



Self-Compassion

teaching for Inayatiyya UK, March 2021

Practice: Affectionate Breathing

Start by settling your body and finding a comfortable position... feel your feet firmly on the floor if they're touching the floor or notice your connection to what you're sitting on... feeling connected to the earth, grounding you, stabilising you... And now connecting to your breath... letting your breath be in its natural rhythm... soft, silence, easy...

Now, if it feels right, adopt a little half-smile, so the corners of your mouth turn up just a little bit. It shouldn't be strained or forced... just let your mouth adopt a position of a little bit of a smile with your mouth closed... Notice how this makes you feel when your face adopts a position of contentment and peace... happiness in the present moment... And now as you breathe in and out, notice how each in-breath feels, and how each out-breath feels... try to let your breath be infused with affection for yourself and or others... with kindness for yourself and kindness for others...

Even if you don't really feel it, just set your intention for each breath to breathe in kindness and affection for yourself and with each out-breath send out kindness and affection to others or for the world as a whole - all beings in the world...

Your mind will likely wander as you do this... gently bring your attention back to your breath, focusing on the feelings of affection and kindness that you're intending with each in breath and with each out breath... if it helps to get in touch with these feelings of affection and kindness, you might try putting your hand over your heart and feeling the warmth that's there...

Noticing each breath as it enters and exits your body... holding affection for yourself and for others... holding kindness for yourself and for others... remembering your little half-smile...

Noticing the feelings of affection generated by your half-smile... or perhaps you have your hand over your heart chakra... getting in touch with the feelings of warmth there... kindness being breathed in... and breathed out...

What is Self-Compassion?

Compassion is defined as sensitivity to the pain or suffering of another, coupled with a deep desire to alleviate that suffering.

Self-compassion is that same process directed towards ourselves. In the face of our own suffering, we feel an impulse to take some form of action to alleviate our pain.



- In my last article on Compassion, we understood that compassion requires being in relationship with the one who is suffering. Feeling a sense of common humanity means we're more likely to be moved by another's suffering. And then be moved to take action.
- It's this need for a *relationship to the one who is suffering* that presents a dilemma for feeling *self-compassionate* because so often our inner critic gets triggered if we're suffering - we get down on ourselves and this blocks healthy, supportive relationship.
- This is where mindfulness of our suffering is so important as it's through being aware that we begin to create that sense of a wise or witnessing self that can start to notice the suffering and respond with compassion.
- And it helps cultivate a sense that we are somehow bigger than our suffering.
- The other factor that can hinder being self-compassionate is our level of resiliency. When we're being compassionate to another and feel that we can respond to their suffering, we feel strong and resourced and hopeful that we can help. We approach the suffering of another from this place of strength, love and support.
- But when the suffering is ours, we're standing *in* the suffering and in our vulnerability, not in our strength. There can be a tendency to get lost in the pain and it can then feel hard to connect with a belief that we *can* do something to alleviate our own suffering.

Practice: Loving Kindness meditation

Please sit in a way that allows you to be comfortable and relaxed. Begin by feeling your intention to bring kindness to the life that's here...

Now, scanning through your body, see if you can let go of whatever tension might be most obvious, loosening through the shoulders, softening the hands, relaxing the belly. You might bring a slight smile to the lips, allowing this to connect you with a spirit of gentleness and ease.

Now, bring to mind someone who's dear to you - someone with whom you have an uncomplicated relationship - and remind yourself now of what you love about them. Or maybe it's a beloved pet... What are the qualities of their heart, their intelligence, their honesty, the way they show you love?... What brings up your loving for them? As you reflect on what you appreciate, feel your warmth, and send them a caring wish, and simply let yourself feel the goodness of loving them...



Now, take some moments to remember and attend more fully to your basic goodness. You might bring to mind your love of loving, how it feels when your heart is open, your longing to love well. You might sense your basic goodness in your sincere intention to wake up, to be more loving, to wake up your wisdom. You might sense your basic goodness in your honesty, your curiosity about the nature of reality, what's really true. You might sense your goodness in your dedication to be part of the healing of our world...

If acknowledging your own goodness is difficult, then look at yourself through the eyes of someone who loves you or may be through the eyes of a spiritual figure who's meaningful to you... What does that being see and love about you?...

As you sense your essential goodness, rest in the tender appreciation for a few moments... Now, in the silence of your mind and heart, begin offering yourself lovingkindness through prayers of care. As you repeat each phrase, sense the meaning of the words and let them arise from the sincerity of your heart.

