crying share what they've learned -- and what still puzzles them.

### **Why Do You Cry?**

The "why" of crying may seem obvious and straightforward: You're happy or sad. But that's too simplistic.

'Crying is a natural emotional response to certain feelings, usually sadness and hurt. But then people [also] cry under other circumstances and occasions,' says Stephen Sideroff, PhD, a staff psychologist at Santa Monica--University of California Los Angeles & Orthopaedic Hospital and clinical director of the Moonview Treatment Center in Santa Monica, Calif.

For instance, he says, "people cry in response to something of beauty. There, I use the word 'melting.' They are letting go of their guard, their defenses, tapping into a place deep inside themselves."

Crying does serve an emotional purpose, says Sideroff, also an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine. "It's a release. There is a buildup of energy with feelings."

It can also be a survival mechanism, notes Jodi DeLuca, PhD, a neuropsychologist at Tampa General Hospital in Florida. "When you cry," she says, "it's a signal you need to address something." Among other things, it may mean you are frustrated, overwhelmed or even just trying to get someone's attention, which DeLuca and other researchers call a "secondary gain" cry.

On top of that, crying may have a biochemical purpose. It's believed to release stress hormones or toxins from the body, says Lauren Bylsma, a PhD student at the University of South Florida in Tampa, who has focused on crying in her research.

Lastly, crying has a purely social function, Bylsma says. It often wins support from those who watch you cry. Sometimes, crying may be manipulative -- a way to get what you want, whether you're asking a friend to go shopping with you, your spouse to agree to a luxurious vacation, or your child to get their math homework done.

### **Crying Out Loud: Who's Most Likely?**

Women tend to cry more than men do, most experts concur. "Women have more permission to cry. To some degree it's changing," Sideroff says. But not entirely. "It's still viewed by many, particularly men, as a sign of weakness," Sideroff says.

When it comes to crying habits, the population as a whole is on a spectrum, experts say, with some crying easily and others rarely. Experts aren't exactly sure why, though temperament probably plays a role. "Some people are just more prone to crying," Sideroff says. "Others ignore or are not as fazed by certain things [that provoke tears in criers]."

People with a history of trauma have been found to cry more, Sideroff says. That's especially true, he says, if they dwell on that past. "If you keep referring back to the past of trauma or emotional pain, it will generate more feelings of hurt."

Women who report anxiety, as well as those who are extroverted and empathetic, are more likely to say they feel comfortable crying, according to Bylsma. Those were the results of a study Bylsma and others published in *Personality and Individual Differences* in 2008.

### **Benefits of a Good Cry?**

People often refer to a cry as a good cry and say they feel better afterward.

But is that always true?

Usually, but not always, says Bylsma. In a study of nearly 200 Dutch women, Bylsma found that most did say they felt better after crying. But not everyone. "We found that individuals who scored higher on [measures of] depression or anxiety were likely to feel worse after crying."

Exactly why isn't known, she tells WebMD. It could be that those who are depressed or anxious simply don't derive the same benefits from crying as others do.

## **Coping With Crying**

If you're not a world-class crier but are often around those who cry, it can make you feel awkward, useless, or just uncomfortable. That's because when someone cries, it shows their vulnerability, Sideroff says. "I think in general, people are uncomfortable with vulnerability." When the crier exhibits vulnerability, Sideroff says, "it's shifting the level of intimacy of the environment." Just being in that more intimate environment makes the other person uncomfortable in some cases, he says.

So, how can you -- and how should you -- respond to a crier? Here are four tips:

- Be aware that if you do nothing, you can make the crier feel worse, Bylsma says.
- Try to do something supportive. What that is depends on the situation and how well you know the person, "So hugging someone you aren't very close with might not be appropriate, while simply listening in an empathetic way would be suitable," Bylsma says.
- Don't assume you know how to comfort them. "The less intimate the relationship, the more it is appropriate to begin by asking how you can help and be supportive," Sideroff says.
- Know that criers who tear up in a very large group generally feel more uncomfortable than those who cry in front of one or two people they're familiar with. But even in a large group, the criers welcome support from those they didn't know well, Bylsma has found.

## **Trying Not to Cry**

Sometimes, it's just not cool to let the tears flow -- you are trying to put up a brave face while accompanying a loved one to a medical treatment, for instance. Or your boss has just told you your hours will be cut in half.

What to do? Bylsma has this advice:

- Try to postpone the cry but don't cancel it altogether. Suppression isn't good.
- Excuse yourself, find an appropriate place, and cry.
- If you can't leave the situation, postpone the cry and stem the tears with a positive distraction. It would depend on the person and the situation, but she suggests watching a funny video. If you're in the middle of a doctor's office, you might grab a magazine and read.

## **The Downside of Not Crying**

Too many tears can make observers uncomfortable, but never crying may not be mentally healthy.

"For various reasons, a lot of people push down their tears; they suppress them," Sideroff says. One of the consequences is we sort of deaden ourselves, to suppress or not even notice we have those feelings inside. The way that looks to the outside world is depression."

