Week 7 - Mindfulness and Compassion

Lovingkindness Meditation & Walking Meditation

Up to this point in the course, compassion has played a subtle, but important role in our meditation practice. In fact, compassion, and especially self-compassion, may be the most important component of MBSR - it's the oil that makes the gears of mindfulness work. Without it, the practices are at best, dry, and at worst, harsh and counter-productive. At the heart of our lack of compassion for ourselves is the lie that many of us grew up with: in order to be successful, we must not only work hard, but we must be hard on ourselves.

In some mindfulness courses, the linkage between mindfulness and compassion is not very explicit, focusing almost exclusively on strengthening concentration and the ability to stay with present-moment experience. This has made the mindfulness movement vulnerable to the argument that, for instance, there could be such a thing as a “mindful” terrorist or a “mindful” bank robber.

Of course, something seems very wrong with this, since kindness and compassion are at the core of almost every meditative tradition. This week, we explore our natural tendency to connect and care about others, and consider the value and potential of being compassionate even beyond our closest relationships.

Videos and Reading

The first video, We Are Built To Be Kind, by Dacher Keltner of U.C., Berkeley, provides evidence for the idea that we, as humans, have a deep-seated inclination to care for others. The article, Survival of the Kindest, indicates that even Darwin believed this. As natural as the capacity for compassion is, Matthieu Ricard, a Buddhist monk who has logged 50,000 hours of meditation practice and who also has a PhD in cellular genetics, makes the case for consciously supporting this capacity in the video, Cultivating Altruism.

We also explore the natural linkages there are with mindfulness and compassion in Shauna Shapiro's video, How Mindfulness Cultivates Compassion, and her article, Does Mindfulness Make You Compassionate?

In our culture, it can be argued that the person we are least kind to is ourselves. In the video, Overcoming Objections to Self-Compassion, and in the article, The Five Myths of Self-Compassion, Kristin Neff explores misconceptions about self-compassion, including the belief that motivation requires self-criticism, and the idea that being kinder to ourselves makes us complacent and less effective.

Daily Practices

This week, we introduce two new meditations, the Lovingkindness Meditation and the Walking Meditation. Choose one day to do the Lovingkindness Meditation and another to do the Walking Meditation, and on the remaining days you can choose any of the practices you've learned so far, including these two. The recorded guidance for the Walking Meditation is short, only 6 minutes, so on the day that you do this practice, continue on your own for the remaining 24 minutes of your 30 minutes of practice for that day. **NOTE:** If you are unable to walk without pain, it's fine to do one of the other practices that you've learned so far in place of the walking meditation.

For the informal practice, on any given day, you may choose any of the practices you've experienced so far (e.g., simple awareness, mindful eating, STOP, "Turning Toward"), including the Walking Meditation that you are learning this week. As before, enter each day's informal meditation on the practice sheet.

Videos

- **We Are Built To Be Kind** - Dacher Keltner [4 min]
- **Cultivating Altruism** - Matthieu Ricard [19 min]
- **How Mindfulness Cultivates Compassion** - Shauna Shapiro [13 min]
- **Overcoming Objections to Self-Compassion** - Kristin Neff [12 min]
- **Radical Acceptance is a Prerequisite for change** - Tara Brach [2 min]

Reading

- **Survival of the Kindest** - Paul Ekman
- **Does Mindfulness Make You More Compassionate?** - Shauna Shapiro
- **The Five Myths of Self-Compassion** - Kristin Neff
- **Introduction to Walking Meditation** - Tara Brach

Practice sheets

- **Formal Practice** [PDF] or [WORD format] - Body Scan, Sitting, Yoga (+ Lovingkindness)
- **Informal Practice** [PDF] or [WORD format] - Walking, Simple Awareness, Mindful Eating, STOP, etc.

[ NOTE: For the guided practices use the menu in the left column or go to Practices ]
Supplementary materials related to this week's topic

"I'm On Your Side" video by Michael Franti [4 min]
"Self-Love" interview of Dave Potter video by Yusika Vu [46 min]
Be Kind. Always. video by Jamie Derrick [9 min]
Humankindness: A Hopeful History book by Rutger Bregman
Fierce Self-Compassion book by Kristin Neff
6 Amazing Ways Animals Show Compassion article by Chris Mooney
Self-Compassion by Emma Seppala
Widening the Circles of Compassion video by Tara Brach [3 min]
Disarming Our Hearts video by Tara Brach [6 min]
Compassionate Ethics in Difficult Times video by the Dalai Lama [11 min]
Compassion and Mindfulness video by Jon Kabat-Zinn [5 min]
The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion book by Christopher Germer
First, Forgive Yourself interview of Tara Brach by Tej Rae
The Practice of Forgiveness article by Jack Kornfield
Universal Compassion video by Sylvia Boorstein and Sharon Salzberg [10 min]
Unconditional Love video by Tara Brach [29 min]
Mindfulness and Self-Compassion video by Kristin Neff [21 min]
Making Friends with Yourself article based on Pema Chodron's "4 Keys to Waking Up"
Lovingkindness - should we extend it to the jerks of our world? article by A. Olendzki

Once you have done at least six days of practice and feel that you've gotten the essence of this "Week" through the videos and reading, you are ready to go to Week 8. It's not necessary to read/view any of the Supplementary materials - these are totally optional.

- Sharon Salzberg