

Stepping Into Life:

Mindfulness & Compassion in Depression & Trauma Treatment

Ronald D. Siegel
Center for Mindfulness & Compassion
Harvard Medical School

What is Mindfulness?

- *Sati* in Pali
 - Connotes *awareness, attention, & remembering*
- In therapeutic arena, also includes
 - Non-judgment
 - Loving acceptance
 - Adds kindness & friendliness

Therapeutic Mindfulness

1. Awareness
2. Of present experience
3. With loving acceptance

Mind/essness

- Operating on “autopilot”
- Being lost in fantasies of the past and future
- Breaking or spilling things because we’re not paying attention
- Rushing through activities without attending to them

Life Is Difficult, for Everybody

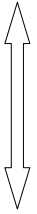


The Problem With Selfing



The Roles of Mindfulness

Implicit



Explicit

- Practicing Therapist
- Mindfulness Informed Psychotherapy
- Mindfulness Based Psychotherapy

Mindfulness *Practice* is Not:

- Having a “blank” mind
- Becoming emotionless
- Withdrawing from life
- Seeking bliss
- Escaping pain

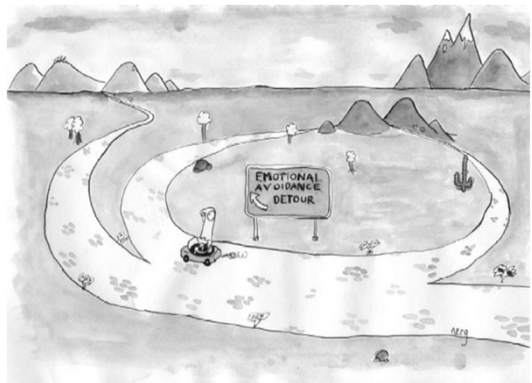
Mindfulness Can Help Us

- To see and accept things as they are
- To loosen our preoccupation with “self”
- To experience the richness of the moment
- To become free to act skillfully

Breath Awareness



How it Works



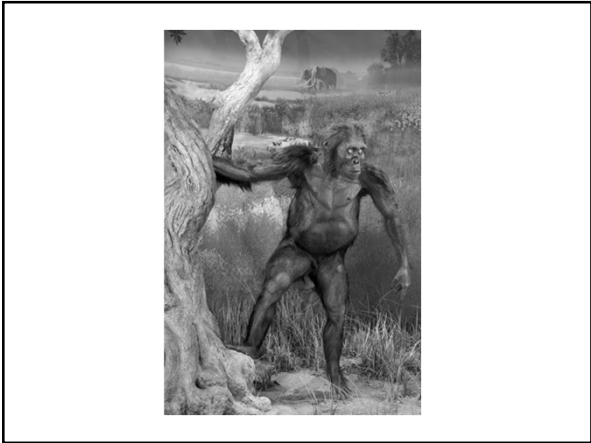


Overwhelmed?



Intensity of
experience

Capacity to
bear experience

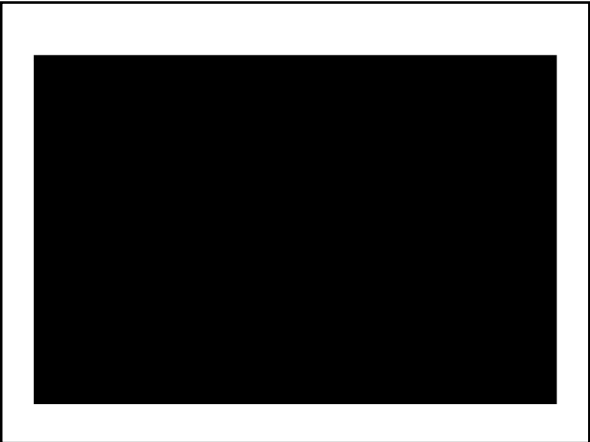


The Thinking Disease

- Analyze past pleasure and pain
- Maximize future pleasure and avoid future pain



**Fitting the Practice to the
Person**



Decisions, Decisions

1. Which skills to emphasize?
2. Formal or informal practice?
3. Which objects of attention?
4. Religious or secular practices?
5. Narrative or experiencing mode?
6. Relative or absolute truth?
7. Turning toward safety or sharp points?