Better to acknowledge feelings such as sadness and hurt, he says. "Feelings are not about good or bad, it's just what is."

Those who suppress emotions and cannot cry may be jeopardizing their physical health, DeLuca agrees. She cites a saying attributed to British psychiatrist Henry Maudsley, among others: "The sorrow which has no vent in tears may make other organs weep."

(this article is something I found on my own after Caroline mentioned Christina Feldman in class)

## **Silencing the Inner Critic**

BY CHRISTINA FELDMAN | JANUARY 12, 2018

**The nagging, negative voice of self-judgement, says Christina Feldman, is a powerful affliction best met with courage, kindness, and understanding.**

*Unruly beings are like space.*

*There's not enough time to overcome them.*

*Overcoming these angry thoughts.*

*Is like defeating all of our enemies.*

—*Shantideva*

The Buddha sat beneath the Bodhi tree on the eve of his enlightenment and was assailed by Mara, representing all of the afflictions we meet in the landscape of our minds: worry and restlessness, dullness and resistance, craving, aversion, and doubt. The one affliction that did not make an appearance in this story is the powerful voice of the inner critic—the inner judge that can torment us on a daily basis, undermining our well-being and distorting our relationship with life. The inner critic is the voice of shame, blame, belittlement, aversion, and contempt. To many of us, it is so familiar that it seems almost hardwired into our hearts.

Before exploring the nature of the judgmental mind, it is essential to mark the distinction between the voice of the inner critic and our capacity for discernment and discriminating wisdom. Discriminating wisdom is what brings us to our cushion to meditate and inspires us to act in ways that bring suffering and harm to an end. Discriminating wisdom is the source of every wise act and word. Discernment draws upon ethics, compassion, and wisdom and teaches us moment by moment to discover the Buddha in ourselves and in others.

***The judging mind is optional; it can be understood and released.***

The inner critic is a creature of a different nature. With the inner critic, we may still come to our cushion but we come accompanied by a story that tells us we are unworthy or inadequate. With the inner critic, we still act, speak, and make choices, yet moment by moment we feel endlessly criticized, compared, and belittled. The judgmental mind draws not upon all that is wise but upon Mara, the patterns of aversion, doubt, ill will, and fear. Rarely is the judgmental heart the source of wise action or speech, nor does it lead to the end of suffering. The judgmental mind is suffering and compounds suffering. It suffocates ethics, the guidelines of kindness and care, and it wounds our hearts and lives.

Discriminating wisdom is essential and must be cultivated. The judging mind is optional; it can be understood and released. Thomas Merton, the great Christian mystic described the essence of the spiritual path as a search for truth that springs from love. Beneath the Bodhi tree, Mara's power over Siddhartha ended the moment he was able to look Mara in the eye and simply say, "I know you." These few words were a reflection of a profound shift in Siddhartha's heart: the shift from being intimidated and overpowered by Mara to having the courage to open a dialogue of understanding with Mara, and bringing intimidation to an end.

The judgmental mind that causes so much pain in our lives cannot be exempted from our practice. The judgmental mind needs to be met with the same courage and investigation we bring to any other afflictive emotion. The judgmental mind does not respond well to suppression, avoidance, or aversion. It needs kindness and understanding. The late Jiyu-Kennett Roshi, a Zen teacher, said the training of liberation begins with compassion for the self, and that cultivating a non-judgmental mind toward ourselves is the key to a genuine compassion for all beings.

We begin this process by asking what a non-judgmental mind looks like, and what it means to be free of the burden of the inner critic. To understand these questions experientially, we need to turn our attention to the judgmental mind and embrace its pain with the same mindfulness we would bring to a pain in our body or to another's sorrow.

The essence of mindfulness is to see, to understand, and to find freedom within everything that feels intractable and clouded by confusion. Mindfulness is a present-moment experience, concerned with embracing and understanding the entirety of each moment with tenderness, warmth, and interest. In the light of this engaged attention, we discover it is impossible to hate or fear anything we truly understand, including the judgmental mind. We begin to see that the greatest barrier to compassion and freedom is not the pain or adversity we meet in our lives but the ongoing tendency to criticize and fear the simple truths of the moment. Instead of just wanting the judgmental mind to go away, we could begin to ask what it is teaching us. Abhirupa Nanda, a nun from the time of the Buddha, suggested meditating on the unconditioned. Liberate the tendency to judge yourself as being above, below, or the same as others. By penetrating deeply into judgment, you will live at peace.

***Looking closely at the judgmental mind, we see that it is rarely truthful or able to see the whole of anything.***

Although it may seem so, we were not born with a judgmental, aversive mind. It is a learned way of seeing and relating, and it can be unlearned. Looking closely at the judgmental mind, we see that it is rarely truthful or able to see the whole of anything. Instead, the judgmental mind is governed by seizing upon the particulars of ourselves and others and mistaking those particulars for the truth. A friend neglects to return a phone call, and this triggers a cascade of anxious thinking that convinces us they are an indifferent person or we are unworthy of their

attention. We arrive late for an appointment and in moments the inner critic determines we are a mindless failure. The practice of meditation, of discovering what is true, suggests there is another path that can be followed.

