

Cultivating unconditional self-compassion from a trauma informed perspective

Did you know that the latest findings in psychology (see Kristin Neff – Self-compassion, 2015) have found that the new self-esteem is really self-compassion. The old pop psychology idea of ‘self-esteem’ that took off in the 80s’, has recently been challenged and de-bunked as an unhelpful construct and goal. Why? Because self-esteem is conditional- its usually highly dependent on how well we are measuring up to our achievements, expectations and ideals. Having high self-esteem was often interpreted as having to be above average at something and theoretically, it’s impossible for everyone to be above average or above average all the time! If we are measuring up to our goals, yes, we can temporarily have a high self-esteem and feel fabulous! However, we can see that with this definition, our self-esteem can be a very brittle as soon as we face a limitation or setback. What happens if we don’t measure up - when we stop living up to our ideals, don’t know how to do something, lose something important to us, don’t feel special, fall into old patterns (appeasing, fighting or fleeing), don’t get the confirmation or mirroring that we were seeking for an achievement. What happens if we have to accept a physical or psychological limitation in ourselves or something we have invested a lot in. In these situations, if we aren’t reaching our ideals, we can easily lose our self-esteem and collapse into a place of self-doubt, worthlessness and deficiency.

Consider for a moment that true unconditional self-esteem (confidence and value) comes from cultivating radical acceptance and compassion towards all parts of our human experience – the good, the bad, the traumatized and the ugly! In my experience, the deeper our self-acceptance and self-compassion the deeper our sense of freedom, and paradoxically the more resilient our sense of self and worth actually becomes. Why might this be the case? Because it’s not dependent on whether we measure up to some ideal standard. True self-acceptance and compassion can be brought in to hold and accept any part of our human experience. It is not dependent upon the amount of possessions, recognition or achievement we are making, how well our outer situation is going, the results of our actions and how much were changing and improving. This is something that can be cultivated through the practice of embodied mindfulness and self-compassion.

The deepest acceptance

At an even deeper level, true self-esteem, what I prefer to call our true value, cannot be earned and cannot be lost. It is intrinsic to being a unique human being. Although we can learn to bring self-compassion to ourselves on a relative level (e.g *to have the intention to hold your suffering with kindness and understanding, to appreciate your good qualities, your strengths, your survival patterns, traits, healthy values and capacities*), **the deepest value comes from a place much deeper than anything that we believe, have, achieve, possess, know or acquire**. Through sincere and curious inquiry into the true nature of who we really are, we can discover that our true value is inherent in us, it’s part of us. Acceptance is built into the very fabric of awareness. Prior to the minds labels and interpretations of reality (including of ourselves), awareness has already accepted reality as it is. It is only then, does the mind kick in and begin evaluating, labelling and tinkering with it. Buddhists call this deeper place of unconditional acceptance our ‘**basic goodness**’. Knowing this place inside us can be an enormous support to then safely turn towards and integrate our unmetabolized traumas, as ‘when you know you’re the ocean the waves are less scary!’ (Tara Brach)

When we take the time to be curious, to know and investigate ourselves and the beliefs our mind has concluded about ourselves and the world (the stories we tell ourselves) we have the chance to see, and see through these beliefs and discover what’s really true and what remains when these old beliefs falls away. We discover who we are by seeing who we were not! Who are

you if you're not your stories and ideas about yourself? We might discover that no story we tell ourselves e.g *I'm worthless, I don't deserve love, I'm broken, I'm stupid* - can capture the complexity, utter uniqueness, mystery and vastness of who we really are. We can learn to risk letting go of our identification with the old deficiency or pride based self-images and identities, and can discover an already underlying accepting, open and spacious awareness that naturally holds and accepts all parts of ourselves. This is a non-dual awareness that both embodies, allows and witnesses experience at the same time. We can also consciously learn to bring unconditional compassion and presence to all parts of us, and deeply understand how our identity has been profoundly shaped by our conditioning and past attachment disruptions or traumas. *From a trauma informed perspective, often the first step in cultivating self-compassion is to acknowledge, understand and appreciate how our survival strategies and nervous system* e.g of dorsal vagal shut down or sympathetic hyper-arousal, and protector parts once kept us safe, even if they are no longer serving us well as adults if they remain in fixed states.

