



# One Day Course in Mindful Compassion

Facilitated by

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## Contract

It is important for the group to agree a 'working contract' that will cover the day;

Examples of items that may be part of this are;

- An agreement on 'confidentiality'. This will mean that all discussions within the sessions are treated confidentially by all facilitators and participants, meaning that they will not be talked about outside the group, or, for example, if talking to a friend or member of your family about topics covered you ensure that you keep names and any other identifying features out of the conversation.
- Respect for each other's views and opinions even though they may differ from your own
- Not having two people talking at once as this can be very distracting
- Mobile phones can be quite disruptive, so please either turn them off or put them on silent, unless you are expecting an important call in which case please share this with the group at the beginning of the session.
- Any other item deemed necessary by the group after discussion at the first session...

## The Practice of Non-Meditation

One of the difficulties many people face when beginning to learn meditation is that they 'TRY' to meditate....this can somewhat defeat the object. When talking of our inner environment there is a popular quote that;

'Different rules apply'

We begin to recognise that many of the habitual patterns we have learned in our lives relate to how we interact with both our external and internal environments... Habits such as goal setting and having aims, striving, craving, clinging, yearning, desiring, and so on...and that these habits can be quite problematic when it comes to developing our mindful meditation...setting us up to 'try' to 'do' meditation instead of simply learning to '*be in*' meditation...a popular phrase often used to help us explain this is that when it comes to meditation;

'I am a human being...not a human doing'

We can also have expectations as to what we think meditation is and what we expect to get from it. These expectations can often lead to a disappointing experience, for as we know expectations are often not met...a common example of this can be those who come to a session expecting to have a very peaceful experience, when their minds will go blank or extremely quiet, the time will pass in a very calm and sometimes blissful way and that when they leave the session they will feel changed forever by the experience .... These

participants are often disappointed and sometimes don't return for a second session!!

In order to begin to overcome some of these difficulties it can be helpful to begin with a short session of 'non-meditation'...to begin to see that in most moments we actually have the 'choice' of how to be, the choice of whether to actively engage with whatever we notice, or to simply notice things and 'let them be'...to dwell in the gap between perception and interpretation...the moment just before we begin to engage the thinking mind...

## **Introduction to Mindful Compassion**

The content of this course has been compiled by David Oldham and from the many people he has worked with, both at Blythe House Hospice and with Macmillan Cancer Support, all of whom helped with their feedback from the courses they participated in which helped this course to evolve in the way it has...and will no doubt will continue to do so...It draws from many different sources and acknowledges the wonderful developmental work in the practice of Mindfulness and Compassion, from the earliest teachings of the Buddha and all the lineages, teachers and practitioners that have followed, secular teachers, all the scientists and researchers that have added to our understanding and particular thanks going to Lama Yeshe Losal Rinpoche for the advice he gave for various aspects of this course, and the recognition and realisation that we are practicing to become more of who and what we already are... ***mindful and compassionate human beings***

People often think of mindfulness as coming from the Buddha's teachings which did include an aspect of what he called 'right mindfulness'...as far as is known these teachings were the first recorded ones containing a mindful approach to life, as well as many other different aspects...

If we go back a long time before these historical writings to the beginning of mankind on the planet we would no doubt encounter some of the most mindful people that have lived as they would have needed to be that way in order to survive...They would have needed to pay as much attention as possible to each and every moment as the world they lived in was potentially a very dangerous place, full of many threats to their existence...they would have easily fallen prey to many of the predators that roamed the land and not had many defences against them...so being mindful, paying attention to their moment to moment experience would have been vital.

These people would also have needed to be compassionate/caring for one another in order to form groups and small communities to help with their safety and survival...and evidence was recently found of a fossilised skeleton of an early human that had sustained an injury early in its development that would have meant it needed to be cared for in order to survive...so compassion is another vital aspect of being human....

Therefore mindful compassion is really about '*becoming more human*'...of unfolding and developing what we already are in our authentic nature, recognising that we already use these aspects in many ways at many times,

we may simply not have 'labelled' them as mindfulness or compassion...

When it comes to the more modern development of mindful practices, particularly in the medical/psychological world, we are drawn to the work of such pioneers as Jon Kabat-Zinn and Saki Santorelli who developed Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Rob Nairn who founded the Mindfulness Association, Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale who developed Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), and to the Buddhist teachers, H H Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Tara Brach, Jack Kornfield and many others who have developed their knowledge and skills in their belief systems and also in a secular way to enable this skill to be developed and shared with everyone

In the practice of compassion and self-compassion we can be drawn to many of the great religious and spiritual traditions and their practices and to many great teachers. In recent times recognising the developmental work of pioneers in the field of self-compassion such as Paul Gilbert, who developed compassion-focussed therapy and compassionate mind training, Kristin Neff and Chris Germer, and many others... as well as all the neuroscientists and researchers who have also helped in developing our awareness and understanding.

In relation to mindfulness and cancer there are now several writers who have published their experiences and programmes such as Trish Bartley (2012) in her book *Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy for Cancer*, who when describing her treatment experiences offers a practical view;

*'I found myself sitting with people who were clearly suffering. We rarely spoke, but I found I could meditate as I sat there. This felt comforting'*

She goes on to say about her second cancer experience that;

*My practice has accompanied me closely on this second journey – as has kindness from many sources. Both have been deeply nurturing and inspiring. There have been dips and troughs, twists and turns – and many times when the sun came out'*

And the mindfulness-based stress reduction approach of Elana Rosenbaum who wrote *Living Well with Cancer through Mindfulness* (2005)...she reminds us that;

*'Mindfulness-based stress reduction programme has helped in coping with emotional and physical disorders such as anxiety, headaches, cancer, AIDS, heart disease, gastro-intestinal disorders, psoriasis, fibromyalgia, pain, and stress-related symptoms...'*

She continues with;

*Caring for myself properly meant I really had to listen to my body and nurture myself, mind and body. I needed to remind myself to come back to this moment again and again, I needed to maintain an open, steady heart and*

forgive myself if I strayed. I also needed to be able to accept support. My intention and commitment NOT to SUFFER became paramount in my ability to cope with the rapidity of change that the diagnosis of cancer wrought in my life.'

Both these writers talk of their own experiences within the framework of mindfulness-based approaches and it could be noted that a mindful approach to any difficulty, pain, illness, or suffering, and adding the explicit approach of working compassionately with ourselves applies to all aspects of life and **'being human'**

## Definitions of Mindfulness

There have been many attempts to define what mindfulness is and it would appear, as with many things, that it is hard to get an exact definition of something that is actually experiential... imagine, for example, how difficult it is to define the colour yellow in words, or to define the smell of a rose....and yet you know what it's like to experience these things...so to define subjective experience is hard for us but the following are good examples of how people have managed to get close – it may be interesting as you go through the course to contemplate how you would define your experiences and this is something you may share with the group and record in your journal if you choose to keep one...

David Oldham (2015);

*'An intentionally focussed mind, accepting of present moment-to-moment experiences, just as they are'*

Rob Nairn defines mindfulness (2010) as;

*'Knowing what is happening, while it is happening, without preference.'*

Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) describes it as;

*'Being in the present moment, on purpose, without judgement', following that he added; 'as though your life depends on it'.*

Jaak Panksepp (2012) says;

*'Mindfulness is the capacity to focus on one's daily life with an equanimity that transcends one's troubles'*

**Research** has shown that there are many benefits to health by practicing mindful meditation, such as the lowering of blood pressure, helping to cope with illness and stress, anxiety and depression, helping the immune system and the digestive system, dealing with difficult emotions and thinking problems, generally being able to relax more easily....other benefits that can

be developing more compassion, kindness, patience, calmness, insight, wisdom, healing, and developing a deeper understanding of our selves, of others and of the world we live in...

The research into mindfulness and compassion is ongoing and continually developing so if you have any particular areas of interest it is worth looking up research that may be available, often the internet can be a great resource for this.

