Cultivating Self Compassion, Week 3

Self Nourishment

Installing Supportive States through the Practice of Savoring

Home Practice

Formal Practice: Sit daily for at least 15 minutes using this Savoring Practice guided meditation.

- Submit the Daily Practice Form at least once this week
- Schedule a 1-1 with me for guidance or support

Informal Practice: Savoring Practice

- Take notice of a moment of pleasantness (sunset, laughing with friend, moment of self compassion, someone helping you, etc) that arises naturally
- Identify and linger with any pleasant bodily sensations and emotions that arise

Class Summary

Key Takeaways

1. **The qualities of the heart** (kindness, compassion, acceptance, openness, gratitude, worthiness, enoughness, patience, joy, peace, curiosity, humor, etc) **support our capacity for self compassion and mindfulness**, in other words support our ability to be with our present moment.
2. Positive Neuroplasticity refers to **our brain's ability to change through the repeated practice of something that benefits and support us**
3. **We can cultivate any state we'd like** by purposely bringing our sustained attention to the most pleasant experience of that state (bodily sensations, emotions, images, etc)
4. **We are NOT ignoring or brightsiding the bad. We are building up a resource pool of pleasantness** that serves as a solid foundation from which to work with the inevitable unpleasantness of life.

Definitions

Neuroplasticity: The ability of our brains to change their physical structure over time in response to our repeated actions, making those actions more easily accessible in the future

Positive Neuroplasticity: The ability of our brains to change in ways that benefit ourselves and others through repeated beneficial actions

Savoring Practice: From modern neuroscience, intentionally focusing and sustaining our attention on the pleasantness of an experience in order to "install" that experience in ourselves to more easily access it in the future

Why should we cultivate the qualities of the heart?

Strengthening our mindfulness

The presence of the heart qualities (kindness, compassion, acceptance, openness, gratitude, worthiness, enoughness, patience, joy, peace, curiosity, humor, etc) **strengthens our ability to be with our present experience.**

We have already been practicing kindness and compassion every time we sit down to meditate, bringing that attitude to each of our present-moment experiences.

Balancing our negativity bias

As humans, we are biologically and culturally programmed to notice threats in our environment more than pleasantness. **Engaging in Heart Practices helps shift our attention to what is pleasant, balancing our attentional scale.**

Finding our innate goodness

- **Loving hearts are innately present in us**.

- For many of us, difficult life experiences may have shrouded our heart qualities (for good reason!) and they may be more difficult to access.

- **If we look closely, we all have moments of love**. Remember a moment where you felt open-hearted, present, peaceful or joyful - maybe you were laughing with a friend, holding a baby, cuddling with your animal companion, or looking at a flower. We all have this capacity for lovingness.

- When we recognize these qualities in ourselves, **we begin to recognize them in others**

How do we cultivate the qualities of the heart?

Repeated Practice and Neuroplasticity

- **Neurons that fire together wire together**

This quote by Donald Hebb means that pathways in the brain are formed and reinforced through repetition. In other words, the more the brain does a certain task, the stronger that neural pathway becomes, making the process more easily done in the future.

- **Where attention goes, neural firing flows, and neural connection grows**

This quote by Dan Siegel means that what we are paying attention to is what we are practicing and hence what neural pathways we are reinforcing.

- **You can use your mind to change your brain to change your mind…to benefit yourself and other beings**

This quote by Rick Hansen means we can intentionally direct our attention toward a positive state which reinforces our neural pathways of that state, inclining our minds toward that state in the future.

Directing our attention

- Our **negativity bias** is focusing on where our needs aren't met. (where we are not safe enough or not satisfied enough)
- When we reduce our attention to this sense of not-enoughness, we signal to our bodies that things are basically okay
- We can **direct our attention toward what is pleasant** or neutral instead
- This lessens the disturbance of thoughts and feelings of "something's wrong, something's missing"

Being full

We can grow a sense of already being full, of having enough, within ourselves. This means that when we encounter thoughts, feelings, and sensations related to "something's wrong" or "something's missing", we can respond from an already-okay, calm foundation, rather than reacting urgently to every signal.

Self-care becomes an act of love and compassion rather than an act of desperately trying to make up for some lack.

Obstacles to cultivating qualities of the heart

Feeling vulnerable

Love can bring up feelings of vulnerability and lack of control. Sometimes it is seen as submissive or that it's giving at the expense of ourselves. In reality, **love doesn't make you weak but infinitely strong, because it allows you to be present with any experience**.

Provoking its opposite

Sometimes trying to incline toward kindness or another heart quality brings up its opposite, like resentment, bitterness, or self-judgment. **This is just the place to bring kindness** and awareness. Our job is to tend to whatever arises, no matter what arises.

Cultural Attitudes

There is a strong tendency of self-judgment, shame, perfectionism, and even self-loathing in some cultures. This makes it even more important to include YOURSELF in your wishes of care and compassion for beings. It is normal for this to be difficult. Practice kindness and compassion to whatever arises for you.

We have often been told that well-being is achieved through external gains, but in Buddhist psychology happiness is an inner state that only needs to be discovered. Once we discover this state in ourselves, happiness will flower in our eternal life as a reflection of our internal life.

Clarifications to common misconceptions

In cultivating heart qualities, we are NOT ignoring the bad and trying to only focus on the good.

- It's not about positive thinking
- **We are building our resources.** Building our resources helps us feel **good enough.**
- It **creates a foundation of goodness and solidity in ourselves** so that when the unpleasant material comes into our consciousness, we are more balanced and can better work with it.
- “The more your life sucks, the more important it is to take in the good” - Rick Hansen

We are not forcing ourselves into positive states.

- We are **planting seeds** that will flower in their **own time**, which will be different for different people.
- Start with what **most easily opens the heart.**

The goal isn’t to always have the heart open

- The heart has its cycles like everything else in nature, like a flower that opens with the sun and closes at night.
- Our job is to **love it when it opens, love it when it closes.**

How to Practice

Savoring Practice

1. Choose a heart quality you would like to cultivate (either self compassion or a quality that supports self compassion - kindness, compassion, acceptance, openness, gratitude, worthiness, enoughness, patience, joy, peace, curiosity, humor)
2. Invite a memory of a time when you experienced that quality
    a. If you don't have a memory of that quality, pick a different quality
    b. Set an intention to have an experience of the first quality so you can use the memory of it for the next practice
3. Notice any sensations, images, words associated with this quality
4. Direct your attention to what is most pleasant about the experience
5. Let the feelings be pervasive and as big as they want to be
6. Invite feelings to sink in to you, absorbing and receiving the beneficial experience

Poems

Rumi

Your task is not to seek for love
but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself
that you have built against it.

Let yourself be silently drawn
By the strange pull of what you really love.
It will not lead you astray.

Rick Hansen

Neurons that fire together wire together.
Mental states become neural traits.
Day after day, your mind is building your brain.

Martin Luther King Jr.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness - only light can do that.