The challenges of self-compassion

For many, learning to become unconditionally self-accepting and self-compassionate can feel elusive and sometimes near impossible. We have been dominated by a harsh tenacious critic our whole life and the idea of being kind to ourselves not only feels foreign, but crazy! In fact it can feel dangerous and as result, we can have enormous resistance! There are many myths about self-compassion that we need to question. Many folks I've worked with, including once myself, have come to see that self-compassion is soft and weak, too vulnerable, and leads to self-pity, lack of action and or stagnancy. It can challenge one's identity of being calm, in charge, strong, independent or intellectual. Some understandably fear that self-compassion will open up all their disowned traumatized parts and lead to overwhelming feelings they don't have the capacity to handle. So, how do we navigate these obstacles and help ourselves and our clients learn to safely cultivate unconditional self-compassion and acceptance in a way that's doesn't lead to re-traumatization and shame. Is it even possible? As a survivor of developmental trauma and chronic shame I have learnt it is indeed possible. But it may be different to what you thought it would be? Here are a few learnings from my own journey and what I've learnt from clients.

Notice and acknowledge your lack of self-acceptance

As much as is possible, have the conscious intention to be curious and observe the ways you reject yourself and judge your experience or parts. From a trauma and parts work informed perspective, we benefit from knowing and appreciating the protective parts of us that have developed to keep us connected and safe from further overwhelm, danger and dysregulation. How did our various patterns of fighting, fleeing, appeasing and freezing (dorsal shutdown) originally develop as necessary and intelligent responses to insurmountable adversity, trauma and stress in order to feel safe, connected or in control. This often begins with noticing what your mind says to you and makes meaning of the events around you (e.g. *You should be more...aware, together, funny, intelligent, likeable, capable, good looking, beautiful, or your not good enough, capable enough to cope with that etc*), or the questions you ask yourself (e.g. *Am I good enough? Am I smart enough?*) that fuel your lack of self-acceptance! Furthermore, see if you can catch and notice *how your mind relates to your experience – feelings, thoughts, sensations or patterns?*

Is not uncommon that beginning to practice self-compassion will activate all the ways we resist it. Is your mind often wanting your inner experience to be different, wanting to get rid of, fight, figure out or fix unpleasant feelings (e,g uncertainty, fear, confusion, hurt, vulnerability or sadness), and wanting to hold onto pleasurable ones (happiness, confidence, power or control?). This is totally normal! It is almost inherent in being human that we do not accept, little own embody the immediacy of our experience as it is. *We are wired to seek pleasure and avoid*

pain- which often translates into living up to some ideal image and idea our minds have of ourselves. It's part of our survival instinct as well as our dominant cultural values. See if you can begin to accept this natural normal tendency of the human mind, but begin to see how this pattern may not always be serving you so well now. In fact, it may indeed perpetuate the very symptoms if anxiety or depression you want relief from. When we begin to see this, it can support us to try something different to our habitual patterns of trying to live up to some ideal fantasy image or of self-rejection. If you don't struggle with your struggle, you might find that some more space, peace and stillness open inside to allow everything to be as it is. This deeper peace often opens up effortlessly when we are no longer feeling divided inside. As some say, *the real problem, is thinking you shouldn't have a problem.*

As the Buddha noticed 2500 years ago *our tendency to seek and grasp hold of pleasant experiences and to avoid and reject unpleasant experiences causes the majority of our human suffering.* It is called dukka in Pali! Even if we were not traumatized (which many of us are) we are almost always curating and tinkering with our feelings, picking and choosing what we should and shouldn't feel, based on our conditioning from our families and wider culture! Not only do our minds reject our experience all the time in the hope of a better experience, we often deny, compensate for, ignore and even reject our self-rejection. We defend and fight our own self-hatred or shame, which just makes our self-rejection even stronger. As I like to say, what we reject goes down into the basement and pumps iron!