Mindfulness also allows us to recognise the many and varied aspects of our human experiences such as joy and happiness, creativity, invention, inspiration, loving kindness, compassion, sensing the beauty of the world around us and having wonderful encounters with other people and the deep appreciation of our moment to moment experience of life...and on the whole, although we may encounter some difficulties, practice is to be enjoyed as it is so beneficial for us to be doing something so wonderful to help ourselves...

Kornfield writes (2008),

‘Mindful attention to any experience is liberating. Mindfulness brings perspective, balance, and freedom.’

## **Posture**

When it comes to the practice of meditation there can be quite a focus on ‘posture’. Posture is something to pay attention to as it can influence your practice a great deal. You may like to explore finding the right posture for yourself at this time by trying different ones. There are ‘ideal’ aspects of posture, strong spine, head balanced, gaze slightly lowered, or for some eyes closed, tongue just touching the roof of the mouth just behind the teeth, body feeling balanced and grounded, hands either on thighs or on your lap with the right hand supporting the left and thumbs just touching, ensuring that however our hands and arms are they don’t pull the shoulders into a rounded position....

There are various expressions relating to posture; ‘sitting like a mountain’, ‘sitting with dignity’, having a ‘strong spine’,....most importantly you need your posture to be comfortable for you so that you don’t get distracted by being uncomfortable... Some practitioners prefer to lie down to practice and some even practice standing up....an approach related to being compassionate would be to ‘sit with kindness’....

## The 3 minute breathing space

This *3 minute breathing space* was developed within the practice of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression (Segal, Z et al 2002) is an extremely useful practice when time is limited and can also be used at any time during the day simply to bring yourself back to the present moment of your experience and back to your mindful practice.

### 3 Breaths

If you find yourself unable to take a three minute pause then having a deep concentration on three breaths can bring you back to the present moment and create 'a moments' pause' and an opportunity to focus on what is happening in that moment...

### What is your 'Aim' when you are going to begin a practice?

#### AIM – Attitude, Intention, Motivation

As we realise when practicing non-meditation, when it comes to actually practicing meditation '*different rules apply*' so we let go of aims, goals, trying, striving etc. when it comes to the actual moments of practice...but it can be very helpful to use '*AIM*' as an acronym to help us focus just before we begin a practice....

Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005) writes about meditation being;

'Not what you think', going on to point out that 'although there may be many different and varied techniques that people teach and that 'all techniques are orienting vehicles pointing at ways of being, ways of being in relationship to the present moment and to one's own mind and one's own experience, we can easily get lost in techniques.....so it is helpful to just keep in mind that above all, meditation is a way of being'.

He also adds, 'meditation is not relaxation spelled differently'.

'**Attitude**' – you can consider the attitude with which you approach the moment you are in and the attitude to the practices generally.

Attitude is sometimes expressed socially as a negative thing – people with 'bad attitudes' - however we can become aware of our attitude in the moment we are in, recognise it for what it is without judgement, and decide, if we want to, whether we could do anything at that moment to begin to change it...there are of course many really positive attitudes and we can recognise 'ideal' attitudes to our meditation practice, such as being 'open minded', 'curious', 'accepting', 'looking forward to it', 'enjoying', 'kind', 'loving', 'compassionate'...it really does depend on the moment we are in and whether

we feel able to adopt one of these, or come close to them...or even to simply aspire towards them...

Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) writes of;

‘Seven attitudinal factors that constitute the major pillars of mindfulness practice...they are non-judgment, patience, a beginners mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go.’

He also writes (2005), that;

‘Generosity, trustworthiness, kindness, empathy, compassion, gratitude, joy in the good fortune of others, inclusiveness, acceptance and equanimity are qualities of mind and heart that further the possibilities of well-being and clarity within oneself, to say nothing of the beneficial effects they have in the world. They form the foundation for an ethical and moral life.’

Joan Halifax (2008) introduces the concept of ‘*radical optimism*’ an attitude we could adopt for any moment...where she explains about;

‘Not having expectations about specific outcomes.....this kind of optimism arises directly out of not knowing. She goes on to recount an old Zen saying that offers another way of putting it: ‘fishing with a straight hook’ – meaning, don’t look for results. Whether in the beginning, in the middle, or at the end, just exist in the right-now:’

‘**Intention**’ – knowing the intention you have for doing the practice, for example this may be that ‘you intend to sit for 30 minutes, or to ‘learn to stay more present in each moment’, or to simply ‘focus on the breath as you do this practice as a way of continuing to learn and cultivate your mind and your understanding of how your mind relates to the world around you’, or ‘to stay present, or as present as possible’. Often keeping it simple can be really helpful as if we experience moments of distraction in our practice it can be helpful at times to simply come back to the present moment and remember your intention, so a simple message can be helpful for this...

Kornfield (2008) reminds us that;

‘Be mindful of intention. Intention is the seed that creates our future.’

It is worth recognising that intention is seen as one of the factors that drives our brains neuroplasticity. It is the drive that actually helps us facilitate our learning ....if we consider meditation and the impact that it has on our brain structures we can see that having the intention to learn it can begin to facilitate the change and development in the brain into the areas that are associated with meditation

Then to consider your ‘**Motivation**’ for the practice that will help focus your intention still more and aid that learning and developmental process...it’s your reason for doing it and the reason that lies behind why you set out to learn meditation in the first place...and again it is worth keeping it simple and fairly

concise...also to recognise that as you develop you may amend or alter these aspects of our approach to the practice..., for example, 'it's good for me', or, 'I am motivated to do this practice to help me in my life at the moment, to help deal with the difficulties or suffering I may be facing, and to help myself take care of myself at this time', we may also have a more altruistic motivation to learn this for the benefit of ourselves and others.

## Working with distraction

One of the main aspects of our minds that we encounter as we begin to practice meditation is that of '**distraction**'.

Our minds, even though we have an intention to remain in the present moment, seem to be constantly becoming distracted...almost as if they have a mind of their own, particularly when we begin to learn meditation

This distraction can take many forms, both internal and external, such as thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, sights and sounds...etc.

We also begin to encounter what can be described as 'habitual patterns' of our inner landscape. These patterns can be thinking about what's happening but very often seem to be thinking about the past and the future in some way...such as conceptualising, planning, ruminating, procrastinating, worrying, memories, images and many others...

What we can understand from these mental processes is that they are 'common' to all of us. It is not that we are 'getting the practice wrong, it is just the nature of our psychological programming, of what our minds have learned to do, and it's not our fault in any way.

Recognising this and learning to work with distraction is a very important aspect of meditation practices.

When the mind becomes distracted we notice that it has, and that noticing is an important moment as it is a moment of mindfulness, of what is happening in the here and now of that moment We have to be careful not to criticise or judge ourselves in any way at that moment as that then becomes a continuation of the distraction. We can learn to be kind or compassionate in our attitude towards these habits we have learned. We then simply bring our attention back to the support we use in the practice – very often the breath – back to the present moment and continue with our practice.

We recognise from distraction that the mind is generally in what Rob Nairn (2010) refers to as an 'unsettled' state;

'That our mind is not under our control – it is like a butterfly that flies off and does its own thing driven by habit'.

We can become aware of the difference between thought (that which automatically arises), and thinking (what we choose to continue to do or what we have habitually learned to do, after the thought has arisen, something Rob Nairn (2015) referred to in a teaching he gave as the 'tendency to engage' – recognising that we can notice this as a moment of choice as we develop our practice).

As we continue to develop our practice and our ability to 'observe' our minds processes we can recognise that trying to stop these habits isn't/can't be the goal or the aim of meditation, but being aware of them and allowing the mind to learn to settle, and therefore lessen the distracting nature of them, is one of the benefits of the practice...the practice of finding the right level of concentration can certainly help with this...

Ajahn Amaro (2010) puts it that;

'We tend to forget that in our schooling – particularly in the west – we spend 12, 16, 18 or more years in education systems learning to think and think, to create concepts, to juggle many ideas at once, to compare them and critique them, in addition we get praised for our ability to do that well. So it is hardly surprising that when we come to meditation, all of this is still going on, when we sit down to meditate, we see the results of the actions of a lifetime'

When we begin to 'settle' or 'calm' the mind, knowing that distractions will continue to arise, we can learn that the habit of 'thinking about them' can be minimised or we can gradually learn to 'let go of it'.