In the Sufi tradition it is suggested that our thoughts should pass through three gates. At the first gate, we ask of our thought, “Is it true?” If so, we let the thought pass through to the second gate, where we ask, “Is it necessary or useful?” If this also is so, we let the thought continue on its way to the third gate, where we ask, “Is this thought rooted in love and kindness?” Judgmental thoughts, which are neither true, helpful, nor kind, falter at the gates.

Students often wonder why the judgmental mind does not appear in the traditional list of afflictions that Siddhartha met under the Bodhi tree. Perhaps it is because the judgmental mind is not one affliction or hindrance but a compounded hindrance. If you explore just one moment during which the inner critic is operating, you sense how the winds of all of the hindrances flow through it. There is craving, which takes form in the expectations and ideals we hold for ourselves and others. There is restlessness and worry — the shoulds and expectations generating endless thought and emotion as we struggle to avoid imperfection. And there is aversion and ill will, directed toward ourselves and others when our shoulds and expectations are disappointed. Doubt makes a powerful appearance too—doubt in our worthiness, goodness, and capacity. Then there is the affliction of dullness, which makes a disguised appearance in the form of despair, resignation, and numbness.

Holding all of these afflictions together are the beliefs we have regarding who we are and who we are not, which continually fuel the afflictive emotions. But the path of awakening invites us to understand this compound of the inner critic, to learn how to loosen its hold and power, and to rediscover all that is true within ourselves and others. The path invites us to extend kindness, rather than harshness, to ourselves and all beings and to learn to see a thought as a thought, rather than as a description of reality. On the path, we can begin to see that self-judgment or judgment of another is no more than a thought that is laden with ill will and aversion. There is a profound liberation in knowing this so deeply that we can let go of ill will.

***Nurturing our capacity to be mindful and present is the first step to understanding and disempowering the identity and power of the inner critic.***

The Buddha taught that what we dwell upon becomes the shape of our mind. If we dwell on ill will, directed outwardly or inwardly in the form of blame, disparagement, or aversion, it will become the shape of our mind until all that we see is that which is broken, flawed, imperfect, and impossible. In India there is a saying that when a pickpocket meets a saint in the marketplace, all he sees are the saint’s pockets. Habit and awareness do not co-exist. Nurturing our capacity to be mindful and present is the first step to understanding and disempowering the identity and power of the inner critic.

We can learn to pause and to listen deeply to the voice of the inner judge, with its endless symphony of blame and shame, and we can surround it with the kindness of mindfulness. We can investigate the truth of its story. We can begin to sense that the inner critic truly warrants compassion, as does any suffering and affliction. Instead of fleeing the painfulness of the judgmental mind we can turn toward it, sensing that everything we are invited to understand in the journey of awakening can be understood within the judgmental mind. Letting go, compassion, the emptiness of self, equanimity, and wisdom are the lessons we are invited to explore with this most powerful of afflictions. The alchemy of mindfulness is to nurture a sense of possibility. We are encouraged to imagine a life free from ill will, blame, and shame. To imagine a life and a heart of compassion, wisdom, and peace.

## Stages of Progress (The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook, chapter 13)

Self-compassion practice typically goes through three stages:

- Striving
- Disillusionment
- Radical acceptance

As a meditation teacher once said, “All techniques are destined to fail.” Why? Because whenever our practice becomes a “technique” designed to manipulate our moment-to-moment experience – to make us feel better and make the pain go away – it becomes a hidden form of resistance.[resistance to the pain.]

When the despair of disillusionment brings us to our knees and we surrender in hopelessness, progress finally begins. Progress really means dropping the idea of progress. We stop striving to get somewhere, to achieve the goal of being good at self-compassion, of making the pain go away, and start to refine our intention. Rather than being attached to the outcome of self-compassion practice, we begin to do it for its own sake. We enter the stage of **radical acceptance**, which is best captured by the paradox:

**When we struggle, we give ourselves compassion  
not to feel better but because we feel bad.**

When we fully accept the reality that we are imperfect human beings, prone to making mistakes and struggling, our hearts naturally begin to soften. We still feel pain, but we also feel the love *holding* the pain, and it's more bearable. This response is “radical” because it runs counter to how we normally relate to our pain, and the transformation can be equally radical.

As the meditation teacher Pema Chodron says: “We can still be crazy after all these years. We can still be angry after all these years. We can still be timid or jealous or full of feelings of unworthiness. The point is...not to try to throw ourselves away and become something better. **It's about befriending who we already are.**”

The meditation teacher Rob Nairn puts it even more succinctly: “The goal of practice is to become a compassionate mess.” That means fully human – often struggling, uncertain, confused – with great compassion. And the beautiful thing is that this is actually an achievable goal. No matter how precipitously we may fall, how gut-wrenching our pain, how imperfect our lives or personalities may be, we can still be mindful of our suffering, remember our common humanity, and be kind to ourselves.”