Identify and disengage from your 'Inner Critic'

“You cannot make yourself grow; you can only cease to interfere.
You cannot make yourself happy; you can only stop the judgements.
Growth and expansion are natural; they are the life force itself. And you cannot predict its direction.”

A.H Almaas

As mentioned, one of the first starting places in cultivating self-acceptance is to notice, understand and accept that as a result of familial or cultural conditioning, trauma or attachment wounds you have been conditioned and learnt to not accept many parts, qualities, feelings or behaviours within yourself. This is often a reflection of what messages you got explicitly and implicitly as a child and in your dominant wider culture (about what emotions, values, qualities, desires and needs are acceptable and worthy of belonging). As a result of internalizing these messages, you have developed parts that now do the job of what your care-takers and culture taught you. These parts now protect you from vulnerability, or attack some ‘unacceptable’ part of yourself e.g. an emotion, an impulse, a trait, pattern or limitation. This is what we often call the inner critic or ‘super-ego’ in psychotherapy. Paradoxically, when we deeply understand and appreciate the historic and cultural roots of our inner critic’s lack of acceptance e.g. an internalization of how we were neglected, shamed, marginalized, oppressed or criticized by our environment, (*think patriarchy, hetero-normativism, white supremacy and colonialism to name a few*) we immediately begin to experience more clarity and self-compassion. We can begin to relax and let go. I believe this is the first step on the road to self-compassion and acceptance.

What is the critic’s job?

Over the years, many clients have told me that they think they need their 'inner critic' to motivate them towards change and to become 'enough' believing that without self-criticism they will be rejected by others, stop changing, striving and growing, and become a bad person or simply a shag on a rock! I have my own version of this belief! The critic developed to originally keep you safe or connected to your caretakers (*Note - our need for attachment usually trumps our need to be authentic as highly dependent children*) and to mitigate further abuse, neglect or hurt

by judging and shutting down the parts of you that you believed put you at risk of this. If we can see that our critic was once an ally trying to keep us safe and connected, that it was a strategy of survival, not a reality, we can begin to cultivate compassion and understanding for this outdated protective part of us. It can also be helpful to see how despite its good intentions, the critic is actually making us feel more shutdown, hopeless, numb, ashamed, anxious and avoidant. In my experience it can be very useful to talk to the critic. We can say to the critic, “*thanks for your good intentions, I can see you were just trying to keep me safe by gaslighting my anger at my dad and make me play nice. But I want you to know now, you’re not helping anymore. Your intention are good but the outcome sucks. You just make me feel more hopeless. Now as an adult, I’m learning that its OK to be angry and upset*”. When we can do this, the process of dis-identification from our critic starts to naturally happen and more space opens up to be where we are, to be less divided inside.

Inquiring into our beliefs

Many of us have also learnt to believe our ‘thoughts are facts’ and that they actually tell us who we are! Even though they may feel real, they are not necessarily true? Can a thought really tell you who you are? What if they are just conditioned stories, words and sound bites in your head that you hold onto because that is what you were told, what you know and are familiar with? As mentioned, we often hold onto our negative beliefs and self-judgements because deep down we think we need them to feel safe, certain, connected, secure or to identify ourselves as a person. I’ve had many clients tell me, ‘I’d rather believe I’m a piece of shit, than have no identity at all’. For many, this undefined openness is too scary! Can you identify, inquire into and question what you tell yourself? Identify your should and should nots, and your worst self-judgements. Choose one of the top 3 worst beliefs you tell yourself, write it down and then ask the following questions. *Is it really true? Is this my deepest knowing about who I am? How does it effect me when I believe this story? (e.g. somatically, emotionally, behaviourally). What is good about believing this thought/story? How did it once keep me safe? What’s scary if I stopped believing that thought/story? What would be different in my life if I didn’t entertain this belief? Who would I be?* If you begin to identify and question your self-judgements you can start to dis-identify from them and realise you are far more mysterious, complex and full of potential than any thought can tell you. You might even discover you can be a happy no-body!!

