

Self-Compassion and Mindfulness, December 2020

According to self-compassion researcher and facilitator Christopher Germer, PhD, “self-compassion is the most natural thing in the world. Deep within all beings is the wish to be happy and free from suffering”.

Buddhism teaches us that there are causes of suffering (clinging and aversion) and a path to end suffering (the Eight-Fold path). So the focus of Buddhist practice is to end suffering, for ourselves and others, by seeing into those causations, and learning to cultivate equanimity, and a deep (bottomless) appreciation and gratitude for life as it is. How do mindfulness and self-compassion work together to facilitate ease?

The components of self-compassion are self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. Self-kindness is the opposite of self-judgment; with self-compassion a person responds to difficulties and setbacks in a warm and understanding manner rather than with harshness and criticism. Common humanity lets us know our experience is shared by others. That realization brings relief from the feelings of isolation and loneliness. Mindfulness is unattached awareness, giving the ability to accept painful thoughts and feelings in an even, balanced manner. It also opens us up to being in the present with curiosity, allowing us to inhabit the vitality of the direct experience of life. All of this helps us to let go of self-clinging, and allow life to be as it is.

Recently, I read an interview with Edward Espe Brown, an American Zen teacher and writer, relatively infamous as the author of *The Tassajara Bread Book*, written at the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center. He said, “classically, Buddhism is related to what’s called ease. Ease is where you’re at home with things. It’s about having a good relationship with yourself, being at home in one’s self.”

Dr. Shauna Shapiro, a clinical psychologist, researcher and professor, calls self-compassion the “secret sauce” in mindfulness practice, the cultivation of an ability to be with life as it is with a sense of kindness and gentleness towards one’s own experience. She notes, “what you practice grows stronger. No matter what your past, no matter what your current circumstances, it is never too late to rewire your brain for greater calm, clarity, and joy.”

Listening to a talk this morning by Vipassana teacher Sharon Salzberg, I realized she added the next critical dimension in recognizing the power of mindfulness practice. “The purpose of our mindfulness practice is not just to witness our lives, but to cultivate the insight that allows us to understand them”, said she. “Mindfulness facilitates insight, which brings us closer to our experience in a less cluttered way, and cultivates wisdom”. That’s where the power to liberate suffering and experience freedom lies!

As we move toward the close of 2020, into the time of the Winter Solstice, and the New Year ahead, let’s open ourselves to experiencing the deep mystery of this life, and the natural goodness of our own hearts. Mindfulness and Self-Compassion can help us navigate our way.

Citations from *The Mindful Way of Self-Compassion* by Christopher Germer PhD; <https://chrisgermer.com>; and *Good Morning I Love You*, by Dr. Shauna Shapiro, <https://drshaunashapiro.com/>; and Sharon Salzberg <https://www.sharonsalzberg.com/>