

**SELF-COMPASSION:  
INTEGRATING BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICES  
WITH WESTERN PSYCHOTHERAPY AND A GROUP  
COUNSELLING CURRICULUM**

by

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## Abstract

In this dissertation, self-compassion and its significance to us are explored from the bifocal perspective of contemporary Western psychotherapy and Buddhist wisdom traditions containing philosophical, spiritual and psychological teachings. The dissertation explores the dialogue and synthesis that have been transpiring for the last few decades between Buddhist and Western psychological systems as proposed and practised by Buddhist and Western psychotherapists, psychiatrists and teachers on compassion and self-compassion. My personal orientation and experience of both Buddhism and the practice of Western psychotherapy serve to promote here a rich, meaningful integration and application of self-compassion in the arenas of education and human service, including schooling and mental health.

Chapter 1 is a discussion of the context for my inspiration to study and research self-compassion as a Buddhist practitioner and psychotherapist. In chapter 2, I examine the Buddhist concept of self, as it is integral to the understanding of self-compassion. Perspectives and conceptualizations from some of the primary contributors to the burgeoning field of self-compassion are presented. Chapter 3 discusses further contemporary Buddhist discourses and applications on self-compassion in the therapeutic context. Topics of particular relevance are explored: mindfulness, Buddhist view of reality, wisdom, altruism and loving-kindness practice. In chapter 4, ancient Buddhist texts from both classical and ongoing traditional forms enrich the study; these provide a sacred historical authenticity to the discussion of compassion and honour the Buddhist foundational influences and practices.

Chapter 5 is on emotion regulation. Self-compassion is the significant practice and skill involved in this topic. Emotional regulation, as it relates to cultivating positive emotions such as compassion and loving-kindness, has become integrated into affective contemplative practices. Chapter 6 presents scientific research relevant to compassion and self-compassion.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 present modalities for the development of self-compassion in group settings. Chapter 7 presents three major group therapy curricula used today by pioneers in the field of self-compassion: Compassion-Focused Therapy, Compassion Cultivation Training, and the Mindful Self-Compassion program. For chapter 8, I create a specialized self-compassion therapeutic application for Buddhist practitioners using a Tibetan Buddhist practice of *Avalokiteshvara*, the Buddha of compassion. Chapter 9 discusses my secular group psychotherapy curriculum for self-compassion. The appendix includes an in-depth nine-session guide for facilitators of that curriculum.

## *Dedication*

It is my hope and aspiration that this dissertation contributes to the blossoming field of self-compassion research, study, skill development and practice, while providing a refuge in self-compassion for people who suffer in darkness, loneliness and anguish. My personal dedication for this dissertation:

*May all beings awaken compassion for self.*

*Luminosity carries our existence beneath the subtle flow of impermanence.*

*Pools of swirling torment obscure radiance.*

*Compassionate mind warms and loves, opening through density of afflicted mind.*

*Light clears completely and with wonder.*

*Mind rests in a place of solace.*

—Amy Roomy

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## **List of Acronyms**

CCT	Compassion Cultivation Training
CFT	Compassion-Focused Therapy
MCP	Mindful Self-Compassion program