Core Practice Skills

1. Concentration (focused attention)
2. Mindfulness *per se* (open monitoring)
3. Acceptance and Compassion

Focused Attention vs. Open Monitoring

- Concentration (FA)
 - Choose an object and follow it closely
- Mindfulness (OM)
 - Attend to whatever object rises to forefront of consciousness



Loving Acceptance



Continuum of Practice

Informal Mindfulness Practice



Formal Meditation Practice



Intensive Retreat Practice

Telephone Meditation



Taillight Meditation



Shower Meditation



Formal Practice (Results May Vary)

- Data supports effects of formal meditation
- Structural and functional brain changes.



Intensive Retreat Practice



Objects of Attention

Coarse



Subtle

- Feet touching ground
- Sights and sounds of nature
- Taste of food
- Sound of bell
- Breath in belly
- Mantra
- Air at tip of nose

Religious or Secular?

- “Spiritual” practices
 - Devotional and theistic
- Secular practices
 - Science grounded
- Seek cultural consonance

Narrative Mode

- Psychodynamic
 - Earlier, transference, other relationships
- Behavioral
 - How learned, how reinforced
- Systemic
 - Maintained by family, community, culture

Experiencing Mode

- How is it felt in the body?
- How does the mind respond?
 - Grasping
 - Pushing away
 - Ignoring

Relative Truth

- Human story
 - Success & Failure
 - Pleasure & Pain
 - Longing
 - Hurt
 - Anger
 - Envy
 - Joy
 - Pride



Absolute Truth

- Anicca (impermanence)
- Dukkha (unsatisfactoriness)
- Anatta (no enduring, separate self)



Trauma Treatment: Timing is Everything

1. Open to painful emotions
2. Explore the facts of trauma
3. See it through lens of *dependent origination*
4. Develop compassion



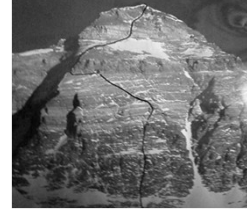
Turning toward Safety I

- Outer or distal focus
 - Walking Meditation
 - Listening Meditation
 - Nature Meditation
 - Eating Meditation
 - Open eye practices



Turning toward Safety II

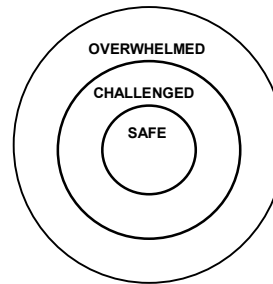
- Inner focus
 - Mountain Meditation
 - Guided Imagery
 - *Metta* Practice
 - DBT techniques



Backdraft



What Does The Client Need?



Safety– Behavioral practice, comfort, soothing

Challenge – Mental training, turning toward suffering

Overwhelm -

Opening and Closing



How To Deal with Backdraft?



Turning Toward the Sharp Points

- Moving toward anything unwanted or avoided
- How is it experienced in the body?
 - Pain, fear, sadness, anger
 - Unwanted images or memories
 - Urges toward compulsive behaviors



Different Strokes

- Need for frequent adjustment of exercises
- Elicit feedback about the experience
 - Both during and after practice
- Titrate between Safety and Sharp Points

When Mindfulness of Inner Experience Can Be Harmful

- When overwhelmed by traumatic memories
- When terrified of disintegration, loss of sense of self
- When suffering from psychosis



Alternate Techniques when Overwhelmed

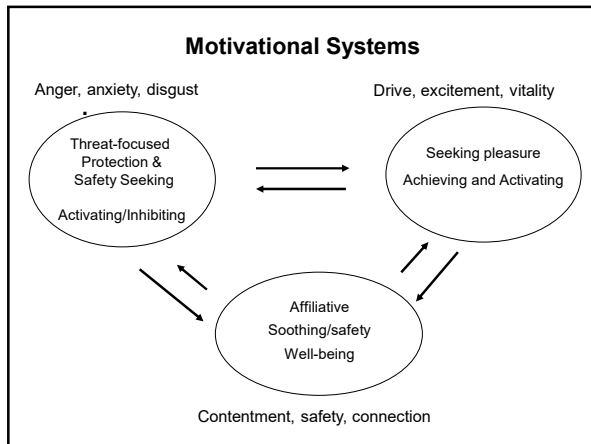
- Eyes open, external sensory focus
 - Ground, trees, sky, wind, sounds
- Yoga practices to stretch and relax muscles



Decisions, Decisions

1. Which skills to emphasize?
2. Formal or informal practice?
3. Which objects of attention?
4. Religious or secular practices?
5. Narrative or experiencing mode?
6. Relative or absolute truth?
7. Turning toward safety or sharp points?

Compassion in Psychotherapy



Compassion

- Latin: *pati*; Greek: *pathein* ("to suffer")
- Latin: *com* ("with")
- Compassion means to "suffer with" another person.