Neff and Germer (2014) refer to the Default Mode Network as the reason for the mind becoming distracted...an aspect of the brain/mind that becomes noticeable when the mind settles...they say;

'The brain is hardwired to wander, to create a sense of self, and to scan the past and future for threats to self. Mindfulness reduces all these tendencies'

They go on to point out that;

The default mode network is often associated with rumination and worry when we have free time – reviewing the past for problems and anticipating problems in the future....

And;

The sense of "self" resides in the DMN. It is continually creating a sense of self, projecting our self into the past and the future, and searching for threats to our sense of self, physically or emotionally...

Research shows that mindfulness meditation deactivates the default mode network (Brewer, et al, 2011) both while meditating and in daily life.'

Brewer et al (2011) state;

Many philosophical and contemplative traditions teach that "living in the moment" increases happiness. However, the default mode of humans appears to be that of mind-wandering, which correlates with unhappiness, and with activation in a network of brain areas associated with self-referential processing.

## *The practice to find right concentration*

### **Right concentration...steadyng/settling/calming the mind**

Here we have phrases from the 'jargon' of meditation practice...so what do we mean by these and how can we develop them as an integral part of our practice.

The right concentration is about finding a level of concentration that doesn't create tension in our mind but also doesn't go the other way and mean that we lose our focus and get more easily distracted...

Hanson, (2014) said that;

'When the mind is steady it closes off the gates in the brain to our short term memory'

We could deduce from this that it would help quite a lot with our practice and lessen our distractions...we can also see how that would help us to stay in the present moment...

Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) writes;

'The practice of Right Concentration is to cultivate a mind that is one-pointed....going on to talk of 'two kinds of concentration, active and selective. In 'active concentration' the mind dwells on whatever is happening in the present moment, even as it changes. ...When we practice selective concentration, we choose one object and hold onto it'

A helpful way of thinking about how our mind is when it is in the state of 'right concentration comes from Rick Hanson (2014) when he said that;

'The mind takes on the shape of the thing it is focused on'

### **Senses in Mindful Practice**

We can learn that our *senses* can be utilised to enable us to become mindful of each moment – when we tune in or pay attention to our senses we bring ourselves into the present moment , the here and now, and we become mindful of our experience in that moment.

For example, when we practice meditation we can pay attention to the sounds around us, not in any judgmental way, simply to become aware of them, and recognise that our minds may be drawn to the loudest or most dominant sound at any given moment, and that there is a 'moment of contact' between the mind and the sound, noting that very often, at that moment, we may begin to think about it in some way, but as we are practicing mindful meditation at

that time we remain with the sound, as it is, without judgment or preference, recognising the moment of choice we have to engage with thinking or not to... In writing about this 'sense interaction' Kabat-Zinn (2005) writes;

'We are literally touched by the world through all our senses', and that they are the only ways we have of knowing either the interior world of our own being, or the outer landscape we call "the world".

He also adds to our list of 5 senses that we normally think of by thinking of 'intuition as a kind of sense. Proprioception – the body knowing how it is positioned in space – is a sense. Interoception – the overall feel of the body as a whole-is a sense. The mind itself can also be thought of as a sense....in a way we could accurately call awareness itself our sixth sense rather than the mind. In a way, awareness and mind essence are two ways of saying the same thing'.

He goes on further saying that;

'Each sense has its own unique constellation of properties, out of which we build not only our "picture" of the world "out there" but out of which we build meaning and our moment to moment capacity to situate ourselves within it'.

## The Awareness of Breathing Meditation...

### Being In Your Relationship with Yourself

The only person you have a life-long relationship with is; '**Yoursel**f'.

When we look at the nature of that relationship it seems that many people find it is sometimes not a particularly helpful or happy relationship....in fact in many people it seems that the relationship is quite destructive and painful, and one that we may 'walk away from' if it was with anybody else.

How we relate to our past, our present and our future is all an aspect of this relationship, how we 'talk to ourselves', our thinking, our behaviours, feelings and emotions are all part of this....if, for example, we have a negative or critical view of ourselves that can become quite a destructive part of our current experiences. If we blame ourselves, suffer from guilt and shame, worry, stress, get fearful and anxious, crave, desire, want, and so on, all these aspects can harm our relationship....and create our own suffering

It is often a relationship that is also reflected in how we relate to others....so as you can see it is a major part of our lives that we may need to work on improving in many ways...

As this course of mindful compassion unfolds much of what we are attempting to improve is this relationship and fashion into a more mindful and certainly a more compassionate, caring, kind and loving one...

*Can you imagine how it may be for you to create a wonderful relationship with yourself from this moment on?*

*Can you imagine beginning to let go of all the old habits that harm that relationship and turning them into positive or helpful ones?*

*Can you imagine no more self-criticism?*

*Can you contemplate just a simple caring relationship with yourself?*

*Would you like to open your heart to your own experiences with acceptance and compassion?*

*Would you like to become more kind towards yourself?*

*How about working to alleviate your own suffering because it's ok to do that?*

This way of looking at how we are with ourselves can certainly apply to different aspects of ourselves as well as our whole self...

For example, when we have an illness we relate to it in a certain way, when we are undergoing treatments and having medication we relate to those in a certain way, when we are in pain we relate to that in a certain way whether it is physical or emotional pain that we are experiencing....and it is in this relating that we find aspects of our relationship with ourselves....there is the often quoted saying in mindfulness that; 'Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional',

Something that Kornfield (2008) reiterates when he writes;

*'Pain is inevitable. Suffering is not. Suffering arises from grasping. Release grasping and be free from suffering'*

*And*

*'If we cling to anger or hatred, we will suffer. It is possible to respond strongly, wisely, and compassionately, without hatred.'*

So we can begin to understand these various aspects and difficulties of our experiences and we can also expand this outwards when we develop a view of ourselves as a 'whole self'...sometimes the idea of holding something in a larger container, or simply seeing things as a smaller part of something much bigger can be a helpful view to find....

## **Being on your own side**

Rick Hanson (2009) writes about being on your own side as follows:

*'It's a general principle that the more power you have over someone, the greater your duty is to use that power benevolently. Well, who is the one person in the world you have the greatest power over? It's your future self. You hold that life in your hands, and what it will be depends on how you care for it.'*

Tara Brach (2003) in her book of 'Radical Acceptance' says;

*'Offering ourselves such care might feel strange and unfamiliar at first.....sometimes extending compassion to ourselves in this way feels downright embarrassing. It can trigger a sense of shame about being needy*

and undeserving, shame about being self-indulgent. But this revolutionary act of treating ourselves tenderly can begin to undo the aversive messages of a lifetime’.

## Definitions of Compassion

Compassion - the word itself coming from ‘the Latin roots *com* (with) and *pati* (suffer), or to “suffer with”...

Oldham (2015)

“The feeling we get of wanting to care for and help alleviate any suffering we encounter in ourselves or another”

Gilbert (2009) defines compassion as;

“Behaviour that aims to nurture, look after, teach, guide, mentor, soothe, protect, and offer feelings of acceptance and belonging – in order to benefit another person”.

Jack Kornfield in his (2008) writes of the second principle of Buddhist psychology as;

‘Compassion is our deepest nature. It arises from our interconnection with all things’,

Germer (2009) talks of self compassion as being ‘a form of acceptance’ and writes;

‘When we offer genuine compassion, we join a person in his or her suffering. Being compassionate means that we recognise when someone is in pain, we abandon our fear or resistance to it, and a natural feeling of love and kindness flows toward the suffering individual...it’s *full* acceptance: of the person, of the pain, and of our own reactions to pain. Self-compassion is simply giving the same kindness to ourselves.