Practice Common humanity for your trauma symptoms and effects

When we take some time to think about it, we often discover that our human pain and trauma symptoms are normal response to abnormal situations. They are universal human responses to overwhelming adversity. When we can acknowledge and understand the impact of our trauma and our trauma symptoms e.g. *dissociation, shame, sensitivity to abandonment, fear of intimacy, self-rejection, self-harming, numbing, different forms of fighting, appeasing, fleeing and freezing* are natural responses to trauma, we begin to develop self-compassion. We can also learn to appreciate that we all share universal suffering – e.g. we all grow old, experience loss and disappointment, feel shame, get ill, suffer from pain and loss, fear failure, and go through heartache. This is inevitable! When we can see the universal human condition of our pain we can connect with our common humanity, and this can bring in a sense of connection, compassion and a realization that *we are all ‘fellow travellers’ (or bozo’s on a bus) sharing a similar existence and set of life challenges*. We all make mistakes and are messy! We can feel less alone when we see our common humanity. This can take away the sense of ‘shame about shame’, and the belief that we are the ‘only one’ going through this kind of suffering. There are probably thousands of other people on this planet right now that are feeling the same feelings and having the same thoughts and conflicts as you are right now! There are many who have had similar traumas to you. What difference does it make to your suffering when you hold this perspective in mind? There is a very powerful Tibetan Buddhist compassionate practice called *Tonglen*, which invites us to identify and breath into our suffering and the suffering of all those

on this planet who have experienced similar pain to you, and to then, on the out-breath, breath out compassion and good will to yourself and all others. Experiment with this and see what difference it makes?

Consciously Practice self-compassion

We can learn to switch from the reptilian brain that's preoccupied with survival (fighting, fawning, fleeing and freezing), to the mammalian nurturing and attachment orientated part of the brain (rest, bond and relax) via the simple intention and act of self-compassion. For example, we can touch ourselves in ways that convey self-compassion and evoke feelings of safety, soothing, softening and relaxation in our biology. E.g. Notice what happens when you put one hand on your heart, and one hand on your belly for few minutes, and to say to any part of you that is scared, stuck or suffering – *I'm here for you! I'll support you!* Often this exercise can immediately evoke oxytocin, dopamine and serotonin (hormones that are associated with bonding, self-soothing, reward and pleasure) and reduces the stress hormones cortisol and adrenalin. It can take us out of being stuck in dorsal shutdown and feelings of shame.

Although our minds find this hard to believe, it's much more effective to feel safe and motivated from self-compassion, rather than being driven to action by the inner critic and the anxiety or hopelessness that it evokes. Doing this self-touch via skin to skin can also be more effective. This communicates directly to our physiology in an instant and profound way that we are attuned too and 'there' for ourselves. Then practice saying to yourself kind self-statements – e.g May I be happy, May I forgive myself for being imperfect, May I accept my limitations, May I be kind to myself. As you gently and silently say these statements to yourself, while having your hand on your heart, or gently stroking your arms and see what happens in your body. You may notice that you start to soften, relax and feel more self-compassion towards your own human suffering and limitations. If resistance comes up towards this process, we can then allow that and be curious what the resistance and concern is if we did offer ourselves self-compassion. We allow the lack of allowing.