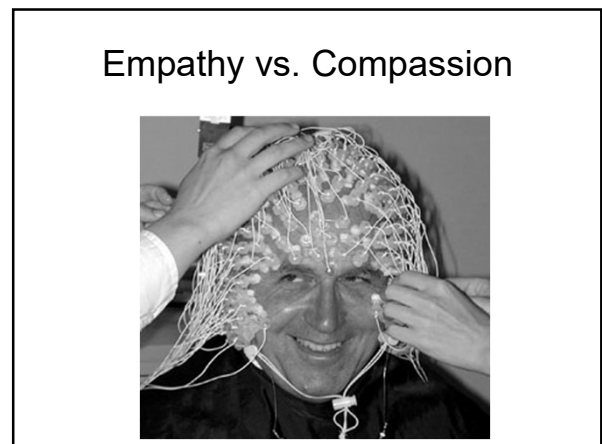
Empathy

"To sense the [patient's] private world as if it were your own, but without losing the 'as if' quality"

- Carl Rogers

Compassion's Relatives

- Empathy
- Sympathy
- Love
- Pity
- Altruism

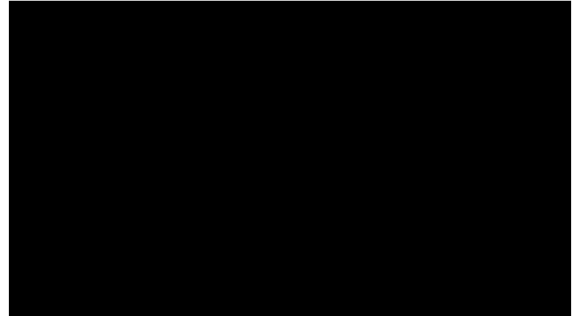


Lovingkindness Practice

- “Metta” practices
 - May I be happy, peaceful, free from suffering
 - May my loved ones be happy. . .
 - May all beings be happy. . .



Looking Through Another’s Eyes



How Mindfulness Develops Compassion

- Compassion for ourselves arises as we open to our own suffering
- Compassion for others arises as we see that everyone else also suffers
- Compassion arises naturally as we see our interconnectedness

Developing Compassion

- Imagine being a deeply compassionate person.
- Imagine being wise; knowing that “we all just find ourselves here” by the tide of evolution.
- Imagine yourself with the confidence, strength, and authority that arises from this understanding.

--Paul Gilbert

Condon, Desbordes, & Miller (2013)



Paradoxical Responses

- Universality of ambivalence
 - Highlight one pole, energize the other
- Negative emotions may arise
 - Cynicism, anger, sadism
- Practice saying “Yes” to these





Self Compassion


When Things Go Wrong

Unholy trinity of

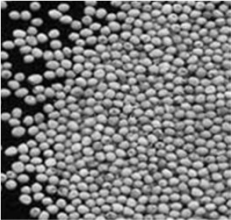
- Self-criticism
- Self-isolation
- Self-absorption

An Anidote: Self-Compassion

- Self-kindness
- Common Humanity
- Mindfulness



First Noble Truth to the Rescue



The Story of the Mustard Seed

5 Paths to Self-Compassion

1. **Physical:** Soften the body
2. **Mental:** Allow thoughts to come and go
3. **Emotional:** Befriend feelings
4. **Relational:** Connect safely with others
5. **Spiritual:** Commit to something larger

--Chris Germer

The Big Picture

- What helps you to identify with something larger than yourself?
 - Nature
 - Friend, Family, or Community
 - Spiritual Teacher
 - Religious figure or image

Self-Compassionate Letter

- Describe something that makes you feel badly about yourself
- Think of loving, accepting, imaginary friend
- Write a letter to yourself from your friend's perspective

---Kristen Neff

Equanimity Phrases

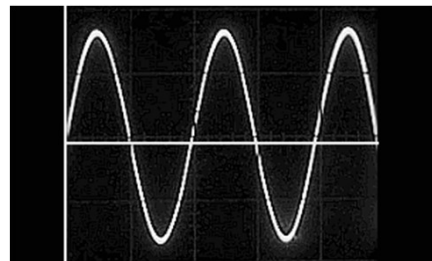
- *Everyone is on his or her own life journey.*
- *I am not the cause of my patient's suffering, nor is it entirely within my power to alleviate it.*
- *Though moments like this are difficult to bear, I may still try to help to the extent that I can.*

Greeting Exercise

- Begin with breath
- Visualize the person behind the door, suffering human being, once a child, has hopes and dreams, vulnerable and afraid, believing you can help
- Now open the door and say "hello."