Over the past few years much has been researched and written about in relation to the practices of self compassion and sometimes the word ‘*self*’ can, of itself, create difficulties or resistance for people beginning the practices, so we need to be clear that this is the practice of compassion for self and others, knowing that as we improve and cultivate a more caring and compassionate relationship towards our own difficulties, those around us also receive benefit from these practices...for example, a person who suffers with stress and takes better care of themselves to reduce that stress may also lessen the stress of the people around them who care for them as they will feel able to worry less about that person as they become less stressed...so practicing self compassion, or compassion for self and others, can become a very ‘*giving*’ thing to do...

## Being Open-hearted

On a recent course the idea of compassion being termed 'open-heartedness' was offered.

It is interesting to reflect sometimes on how words can influence the way in which we think about any particular subject. In this case the term 'open-heartedness' was accompanied by a physical gesture of opening the shoulders and pushing the heart gently forwards whilst raising the face slightly upwards towards the sky. It was also thought about in terms of open-heartedness being non-judgmental.

Interestingly this method of using the body posture has long been used to help people suffering with low moods/depression, and also in a recent group it was reported as having been used as a means to help build confidence.

So, being open-hearted with ourselves and non-judgmental of ourselves is an alternative way of describing self-compassion.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery in his book 'The Little Prince' (1943) shares a very simple secret that:

'It is only with the heart one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye'



So we can reflect on this secret and ask ourselves how we view our experiences – do we continue to look with our habitual patterns, through our eyes that link into those patterns, or can we begin to view our experiences and ourselves through a compassionate heart...intuitively and with compassion, kindness and caring...

## Introducing the 'Affective Neuroscience' work of Jaak Panksepp

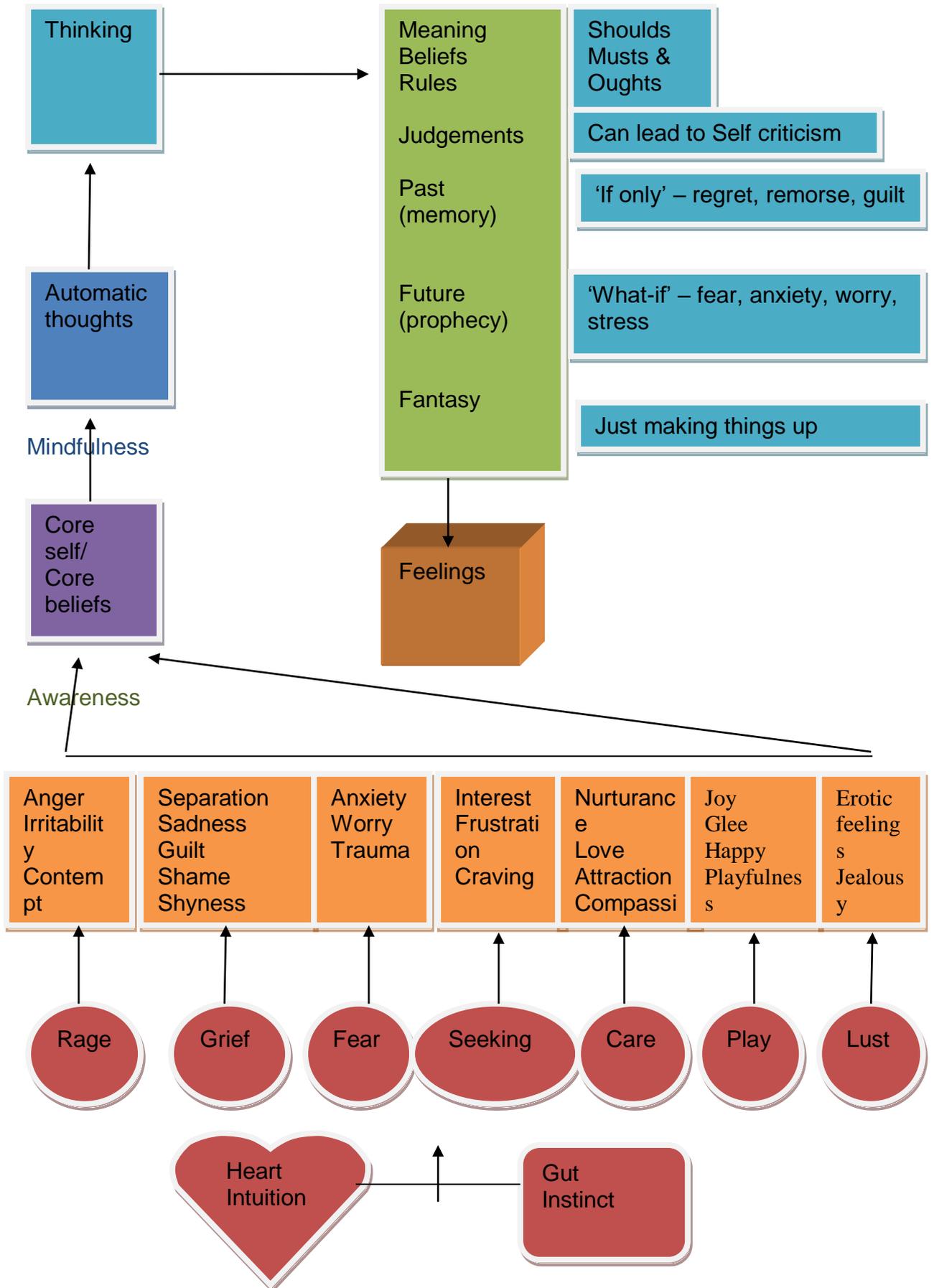
In his work on affective neuroscience (1999, 2012) Jaak Panksepp informs us of the seven affective (emotional) systems that human beings are born with that we then build upon through our experiences to develop the next layers of emotional development.....this is referred to as '*experience-dependent neural plasticity*'. As we begin to grow and take over aspects of our development, and we could focus on the development we can undergo as we learn and practice mindful compassion, this becomes known as '*self-directed neural plasticity*'

These systems are important in forming memories, realising that in our very early life we are 'emotional beings' and not thinking beings...so all our early memories are stored as emotional experiences in our brain/mind/body (somatic)...we can understand from this why we cannot always actually remember or make sense of our early experiences if they are 'activated' in relation to our current experiences...this can lead to much confusion and suffering when trying to understand 'what's going on', (therapeutically or otherwise)...

So, in our understanding of our emotional experiences it may be interesting to be more mindfully aware of times when you experience your emotional systems becoming operative, recognising what 'triggers' them off, how they feel, where you may experience them in your body, how long the emotion lasts, the impact they may have on your thoughts and behaviours, recognising that much of our emotional experience can be pleasant as well as sometimes not too pleasant.

The following model is aimed at beginning to formulate an understanding which, in his book, he describes as Affective Balance Therapy and although this model; isn't something he proposes it demonstrates fairly clearly some of the processes we are dealing with in our selves...so it takes the seven emotional systems, adds recent findings that tell us we have neurons in our hearts and in our guts...and then built on top of that the understanding that we have a 'core sense of self' and 'core beliefs' which as part of the process underpin our more obvious cognitive processes...including with these some of the problematic areas we can create and realise that this is how we create our own feelings....

# Affective Balance Model (Oldham 2013)



So we can see that our bodies are considered to have 3 brains, and research suggests how valuable this understanding is to get a deeper awareness of our processes as human beings...

## Self-criticism

This is a particularly important area of our thinking to focus on and develop a deeper understanding of in relation to the practices of mindful compassion...

If we can recognise it we can introduce techniques to help us change it – hopefully into a compassionate, kind and supportive aspect of our thinking and ‘self-talk’...imagine if all the self-critical thoughts were changed to caring ones!! How different your experiences may be, how your feelings about and the relationship you have with yourself would be affected...