The paradox of change

Part of the paradox of change is that the more we try to change, the more we stay the same. What you resist persists! What you reject you become! This is a fundamental tenet of gestalt psychotherapy's paradoxical theory of change. And paradoxically, the more we notice, be curious and stay embodied with and present to where we are, the more we naturally change, unfolding into our potential and becoming more integrated. Change happens through the process of including, understanding and allowing our experience and patterns to be as they are. It happens when we learn to get out of our own way. From this place we can naturally transcend and include it at the same time. This is the process of change. The only way out, is through - as we say in gestalt. The paradox is that the more you integrate your experience, the more you welcome all your parts home (*in a safe way- more on this coming*) the more you naturally disidentify from them. You are no longer caught in it. *As soon as you see it, you don't have to be it!* You become the witness to it and discover there is some part of you bigger than the ever changing content of your experience. With more awareness there is more choice and response flexibility.

A.H Almaas, founder of the diamond approach says, the most natural way to become who you are (your true nature), is to be exactly where you are! So, it turns out, instead of trying to feel better, we need to get better at feeling - into exactly where we are and to then let go of the hope that our experience should be any different to what it is. Easier said than done! The more we do this with *curiosity and kind embodied understanding*, we naturally dis-identify and unblend from the experience we were previously stuck in. More space opens up naturally, and we feel

more integration and freedom. This doesn't mean we have to like it! It just means we stop rejecting it. Some experiences are very painful and difficult to sit with, so why would we like it. However, if we can make space for it, put out the welcoming mat and let go of struggling with it, we can discover that experience naturally flows through us and moves towards completion. All the difficult and challenges experiences we have faced and experienced pave the way for who we become and grow into. The obstacle becomes the path as the Zen Buddhists often say. The irony is that instead of finding freedom 'from' our experience, we find freedom within it. We don't get rid of our experience, we get with it, embody it, and it naturally transforms.

One of my favourite poems captures what I'm trying to say beautifully

*When effort and judgement are cleared away,
that which is itself, will of itself, become itself.*

Taoist saying

One drop at a time - Dosing the level of self-compassion with titration and pendulation while staying in the window of tolerance

You might be thinking that this wonderful idea of 'welcoming the unwelcome' (see Pema Chodron's book) might sound well and good in theory, but how do I do this if facing my feelings and body sensations feels like I'm opening a trap door to hell! What if facing my feelings sends me off the cliff! For trauma survivors, we know that the practice of staying with our disturbing experience goes against the grain of our survival conditioning to disconnect and is not easy to say the least. Many of our clients have highly dysregulated nervous systems and are in a deep core dilemma about reconnecting to their feelings and body. In fact, for many even the idea of learning to connect to themselves can activate a fear response. As Bruce Tift, author of 'Already free – Buddhism meets psychotherapy on the path to liberation' likes to say, *befriending our disturbing emotions is counter-instinctual and counter-cultural*. This is especially true for trauma survivors. Our normal and natural instinct, intensified by trauma conditioning is to want to get rid of our annoying patterns or to get away from painful feelings and sensations and to live above the eyebrows (in our intellects), or disconnected from our bodies.

So how do we integrate the teachings of mindfulness and self-compassion in a way that is trauma informed, and doesn't blow up our systems. The most important skill I have learnt as a trauma therapist is to help my clients learn track their nervous systems and window of tolerance and to titrate (touch into a little bit) the amount of activation they are feeling. This means, instead of saying, "*lets welcome and be with that feeling*", I might ask instead, using invitational language, "*Is it tolerable to be with just a drop of that feeling momentarily and see what happens next*". *Can you feel just 2% of that grief...fear...anger.... right now, and then lets pendulate your attention back to your resource and out the feeling. What happens if you just touch into the edges of that feeling for 5 seconds, and then touch back out to the resource of that tree outside the window*". The practice of tracking the nervous system, titrating and pendulating back to a resource is a useful skill in complementing self-compassion work. Because self-compassion can lead to expansion and more openness, we need to pace this process, as many feelings can arise quite quickly in a way that can be overwhelming. Keep asking your clients, *are we going at a pace that is tolerable for you. How are you doing with this feeling*? Remember, our clients need brakes (and boundaries) before they put on the accelerator and learn to say yes to our experience or connection with others.