I'll mention a number of phrases. You might choose those that resonate for you or feel free to develop your own phrases that have meaning for you:

- May I be filled with lovingkindness.
- May I be held in lovingkindness.
- May I accept myself just as I am.
- May I feel happy.
- May I feel safe and at ease.
- May I touch great and natural peace.
- May my heart and mind awaken.
- May I be free.

As you repeat the phrases, you might deepen the care by gently placing your hand on your heart, letting the touch be tender... May I be filled with loving presence, held in loving presence. May I be happy. May I feel safe and at ease...

As you continue to send yourself loving-kindness, imagine and feel the experience that you're wishing for yourself...

Letting go of all words now and simply being aware of the quality of warmth and openness of heart, and the possibility of increasingly trusting this goodness as you continue on your path... Opening your eyes.



Loving-Kindness

- I'd like to say something about Loving-Kindness as a Mindfulness concept and how it's relevant to developing Self-Compassion.
 - The term Loving-Kindness comes from the Pali term *metta*, which means *friendliness*. So, it's a practice in which we learn to be a good friend to ourselves - to become an inner ally.
 - It entails general feelings of friendliness to oneself (and others) and *doesn't necessarily involve suffering*. Whereas compassion and self-compassion, do involve a recognition of suffering.
 - So Loving-Kindness encourages us to develop a friendly stance to ourselves even when things are going well. This is one way of beginning to soften and open our hearts towards ourselves (and to others of course).
- Here are a couple of quotes from the Dalai Lama who describes the differences between these two heart-centred states of Loving-Kindness and Compassion. He said that:

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*.

- And if we put these two ideas together, a meditation teacher from Myanmar (formally Burma) said:

When the sunshine of loving-kindness meets the tears of suffering, the rainbow of compassion arises.

Story:

Here is a brief story that highlights the essence of practicing self-kindness which is about seeing our basic goodness and actively expressing care to ourselves.

Some may know the story of a giant statue of the Buddha in Southeast Asia. It was a plaster and clay statue, not very handsome or attractive, but loved by many. It had endured wars, storms, changes of government, but at one point, because of an extended dry season, cracks appeared in the statue. When the monks went to investigate, they shined a flashlight into one of the cracks. What appeared was the gleam of gold. Then they went about chipping off the covering and discovered it to be the largest solid gold statue in Southeast Asia. The monks believe that it had been covered over to protect it through difficult times, much as we cover over our innocence and purity to navigate a difficult world.



Our suffering is that we fixate on our coverings, on our ego defenses, our often misguided ways of seeking safety or approval, and we forget the gold.

The gold is your basic goodness, and it's here now - it's always here. We may just not be in touch with it.

With modern day psychology, we're very open to acknowledging our unhealthy conditioning and ego coverings. But it's just as important on the path of opening your heart to self-compassion to remember the gold: the love, and the wisdom-the awareness that's your essence.

Learning to see the inner gold is what will allow you to connect with the light of compassion towards yourself.

Practice: Developing Self-Compassion

- Settling yourself with your breath... noticing the in-breath ... and the out-breath... And settling your body once again, being aware of any tensions... adjusting your posture if you need to... being with yourself in this moment, now, quietly breathing... (1 minute).
- Now, I'd like to invite you to think of a situation in your life that is difficult. Something that is causing you some stress or emotional pain. It doesn't have to be something big or deeply painful... It can be fairly everyday... (pause). Call the situation to mind and heart... You may find that more than one situation is arising... if that's happening either actively choose one and settle with it or trust the first one that arose... You can come back to the other situations in your own time some other time... (pause). Once you've settled on something, become aware of the emotions involved in the situation... there may be more than one emotion... that's fine... just allow whatever is there to simply be... (pause).
- And now see if you can feel the emotional discomfort that this situation evokes within your body... notice what physical sensations does it give rise to?... You might feel some activation in your solar plexus... or in your heart chakra... or in your head... or back... or some other place in your body... It may be that this situation activates more than one area in your body... That's ok... just notice this and let it be... Breathe with it... (pause)...
- Now, we're going to move through the three components of self-compassion whilst focusing on this situation and the emotions and physical sensations that it gives rise to:
 1. The first component of developing self-compassion is: to begin by inviting in an attitude of self-kindness:



- Being aware if there are judgemental thoughts around (in Sufism we know this state as the blaming or regretful nafs - it's the activation of the ego or small self that is so ready to find fault)... and beginning to think of yourself kindly, with care and understanding... letting go of any harsh judgement and negative thought patterns... breathing them out on the exhalation... (pause).
- And connecting with a *desire to positively alleviate your suffering*. Knowing that you can do something constructive to change your state of mind and heart.
- This is an active stance... so beginning now to actively soothe and comfort yourself... to ease your suffering, by saying these comforting words (or you may like to say another set of words that have more meaning for you).
- You might say: (pause between each phrase)
 - This is a moment of suffering.
 - This is really hard right now.
 - I'm really struggling.
 - This hurts.
 - This is stressful or makes me angry or anxious or sad or frightened - whatever your emotion might be...
 - Repeat the phrases
 - Just notice for a moment what impact these words have on your emotions and physical body... Notice if there's a softening or a change in your system (pause)... and, if there isn't, that's ok... let it be just as it is right now...

2. Moving to the second component of developing self-compassion:

Encouraging recognition of our common humanity:

- So beginning to foster a sense of connection with others... and seeing your experience as part of the larger human experience... (pause)
- And recognising that you're not alone in this... This is not to minimise your suffering but to recognise that your suffering is part of being human... Some suffering is intense and terrible; some is quiet and small...
 - Recognising the Buddhist principle that life is imperfect, *suffering is part of life*... how you respond to your suffering is what's important...



- In *this* moment, you can choose to respond with self-compassion by repeating the following phrases to yourself (or finding you own):

Pause between phrases

- Suffering is part of life.
- It's not abnormal to feel this way.
- Many people may be feeling this way.
- I am not alone in this experience.
- Repeat the phrases and pause.

- Now, putting your hand over your heart chakra and feeling the warmth and gentle touch of your hand. Or use some other soothing and gentle touch - you may like to cup your face with your hands or place your hands on your solar plexus or wrap your arms around yourself... whatever feels like the most compassionate touch that you can give yourself in this moment... (pause). You can hold this compassionate touch if it feels right or release your hands - just as you choose.

3. And moving now into the third component of developing self-compassion - being mindfully aware of your suffering:

- So, *being with the painful feelings* just as they are right now... not avoiding your suffering or pushing it away... as best you can, embracing whatever is present in this moment... as Rumi says in his poem *The Guest House*, to welcome "our crowd of sorrows" as guests; to "treat them honourably... Because each has been sent as a guide from beyond"... So, trying to honour and be with whatever discomfort is present with you now, whether at a physical, mind, heart or soul level...
- And repeating the following phrases to yourself (or finding your own words):
 - May I be kind to myself in this moment.
 - May I be gentle with myself right now. Repeat and pause.
 - You may ask yourself the question: "what do I need to hear right now to express kindness to myself?" Is there a phrase that speaks to you in your particular situation... may be one of the following:
Pause between phrases



- May I give myself the compassion that I need.
- May I learn to accept myself as I am.
- May I forgive myself.
- May I be patient.

- Having moved through these three components of developing self-compassion, tuning in now to how you feel in your body... what sensations are arising... (pause)... And notice how you're feeling emotionally... (pause)... If you're not feeling self-compassionate, know that that's ok... that's how it is in this moment and it could be an opportunity to try to accept your limitations...

Preparing to come out of this practice, feel your feet on the floor and your contact with your seat... notice the noises around you... and gently open your eyes and come back into the room...

Reflection

- Reflect on what blocks you from feeling self-compassion.
- What helps you to move towards being self-compassionate?

Practice

Sufi practice with two wazief invoking Divine light and kindness.
Ya Noor (Divine Light) - **Ya Karim** (Divine Kindness) x 11/33.

Why I wake early by Mary Oliver

*Hello, sun in my face.
 Hello, you who make the morning
 and spread it over the fields
 and into the faces of the tulips
 and the nodding morning glories,
 and into the windows of, even, the
 miserable and the crotchety –*

*best preacher that ever was,
 dear star, that just happens
 to be where you are in the universe
 to keep us from ever-darkness,
 to ease us with warm touching,
 to hold us in the great hands of light –
 good morning, good morning, good morning.*

*Watch, now, how I start the day
 in happiness, in kindness.*



A Self-Compassion reflection

Reflect on the ways in which you might show yourself compassion when you're struggling. Saying the Prayer Nayaz for yourself.

Prayer Nayaz

*'Beloved Lord, Almighty God!
Through the rays of the sun,
through the waves of the air,
through the All-peroading Life in space,
Purify and revivify me,
and I pray,
heal my body,
heart
and soul.'*

Hazrat Inayat Khan

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