There are a variety of hypotheses as to why we develop this self-critical aspect of our thinking, ranging from the idea that we learn it very early on in life as some kind of defence mechanism, as suggested by Kristin Neff in a teaching she gave (2012), or we may develop it from our own brains need to self-monitor and look for negative aspects of our experiences and therefore it becomes a negative thought appraisal...but whatever the reason we can recognise that most people seem to have a really well developed self-critic so we are not alone with this and therefore we do not need to criticise ourselves for having it. In fact, each time we recognise it we could ‘thank’ it for the help it may have given us in the past when we learned how to defend ourselves, or when our brains were self-monitoring for our own safety...and then gently let it rest, replacing it now with that voice of self-kindness

Tara Brach (2003); tells the story of a friend;

‘Telling her she was learning to be ‘her own best friend’ and how that led her to breaking down in tears as she realised how she was ‘continually harassed by her own inner judge who was merciless, relentless, nit-picking, driving, often invisible but always on the job. I knew I would never treat a friend the way I treated myself, without mercy or kindness.’

## Meditation on Stillness and Creating your Inner Refuge

Developing a practice using the ‘pause’ in between each breath can be a valuable way of learning to create stillness within ourselves, something that can be really beneficial within our day to day activities and active lives.

It is a rare thing and we can learn to enjoy and even to cherish our stillness, even if it’s just for a moment, but ideally to make it a regular and deep aspect of our meditation practice...the absolute way of just simply ‘being’, with no effort, no striving and no ‘doing’...

Tara Brach (2003) refers to the ‘sacred pause’ and looks at many aspects and ways of ‘taking time out’ from our daily lives anything from moments to long retreats and she writes;

'A pause is a suspension of activity, a time of temporary disengagement when we are no longer moving toward any goal.....the pause can occur in the midst of almost any activity and can last for an instant, for hours or for seasons of our life. We may take a pause from our ongoing activity by sitting down to meditate.'

Donna Farhi enquiring in to what she calls 'the essential breath' (1996) writes,

'What do you find at the end of the exhalation? Did you feel the momentary pause that follows the end of the exhalation? This pause may be brief, a momentary hesitation, yet something very special happens in that pause. Don't try to make the pause happen or to extend it forcefully. Simply relax and let it happen. As you surrender to the restfulness in the pause you may find it lengthens on its own accord. Trust that the next breath can arise out of the pause without you grabbing for it.' She goes on to say that, 'the pause is a well, a resource that is always available to you. Know that at any time when you feel tired or confused, hurried or overwhelmed, you can draw from this well for rest and replenishment simply by entering the pause at the end of the exhalation.'

### **Attributes of Compassion (taken from Paul Gilberts work (2006);**

**Care for well-being** – being motivated to be caring for self/others, particularly when there is suffering

**Distress sensitivity** – being sensitive to the nature and complexity of distress and learning to read the cues and be sensitive to self/others needs

**Sympathy** – the ability to be emotionally moved by both the distress and joys of others.

**Distress tolerance** – learning to not become overwhelmed, but to tolerate others, and our own, suffering. On a previous course a participant expressed a dislike for the word 'tolerance' and thought that 'acceptance' or 'forbearance' or 'to bear our own/others suffering' would be a more acceptable description.

**Empathy** – being able to 'walk in another's shoes' is a common description of empathy. Added to this is the reasoning/thinking about the causes of others behaviours, intentions and motivations. The neuroscience view looks at the cells in the brain known as 'mirror neurons', believing that they are the source of our abilities to feel empathy, as well as to mimic and learn from others.

**Non-judgment** – the ability to see and understand what is happening in ours/others' lives, without judging ourselves/them

**Warmth** – an emotional tone/quality of gentleness and kindness and acceptance that runs through all of the above.

The above list from Paul Gilbert has been added to as experiences and feedback from previous course participants have indicated that we can also recognise **courage** and **patience and acceptance** as important attributes of compassion.

**Courage** is an integral part in the intention to doing this work on developing self-compassion as it can challenge our life's conditioning and ideas about the whole concept and also we need the courage to continue with the process when we may be faced with some resistance or difficulties as we venture along this developmental path.

It was mentioned by a participant on a previous course that the word courage comes from the French word for heart, which is 'Coeur', and that the work we do is full of heart, or heart-felt, that we need to encourage ourselves, and also the practice is often referred to as being 'warm-hearted'.

Participants have also said that courage is;

'Fear that has said its prayers',

And

Allowing yourself to do what you would not normally do'.

Sometimes we need to practice courage to simply get out of bed in the morning and we may not recognise that as a courageous act but something ordinary. With our developing awareness of all aspects of life we may understand that this ordinary courage is present within us a lot of the time and that recognition may in turn help us to see ourselves as more courageous beings.

Jack Kornfield, (2008) writes that;

'Great courage is not demonstrated by aggression or ambition. Aggression and ambition are more often expressions of fear and delusion. The courageous heart is the one that is unafraid to be open to the world. With compassion we come to trust our capacity to open to life without armouring'.

**Patience**, and tolerance as was pointed out on a previous course, is something that we may develop from a mindful meditation practice, almost as a kind of 'side-effect', and is another attribute that can be extremely helpful when faced with resistance, and with the continuing effort we need to apply if the practices become challenging. We can also be compassionate towards our impatience if we feel that.

## **Acceptance and Self-acceptance**

Acceptance is a word we can hear used so often in many different aspects of life and experience... it is a word that may mean different things to different people and our understanding of what it means to us is really important when

we look at this as a 'practice', or as something to 'find', or to aspire towards...to become more accepting...to have an attitude of acceptance...

### ***What is it that we are looking to find acceptance of?***

If we can answer the above question then presumably we can explore what it is that we are not accepting and how that non-acceptance feels ...the impact it has on our lives and how we may begin to move towards acceptance...being careful and kind towards ourselves as we do that exploration...approaching it with compassion...

It is worth realising that the opposite of acceptance can be discontent, rejection, or resistance of some form...and we can no doubt realise from our own experiences in life just how unpleasant those feelings can be...they can lead to a good deal of confusion or conflict, self-judgment or criticism, denial and disassociation repression or suppression.

We can realise when it comes to our meditation practice that what we are trying to accept is 'everything as it is' in any particular moment – with the recognition that in this moment everything is already exactly as it is' – the word '*Isness*' could be used to describe this current state of everything being as it is...

This does not of course mean that we are 'giving up' or 'acquiescing' to everything having to remain as it is...this is impossible anyway as everything changes (impermanence), but some people think of acceptance as giving up, or giving in or being weak in some way, or condoning something, or passivity, so we need to be careful not to put that meaning onto the word as it will create a negative view of what we are trying to practice

We know we can't change the past, we also know that we can often make some changes in the future, so we are talking of acceptance in the present moment and accepting what has happened in the past...we are not even saying that it's alright that things are as they are, or it's alright that these things happened, we are not condoning but simply accepting that these things are actually happening and we are acknowledging and accepting that things have actually happened.

We may also recognise how we currently feel about things being as they were or as they are...and we are not saying that these felt experiences are 'right or wrong', but we are acknowledging that is how they feel right now.

It may be if we work to introduce changes or begin any *process of change* that we may wish to embark upon for the future that these feelings will change too.

This is a really important aspect of acceptance...it is a 'felt sense', not just a thought process or a 'good idea'...feeling acceptance means no longer having those feelings of discontent, rejection or resistance of some kind...we can work towards acceptance of 'what is' and feel that in our whole being...

One helpful thing to remember when beginning to work towards acceptance is that much of what we 'take on' in our lives, much of what 'programming' exists within us, most of the messages, rules, regulations, meanings, beliefs, and so on, that fill our mind and thinking,...most of our habitual patterns.....most of this 'stuff' has been learned, quite unknowingly or unconsciously, from other people and from our experiences... This can mean therefore that much of this wouldn't have been 'chosen' by us, it is not our fault, but that acceptance means we are no longer resisting it but can move forwards and make the changes we would now choose..

A great example of how people have addressed this subject can be found in the following commonly used 'Serenity Prayer'...



In our practice we can relate to some of the definitions used for mindfulness which said it was 'without preference', or 'without judgement'...This would be for us to 'accept', to not have preference in this moment for anything in to be any different, to not make judgement about how things are....this would be full acceptance of this moment....as it is.