Using the body to contain strong emotions supports co-habitation

Experience is naturally self-liberating when we stay present with it in our bodies. Most of us on a healing path are beginning to learn this. When we stay fully present to the charge of our feelings in our body (without going into our minds), by recognising, naming and allowing them, we often discover that they tend to flow through us in waves, often in a matter of a few minutes. In my experience, this process is powerfully supported and kept safe by the practice of '**embodied containment**' – consciously inviting the charge of intense feelings to spread out and expand into our arms, belly and legs using your breath and movement to support this. (Read – The practice of embodying emotions - by Raja Selvam). This allows the whole body to be a container and holder for our feelings, which makes it much easier to tolerate and mitigate re-traumatization. Noticing and naming our feelings also gets our frontal lobes on line and calms down the reptilian brain. If you can name it, you can tame it as Dan Siegel famously says.

In my view, the path of integration involves learning to become aware of and then to '*be embodied with*' these unpleasant sensations and emotions, to breathe into and hang with them, without getting caught up in any fixed storyline about them. Can you do the counter-instinctual move to witness, label, allow and tolerate the intensity of these painful feelings and sensations (*using titration and pendulation skills*), and to suspend the compulsion to go into your thoughts about them e.g figuring them out, judging them, fixing or jumping to conclusions about them. To support containment of emotions, can we invite all of our body – our arms, legs, feet, hands and belly to be a container to sit with the intense wave of our feelings, at the sensation level and let it flow through us. To go one step deeper, listen to the message in your feelings – what are they here to tell you about what you need to feel in more balanced and complete. This is true unconditional self-acceptance, which leads to the confidence that we can befriend all of our feelings with kindness. If we are not afraid of our feelings, we not afraid of life, because facing life fully means being willing to feel everything!

Self-compassion is supported by self-regulation

If we can cultivate more ventral vagal capacity, we automatically support the neuro-platform for self-compassion and acceptance. From a ventral place we can learn to witness and allow dorsal or sympathetic energy without getting lost in it. But, what gets in the way of your self-regulation and cultivating ventral vagal capacity?

Neuroscientists have discovered that due to our evolutionary history of growing up around constant danger, our neuro-ception has become more strongly wired to look for and notice the threats than safety. As Rick Hanson famously says, we are '*Teflon for the good and velcro for the bad*'. We are more likely to notice and fixate on the one negative experience that happened at a social gathering, rather than all the moments of positive connection and safety. We so easily fixate on what is wrong and what needs improvement in ourselves or others. Where do you get most hooked into this pattern of noticing what's wrong with yourself or the world? e.g. With your work, your relationships, your parenting, your lifestyle choices, your body, your friendships, your personality?

This negativity bias survival instinct is wired into our primitive brain, and exacerbated by trauma and attachment disruptions. Trauma naturally leaves people feeling dys-regulated in their nervous system and generally skews their neuro-ception towards noticing threat and overlooking cues of safety, or if your more dorsal dominant, numbing out to threat cues all together which is also maladaptive. Its natural and partly adaptive to notice threat when in proportion to the situation were in, but what if this survival function of expecting or numbing out to danger is stuck on 'on' all the time? The more we get hyper-focussed on what's wrong or where the threat is, the more we strengthen those same fear based neural pathways and trigger more stress hormones into our system (e.g cortisol and adrenalin). This perpetuates hyper-arousal and over time, when chronic, can give rise to stress related symptoms e.g body tension, lowered immunity, digestive problems etc.). We may also overlook the support and safety that is actually here because we're too busy expecting threat!