Turning Toward Experience: Treating Depression

All or Nothing



Turning Away from Experience

- Depression involves turning away from pain
- Mindfulness turns *toward* the experience at hand, challenging the depressive stance

Learned Helplessness

- Mindfulness redirects attention to present
- Practice seeing moment to moment experiences as workable



Prisoners of Habit



Murder in the 180th Degree



Aliveness



You become sensitive to the actual experience of living, to how things actually feel. You do not sit around developing sublime thoughts about living. You live. - Bhante Guaranantana

Attention to Present Affect

- Focus on *what*, not *why*
 - What is happening right now?
 - Can you be with or breath into what is happening right now?
- Similar to Eugene Gendlin's focusing and Gestalt Therapy techniques.

Moving Toward Pain

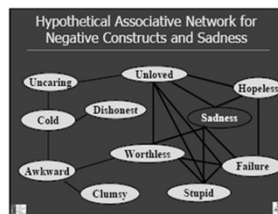
- What do you experience in your body?
- What is your relationship to your pain?
- Do you feel compassionate toward yourself?



Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

- One of “Third Wave” of Behavior Therapies
 - Acceptance is a precondition of change
 - Carl Rogers
- Formulated by Teasdale, Segal, & Williams
- Hypothesized that mindfulness might prevent relapse of Major Depression episodes
- Based on information processing theory

MBCT Model of Depression



Mild dysphoria triggers depressive cognitive patterns from previous major depressive episode

MBCT Components

- Formal Practice
 - Body Scan
 - Mindful Stretching/Yoga
 - Mindfulness of breath/body/sounds/thoughts
- Informal Practice
 - 3 minute breathing space, regular or coping
 - Mindfulness of everyday activities

MBCT Structure

- Activities based on MBSR model
- Done in groups of up to 12 recovered depressed patients
- 8 weekly 2 hour sessions
- 4 follow up meetings
- Daily homework

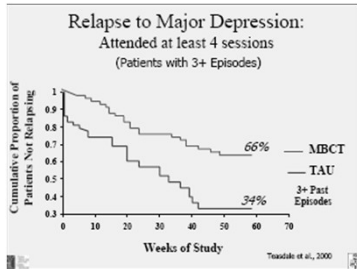
Perspective on Thought

- Refuting thought often falls flat
- Changing relationship to *all* thinking is more powerful

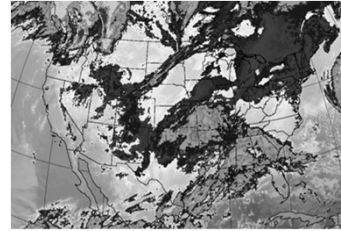
Thoughts are not facts...
I am not my thoughts...



MBCT Depression Treatment Outcomes



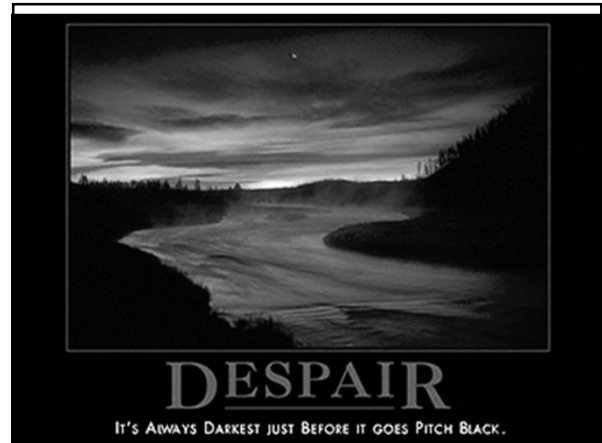
Affective Meteorology



- When in the past did you not feel depressed?
- How were your thought patterns different?

Entering Dark Places

- Following our patient into
 - Despair
 - Loneliness
 - Un-lovability
 - Self hate



Surviving & Connecting

- Patients need to know that they will not kill us off with their anger or despair
- "You cannot draw a depressed person out of his misery with love. . . you can, sometimes, manage to join someone in the place where he resides"

— Andrew Solomon

Hope

- Premature offers of hope are empathic failures
- Empathic connection itself offers hope



Medication

- Is patient caught in downward spiral?
- Does depressed affect lead to behavior which results in more depression?
- Is therapeutic relationship sufficient to reverse this?

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

~ Rumi ~

For tailored meditation practices, visit:

www.DrRonSiegel.com

email:

rsiegel@hms.harvard.edu