When you remember the **AIM** for your practice, the A standing for our Attitude, we can begin to understand that the '*attitude of acceptance*' can be extremely useful to develop in terms of being compassionate towards our own personal development, our brains development, our path through illness and treatment, and our life in general

All of this also relates to what can be termed '**self-acceptance**' – recognising that much of what we can develop acceptance for is within our own experiences – and again, as above, realising that this is a process and something that we are working with in the present moment, that it can help us towards making changes in the future, or at least suffering less in the present and the future...as well as enabling us to practice letting go of some of the burdens we may be carrying from our pasts...and even practicing forgiveness and self-forgiveness.

Tara Brach (2003) in her book on Radical Acceptance writes;

'Radical Acceptance reverses our habit of living at war with experiences that are unfamiliar, frightening or intense. It is the necessary antidote to years of neglecting ourselves, years of judging and treating ourselves harshly, years of rejecting this moment's experience. Radical Acceptance is the willingness to experience our life as it is. A moment of Radical Acceptance is a moment of genuine freedom.'

## Tolerance

Tolerance is one of the attributes of compassion that Gilbert (2006) listed....distress tolerance...when discussing this course with Lama Yeshe Losal Rinpoche (2014) he advised that as well as teaching mindful compassion we should include these two major influences on our well-being – **tolerance** and **forgiveness** so we can also recognise these as important attributes of our compassion...

A definition of tolerance from the internet (oxford dictionaries 2014) offers;

The ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with: *the tolerance of corruption, an advocate of religious tolerance*

Or

The capacity to endure continued subjection to something such as a drug or environmental conditions without adverse reaction:

So we can see from these definitions that it is considered to be about 'enduring' or 'putting up with' certain conditions that exist either in the external or internal environments...

On reflection these ways of considering tolerance may have a somewhat negative aspect as to how we approach or 'be with' the difficult and distressing things we encounter...the mindful and compassionate way in which we develop our tolerance of our difficulties may help us in a more beneficial way, focussing on how we 'relate' to them, or the attitudes we can bring to them – remembering the idea put forward that 'pain is inevitable and suffering optional'...

As we develop our practice of 'being in the present moment' we may recognise how the difficulties we are facing impact on us, physically, emotionally or in our cognitive processes, we may be able to develop the ability to recognise the source of the difficulties as and when they arise, whether they be internal or external....develop our skills of acceptance and allowing as we recognise that these things are already present in our experience...as we learn to view them in our awareness we may not 'wholly' relate to them but learn to view them as an aspect of our experience and not our whole experience (often referred to as not fully identifying with them as 'defining' our selves' or as non-identification')

Compassion is both the attitude we bring to our distress and the drive to alleviate the suffering we are facing as much as we can...

Through our compassionate approach to ourselves in these moments we can

develop a more kind and caring way of 'being with' these difficulties, the source they are coming from, and the impact they are having...finding antidotes for them if we can...recognising how the thoughts we have and the 'stories' we may be telling ourselves may create more feelings of suffering and lessen our abilities to tolerate the situations...using our 'compassionate voice' to talk to ourselves, practicing giving our selves compassion breaks to care for ourselves in those moments when we recognise our suffering...

We may also recognise that we have several other psychological aspects that will help us tolerate these conditions, such as our beliefs, philosophies, empathy, resolve, resilience, patience, courage, and the understanding of the impermanence of all things, bringing compassion to our intolerance ...none of which may seem easy for us to cultivate but which are so helpful when we can bring them to any particular current experiences...we recognise that all these skills and ways of being take practice, particularly when we are looking to develop antidotes, coping strategies, and the more we can practice the more we may benefit...developing all aspects of our practice particularly when we are having times of no suffering, so that when we need to tolerate or forgive we already have our developed practice to approach these moments and care for ourselves as best we can...

## **Forgiveness and self-forgiveness**

We may recognise that not allowing ourselves forgiveness for the things we may have done and not finding forgiveness for the things others may have done, leaves us with many of the burdens and pains that we carry through our lives.

We can learn to recognise that when we find forgiveness for ourselves it eases our suffering and when we find forgiveness for others it too lessens our own suffering and can improve the relationships we may have with them. We are not suggesting that we are in any way condoning what others may have done but trying to understand that as human beings they too are suffering and it may well be that their actions are somehow born out of that suffering, so we are offering forgiveness to that suffering in them...in a way we could say that we are forgiving their 'humanness' ... we all have it within ourselves to be like others, it is generally the circumstances or conditions of our lives that create the differences...

John O'Donohue (1997), writing from a Celtic spiritual perspective about the wounds we suffer in our lives says;

'To visit them in a gentle and mindful way. The one kind of creative presence we can bring to these areas is compassion. Some people can be very compassionate to others, but exceptionally harsh with themselves. One of the qualities you can develop, particularly in your older years, is a great compassion for yourself. When you visit the wounds within the temple of memory, the places where you made bad mistakes and now feel such regret, you should not blame yourself. Sometimes you have grown unexpectedly

through these mistakes. Frequently, in a journey of the soul, the most precious moments are the mistakes. They have brought you to a place which you would otherwise have always avoided. You should bring a compassionate mindfulness to your mistakes and wounds.' He goes on to say that 'when you forgive yourself, the inner wounds begin to heal.'

Gilbert (2006) says;

'Our self-critical part is often very unforgiving, and will usually see any opportunity to attack or condemn as an opportunity not to be missed. Learning the art of forgiveness however, can be important. Forgiveness allows us to learn how to change; we are open to our mistakes and learn from them.'

Tara Brach (2003) writes;

'As our heart transforms suffering into compassion, we experience being both the holder of our sorrows and the vulnerable one that is being held.' She goes on to write, 'compassion begins with the capacity to hold your own life with a loving heart. Whenever you're aware that you are suffering, if you offer yourself care – through attention, words and touch – compassion will naturally awaken.'

In answer to a question on a retreat in Nottingham about the hardships she had faced in her life Sister Chan Kong (2012) simply said;

'Compassion always wins through'.

Throughout history we can be aware of witnessing or hearing about remarkable acts of forgiveness in many different ways, we may have heard individuals forgiving others for terrible crimes they have perpetrated against them, we may have heard of such things as peace and reconciliation between warring factions or societies or countries, we may have been surprised, pleased, astonished or shocked when hearing of the power of such acts of forgiveness. We may be aware in ourselves that we have been able to forgive ourselves or others for some things and not for others.

We may agree with the 'idea' that forgiveness is a worthwhile thing to find, we may try hard to achieve it, but again, like acceptance, forgiveness for self and others is a deeply 'felt sense' that when we find it within ourselves we remove layers of our own suffering...but it can certainly be something we have to engage with and practice, often many times over before we begin to find it within ourselves.

## Resistance

Why would we resist being caring and compassionate towards ourselves?  
Some comments from previous course participants have been;

'It's because of the rules we've been given to 'not be selfish'  
'To always put others first';  
'Guilt';  
'Weakness being shown';  
'Being vulnerable is not ok'; 'fear (of caring)';  
'Fear rises when thinking about taking care of myself';  
It may 'bring stuff up'...

We can recognise that some of the ideas/messages/rules we have picked up are not actually that helpful and certainly aren't 'truths' that we have to live by....they were no doubt given with the best of intentions at the time so no need for looking back and blaming anyone, they simply are something that it is very helpful to recognise, to notice how they still influence us, and to allow ourselves to change them into more realistic and helpful ones for ourselves at this time.

It is also really important to realise that resistance is a very common response to this developmental work that we are doing with ourselves...many people experience resistance for many different reasons. To understand that we may experience it, that it is not our fault, that it arises due to the way we have been programmed and the experiences we have had in our lives and that through continued practice we can overcome it.

One way we can do that is to simply allow ourselves to bring compassion to our feelings of resistance, to be extremely kind and understanding towards it, allowing it the time and space within our practice for it to 'dissolve'...to let go of it and gradually to transform it into more of our compassionate understanding and practice

Another way we could think of addressing this borrows from some recent understandings of the nature of our universe...