Notice the support that's already here

So, what can we do about this? When you have awareness of your trauma's survival drives and negativity bias's you have more choice to then practice balancing and putting your attention on the opposite – What's good, nurturing and or working for you in your life? Can you take a moment to appreciate what are some of your good qualities and inner capacities, and where you perceive the absence of threat? The more you put your attention on your capacities, or what supports you, the more your threat perception system starts to relax. A key principle here is that the mind takes its shape by what you pay attention too. With awareness, you can shape your brain by directing your attention in new and supportive ways that then change your mind! This called positive neuro-plasticity in neuroscience!

An antidote to trauma and the power of the negativity bias is to pay more attention to what supports, nurtures, gives us pleasure, connection and satisfaction. Deb Dana, a well known author on poly vagal theory, calls these experiences 'Glimmer' moments. Glimmers support the development of ventral vagal capacity. Instead of focussing just on the triggers, focus on the glimmers, that is the people, places and activities that bring us feelings of wellbeing. When we pay attention to something that supports us (or co-regulates us), can we let this become fleshed out through our 5 senses, and then to allow the feeling to become absorbed into our body awareness. When we notice something that opens our heart, touches us, or gives us pleasure or support can we stay with this feeling and let it land in our felt sense one drop at a time e.g patting your dog. *When we pay attention to the good, we start to rewire our brain and develop neural pathways that support the development of regulation, well-being and happiness in the brain circuits.* Overtime, with repeated practice, ventral vagal capacity will develop and we experience more internal regulation and coherence. When these brain circuits develop, we start to shift our mood from pessimism to optimism, from shame to acceptance, and ultimately attract more pleasure and nourishment into our lives. This sense of well-being then supports and invites better personal and professional relationships and we develop positive relational feedback loops.

Life supports you

As already mentioned, it's easy and natural to focus on what's not working. With some tongue and cheek, I call the things that don't work in my life, 'Embuggerments!' The things that get in the way of life flowing harmoniously! Without dismissing the embuggerments and the many injustices, horrors and difficult things in life, what if we also balance this out with taking a moment to appreciate how the intelligence of life is already supporting you without any effort on your part. Life has given you a brain to discern, problem solve, appreciate and make sense of things, and a body to keep you alive, help you move, act, contact and sense the life around you. It may not be perfect, but your immune system, circulatory system, respiratory system, digestive system and many other systems and organs in your body are all designed to support you, and to keep you alive. Isn't this an amazing thing! The universe has created a planet that has created just the right amount of atmospheric gases and pressure to support you. This planet has developed plants to create oxygen and absorb CO₂, animals to support you, a blue sky, clouds to provide rain, green grass, trees, forests and sunshine. Even our crazy society supports us in many ways with roads, cafes, super-markets, helpful technology. I know not of this is perfect and that there can be challenges and limitations in all of these things, but there is also a lot of support that life gives us.

Can you practice noticing what can you be grateful for, what you appreciate, do well, and where you feel supported by life? What can you savour in your life that is pleasurable, soothing,

empowering, supportive, safe and caring? This practice can be powerful anti-dote to contradict and update the trauma generated beliefs and identities. we may have developed over our lifetimes.

Please note –the practice of taking in the good can be scary, as some of us are scared to feel too good, in case it gets taken away and leaves us disappointed. Hence some unconsciously decide that it's safer to feel unhappy. 'Better the certainty of misery than the misery of uncertainty' is a famous saying by Virginia Satir to describe this common phenomena.

Bibliography

A.H Almaas (2013). The unfolding now – realizing your true nature through the practice of presence.

Jeff foster (2012) – The deepest acceptance – Radical awakening in ordinary life.

Rick Hanson (2013)- Hardwiring happiness – How to reshape your brain and your life.

Pema Chodron (2019) – Whole hearted living in a broken-hearted world.

Kristen Neff (2011) – Self compassion – the proven power of being kind to yourself.

Peter Levine (2011) – In an unspoken voice – how the body releases trauma and restores goodness.

Bruce Tift (2015)- Already free. Buddhism meets psychotherapy on the path to liberation.