A while ago there was an interview with a group of astrophysicists about the nature of the universe and when asked 'what existed before the universe began?' One of them answered 'the fields of potential'...

On reflection this was a wonderful reply....one that left it open to interpretation but seemed to make sense...so going back the billions of years to that moment of creation we can recognise that 'this moment', this person (you), all of us, existed as 'potential' in that moment, and that over billions of years that potential has been waiting for you to exist, and waiting for this moment to exist....over that time there has been the birth and death, or coming and going, or 'cause and effect', the creating of the 'right conditions' for things to come into being, many things in many moments, including, for example, the creation of the chemical carbon in the birth of stars....and some of that carbon is in your body in this moment...and all through the history of the universe so many different things unfolded in order for the carbon to be present in you in

this moment....so in terms of self-care we can see just how you are simply an 'interdependent part of this whole unfolding universe, therefore instead of seeing this as self-care, can you see it as simply caring for your part of this universe and everyone else that is in it...

In fact, we can begin to see from this perspective that to not be compassionately caring towards yourself is '*selfish*', whereas to be compassionately caring with yourself is a very '*giving thing*'...it cares for everyone and everything...

His Holiness the Dalai Lama (2001) writes extensively on the subject of interdependence including the statement;

'To have a happier future for oneself, you have to take care of everything that relates to you',

And (2006) he writes of the lack of inherent existence for all things/beings and leads to the point that this insight allows us 'access to this depth of love and compassion' which we can only find when we truly realise the interdependence of all things.

Another way to contemplate this would be to simply ask what you may teach a newborn baby about this way of being in the world. Would you teach it to live a life of self-compassion that would enable it to take great care of itself and those around it, or would you teach it not to take care, to put others first even when suffering, to be self-critical and live in fear?

## Reflection time

You may take a little time in groups and individually to reflect on the following three questions as a way of beginning to assimilate the ideas from today and how they may be beneficial for you now and in the future...

How might this impact on the way I work?

How might this impact on my personal life?

How might I put the ideas into practice in my life?

## Compassionate letter writing:

If 0 out of 10 was the least compassionate and 10 out of 10 the most compassionate you could be. Where are you on the scale of 1 to 10 when it comes to self-compassion? Now write a compassionate letter on the next page to address the gap between your score and 10, or write to an aspect of yourself you may wish to bring compassion to, or alternatively you may wish to write to your 'self critic', or of course all 3....

Here's an example of a letter that Debs wrote to herself on one of our one day retreats...

Dear Debs,  
Be kind to yourself, on such a lovely blustery day take in the fresh windy breeze  
You are looking good so enjoy your day at the retreat and allow yourself to let go and enjoy being joyful because it makes you feel joyful towards others  
Feel blessed with the friendship you have made through your illness because you are positive and only see the positive sides of life, like through the illness you've made friends with people that you otherwise would never have met  
Your illness has made you see the world in another positive light and everything is much more clearer and beautiful  
Even the worst weather has its reasons for being and is wonderful in its own right  
All the best and keep positive and keep smiling  
Love me  
Xxx  
Xx  
X

**Compassionate letter.**

**Dear** 'gap between my score and being 10 out of 10 / aspect of myself / self critic...'

**Review of the day...**

Reflect on how the day has been for you, how it has impacted, how you may agree or disagree with different aspects...and how you may take the practice forwards...

**Closing meditation – then keep practicing!!**

# THE PRACTICES

## The Practice of Non-Meditation

*Beginning by simply sitting comfortably and recognising that this is a choice you are making...to sit comfortably....alternatively you could choose to remain uncomfortable or less comfortable...so the choice is yours in this moment.... You can begin to recognise that in each moment you make choices....you choose how to be, or what to do....so with this practice of non-meditation you can begin to recognise choices and make the choice that suits you best in each moment....*

*So for now, as there is nothing to actually do, nowhere to go, nothing to aim or strive for, no-one wants or needs anything from you...you could choose to simply be....a human being....and not a human doing....*

*Now, in this moment, you can begin to notice those moments of choice for how you would like to be ... for example, you could simply choose to notice how your body is in this moment ....does the body feel 'present' in this moment...do you feel completely present in this moment....you could choose to remain present in each moment, mind and body simply sitting here...and just see how that is for you...and noticing what is happening in each moment....or you could choose not to, to ignore aspects of what may be happening and let your mind wonder...or maybe you will be present for some of the time and not for some of the time....you choose what you may like for yourself, right here, right now.....you may choose to notice how the body can feel like an extension of the chair or the cushion you are sitting on, how that contact feels in this moment how the spine feels as it rises out of that seat and noticing if your spine is comfortable....how the rest of your bones are positioned and whether they are in comfortable positions....you could decide to begin to relax your body....as you begin to relax you could choose whether you want to keep your eyes open, maybe with a 'soft focus', or to gently let them close....whichever choice suits you in this moment of relaxing....of letting go of any tension you may be carrying in your body....so a choice may be to pay attention to your body and to notice if you do have any tension, and then, if you have, to choose whether or not to keep hold of that tension, or to choose to soften or relax those parts of your body...*

*As you just sit here doing nothing, you may notice that your bodies senses remain active, monitoring your environment as they are meant and have evolved to do...noticing things like sound, light temperature, taste, the feel of things....you cannot and would not choose to turn these senses off., but you can maybe begin to notice that you have a choice what you do with the information those senses give to you, whether for example to engage those noticing's with the mind and think about them, or simply to choose to notice them but not to have to engage the mind in those habitual thought processes...*

*The same choices apply to whatever may be going on with your own inner experiences...the thoughts that may arise, the feelings you may notice, your emotional experiences or any sensations the body may be having in any moment....you may choose whether or not it suits you to engage these things with your mind or not....often you may notice that you do find yourself just thinking about things.....your mind has these many different habits and*

*experiences, thinking being a particularly habitual one....and you may notice different aspects of thinking.....and you may recognise the moment of choice to engage thinking.....many choices.....moment by moment...*

*You can choose to bring your attention to the breath in the body, simply noticing your breathing as it happens, the in-breath, the outbreath, the little pause at the end of the outbreath....or just choosing to feel the natural rhythm of the breath that's happening in your body....just choosing to spend a little time noticing how this breath feels in the body, as it happens.....*

*Each moment noticing what's happening, and in each moment being aware you make choices of how to 'be'.....*

*And then, when you feel you have practiced your non-meditation for a while you can simply choose to carry on with whatever it is you may be going to be or do next...so you could choose to carry on for a while with the practice or you could choose to bring the practice to an end, to open your eyes if they were closed....*

## **The 3 minute breathing space**

**1<sup>st</sup> minute – AWARENESS** – *Paying attention to your present moment experience. Noticing with awareness how your mind is, how you are emotionally, how your body is, here and now paying attention to any particular sensations that may be present.*

**2<sup>nd</sup> minute – GATHERING** – *Paying attention to your breath as a means of gathering your awareness and being 'present' in each moment, each in-breath and each out-breath*

**3<sup>rd</sup> minute – EXPANDING** - *Opening up your awareness from the focus on the breath to the whole of your body and the environment that surrounds you.*

## **3 Breaths**

*You can further develop your practice by simply tuning into and paying a deep attention to the next three breaths that you take – really focussing your attention onto them, being mindful of them, and realising that this brings you back into the present moment...*

## *The practice to find right concentration*

*Let's begin by simply allowing yourself to get comfortable....feeling the support you may have from your chair or cushion....and beginning to let the body relax....*

*As you know your senses will continue to be active in monitoring your environment so you will notice things like sound, light, temperature and so on...and you can recognise the moment of choice you have as to whether or not to engage anything you may notice with your mind....*

*You will also continue to notice things that may happen in your mind, such as thoughts and images appearing....you may notice how you feel right now, and you may also continue to notice any sensations the body may have....and again, you can choose whether or not to engage any of these things with our minds....*

*Now inviting you to choose a particular part of the body to focus the mind on, remembering that the focus is a gentle one – it doesn't matter which part you choose...it could for example be the inside or the end of your nose, it may be the feeling of some movement in the chest or abdomen as you breathe, or it could be your hand or your little toe....simply choosing one place for now and with an effortless effort, just resting the mind on that place...and then maintaining a gentle focus on that particular place.....noticing how that feels in the mind....*

*If the mind feels 'tense' in any way as it rests there, just gently let it ease off and not put the effort in or not try or strive to focus, so a sense of relaxing the mind as it stays focussed....finding the right level of concentration for you in this moment...*

*The 'right level' of concentration will hold you in the present moment...not too tense, not too slack.....just right.... for a few minutes just simply practicing finding and holding that right level, noticing that it is keeping you in the present moment with that part of the body, and if the mind does wonder off, which it is likely to do, noticing that and choosing to bring it gently back to that place and to rest there again with that right concentration...*

*After a while, if you would like to, you can 'zoom in' to focus the concentration more, practicing keeping it at that right level...as though you were focussing into just one particular cell in the centre of the place you are holding your concentration on....and keeping that feeling of effortless effort as you do so, noticing if the mind feels tense in any way or too slack and just simply adjusting that until you feel the right concentration again....and then for a few minutes just holding this 'single-pointed concentration....*

*As you practice you may find that you can hold the right concentration for a while and then it may change so you can practice bringing it back and re-focussing the mind and becoming present again in an effortless way with the*

*focus of your attention, finding yourself being 'mindful' of that particular place....*

*After a while you can choose to begin to open up your focus from that one single point, opening to the whole of the body...becoming aware of the whole body...practicing maintaining that right level of concentration as you do so....noticing how it feels, whether it becomes too slack or tense as we open up and gently adjusting it if we need to....*

*And then from the body you can simply allow your awareness to extend out into the space beyond the body, to the whole of your environment and to find how that is as you maintain your right concentration....again, checking how the mind may respond to this and finding that right level to hold you present in each moment, without striving or trying to do so....effortless effort and right concentration....*

*And then when you feel ready the sound of the bell brings the practice of right concentration to an end...*

## **The Awareness of Breathing Meditation**

*As you sit here doing nothing, not striving or trying, finding the right concentration with effortless effort...you can begin to have an awareness of the breath....so as you breathe in you are aware that you are breathing in.....and as you breathe out you are aware that you are breathing out.....feeling the breath happening in the body simply by being aware that it is happening.....no need to put effort into thinking about it....breathing in I know I am breathing in.....breathing out I know I am breathing out...*

*As you breathe you may notice that each breath is different...some are long or deep breaths....so you are aware as you are breathing in a long breath that you are breathing in a long breath.....and you are aware as you breathe in a short breath you are breathing in a short breath.....and as you breathe out the long breath you are aware that is what's happening, as you are when breathing out a short breath...*

*And so for a while simply sit and be aware of each breath as it happens – noticing any thoughts or commentary in the mind, no need to think about breathing, nothing to try and do, but simply being aware of the body breathing, in and out, long and short...*

*And remembering always that if you become distracted you simply bring yourself back to your awareness of each breath in the present moment...*

*After a while you then become aware of the whole body....sitting here in this moment....just noticing the body as it is....learning to hold your whole body in your awareness as well as the feeling of breathing.....maintaining that right concentration without effort...so, as you breathe in you are aware of your*

*whole body, and as you breathe out you are still aware of your whole body....you may notice that as sensations come and go in the body you are drawn to focus on them in particular, and as you do so to simply recognise that is what's happening and to gently open up your awareness back to the whole of your body again.....in the same way as you do when you notice your mind has become distracted by anything...*

*Breathing in, aware of your body, breathing out aware of your body...*

*After practicing for a while you may simply notice sensations arising within the body as they arise but without being drawn to focus on them...simply holding them in your awareness...*

*And then you simply begin to hold the breath and body lightly in your awareness and to let the body calm down....breathing in, calming the body, breathing out, calming the body....*

*You allow this body of yours to calm down, in its own time, again there is nothing to do here, no effort required...you are simply holding it in your awareness and letting it calm down....like giving it up to gravity...naturally letting it settle...allowing it all the time and space it needs to do so...letting go of tension and stress from all parts, the forehead, the jaw, the neck and shoulders, the hands, the belly, the legs, the feet....letting it all just calm down on its own as you hold the breath and the body within your awareness....*

*Breathing in calming the body, breathing out calming the body...*

*After a while you may begin to notice how the body feels as it calms down or how it feels when it is calm....just simply noticing how that is for you in any one moment....not trying to change anything, not trying to make anything happen....effortless effort, right concentration, calm body, noticing in your awareness just how that feels...breath by breath, moment by moment....*

*After a while you may begin to become aware of your mind, as it is in each moment....simply noticing as you continue to hold your breathing in your awareness...just what happens in your mind....*

*So, breathing in you are aware of your mind's activities....breathing out you are aware of your mind's activities....*

*You may notice thoughts arising and passing through the mind....you may notice thinking of one type or another following those thoughts....planning, ruminating, reflecting, analysing, evaluating, contemplating, diagnosing, worrying, and so on...so many different aspects of thinking...and as you notice you may realise just how habitual these patterns are...you may notice many different aspects of your mind....as you breathe in and out, short and long...*

*You may notice images arising of one sort or another, you may notice memories of the past or thoughts of the future....whatever is happening you simply notice it as it is, holding your mind and all its activities in your awareness, not trying to change anything, no effort required...*

*You may notice different feeling states coming and going....simply noticing these in your awareness...*

*And you may notice combinations of thoughts, feelings, images and so on....simply noticing all these activities of your mind, whilst also being able to remain aware of the breath coming and going, in and out....*

*After a while, having the breath, the body and the mind in awareness, you simply allow the mind to calm itself down – again no effort or trying, simply breathing in and out and calming the mind, in the same way we let the body calm down....*

*If you want for a short time you could feel that the in-breath is drawn into the mind to gently calm it and the outbreath is 'letting go' of all the activity of the mind....you may find it helpful to feel that your effortless focus is a little more on the outbreath for a few breaths....but then simply returning to an awareness of the whole body and mind sitting here, aware of the coming and going of the breath, letting it all become calm in its own time, effortless effort, maintaining that right concentration....*

*Breathing in calming the mind, breathing out calming the mind*

*Breathing in allowing the mind and body to become calm...*

*Breathing out allowing the mind and body to become calm...*

*So you are sitting....breathing...aware of your moment to moment experiences of breath, body and mind, allowing them the time and space to become calm...and then you can simply rest in your awareness of being calm....for as long as you choose to, if you get distracted you just bring yourself back to your awareness...your calmness...in each moment....*

*Until the bell rings 3 times to bring the practice to an end....*

## **The Practice of Stillness and Creating an Inner Refuge**

*Beginning to gently focus onto the feeling of the breath in the body, noticing the in-breath as it happens.....the moment it turns and becomes the outbreath....feeling the outbreath as it happens....and noticing the pause at the end of the outbreath...just before you naturally breathe in again....this pause, or this moment of stillness keeps coming around so practicing just noticing it for a while....*

*After a short while, beginning to notice just where in your body you may feel that stillness....where does the feeling of the outbreath end for you in your body....there is no 'right' or 'wrong' for this....you simply notice where in your body you feel that stillness....and this is your place of inner refuge....a place to choose to focus the mind, at that right level of concentration, and choose to just rest there....resting in your inner refuge, your stillness....*

*And so for a while you simply rest in stillness....noticing distraction as it happens and coming back to your stillness....*

*As you practice you will notice that everything carries on around your stillness...the environment is monitored by your senses – so you may notice sounds, light, feeling the chair or cushion beneath you...you will notice that you continue to have thoughts, feelings and body sensations....and you practice noticing all these things from your still place...your inner refuge....*

*So for a while now, just being still....*

*The bell can be rung occasionally throughout the practice for you simply to notice how you are in that moment, where the mind may be focused and to bring you back to the present moment and to your stillness.....*

*Ending with the 3 rings of the bell*

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