## Glossary

<i>Anatman</i>	Sanskrit for "non-self"
<i>Anatta</i>	Pali for "non-self"
<i>Anussati</i>	"Mindfulness" is one of its translations
<i>Avalokiteshvara</i>	Buddha of compassion
<i>Bhikkhu</i>	Monk
<i>Bodhicitta</i> ( <i>Bodhichitta</i> )	"Awakened heart" or mind
<i>Bodhisattvas</i>	People who dedicate their life to help others achieve liberation
<i>Brahma</i>	"Creator God" in Hinduism
<i>Brahmaviharas</i>	Also referred to as the Four Immeasurables, four Divine Abidings, Four Divine Abodes, four illimitables, or sublime abidings
<i>Citta (chitta)</i>	Mind or heart
<i>Dhammapada</i>	Essential teachings of the Buddha
<i>Damtsik</i>	Tibetan for "pledges"
<i>Dukkha</i>	Pali for "suffering"
<i>Gelug</i>	One of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The other three are Kagyu, Nyingma, and Sakya.
<i>Geshe</i>	In Tibetan Buddhist scholarship, "Geshe" is equivalent to a PhD
<i>Jhana</i>	Wisdom
<i>Karuṇā</i>	Pali and Sanskrit for the word "compassion"
<i>Khenpo</i>	A title given in recognition for formal scholarly training in Tibetan Buddhism
<i>Klesha</i>	Afflictions and defilements
<i>Lojong</i>	"Mind training"
<i>Lorig</i>	Tibetan for "Buddhist psychology"
<i>Madhyamaka</i>	Middle Way philosophy
<i>Mahayana</i>	Sanskrit for Great Vehicle
<i>Metta</i>	Love or "friendliness"
<i>Metta bhavana</i>	The practice to cultivate loving-kindness
<i>Mudita</i>	"sympathetic joy"

<i>Nying-je</i>	Tibetan for "compassion"
<i>Pandit</i>	Sanskrit scholar and teacher
<i>Paramitas</i>	Perfections to be achieved in Mahayana Buddhism
<i>Prajna</i>	Sanskrit for "discriminating awareness"
<i>Prasangika</i>	"Consequentialist school" of Madhyamaka
<i>Quan Yin</i>	Female Buddha of compassion
<i>Rinpoche</i>	"Precious One," title given to senior abbot or lama who chooses his rebirth and is recognized as such by high lamas
<i>Sadhana</i>	A Buddhist puja or practice
<i>Samadhi</i>	"Meditative concentration"
<i>Sgom</i>	Tibetan for "meditation"
<i>Shamatha</i>	Sanskrit for "Calm abiding meditation"
<i>Skandhas</i>	Sanskrit for "heaps," also referred to as the "five aggregates"
<i>Sunyata</i>	Sanskrit for "emptiness"
<i>Tantra</i>	"Resultant path," also known as the "swift vehicle"
<i>Tathagata</i>	Honorific for Buddha
<i>Tonglen</i>	"Taking and Giving"
<i>Tsewa</i>	Tibetan word for "compassion"
<i>Tulku</i>	Title given to reincarnate lama
<i>Upeksha</i>	Sanskrit for "equanimity"
<i>Vajrayana</i>	An esoteric form of Mahayana Buddhism
<i>Virya</i>	Thurman translates as "effort," "striving," "vigor," "energy," and "diligence"
<i>Vipaśyanā</i>	Sanskrit for "insight meditation"
<i>Yanas</i>	Vehicles
<i>Yidam</i>	Image of a deity

## **1. Inspiration and Context for my Exploration of Self-Compassion as a Psychotherapist and Buddhist Practitioner**

*Self-compassion*

*Open heart of golden light*

*Caressing tender mantras*

*Embracing all directions*

*All darkness clears*

*Boundless like space*

*Scattered stars across the sky*

*Reflect scintillating light on water*

*Luminous and unceasing*

—Amy Roomy

Since 2002, when I first became aware of the need for self-compassion group curricula, accompanied by my heartfelt wish to be of service by offering a curriculum addressing that need, the world of self-compassion has burgeoned into a field of extensive research and writing. A significant number of thinkers in the field of self-compassion have an orientation in Buddhism. Contributions to self-compassion have come primarily from Western psychiatrists, psychologists, professors and researchers, professionals in the helping field, and contemporary Buddhist scholars and teachers. I will discuss in the course of this thesis commentaries from Buddhist teachings for practitioners and clients.

Life is precious, and I believe that working with the mind is paramount to a meaningful life. Self-compassion is a nascent field in which I hope this dissertation makes some small contribution. As some of the research demonstrates in this dissertation, self-compassion has been shown to be efficacious for individuals, and my personal experience has shown it can also be transformative when cultivated by participants in a group setting. The interdependent web of compassion that connects the people of the world can be fostered by self-compassion.

In the last two decades, there has been a rapid rise in research into the cultivation of self-compassion through contemplative practices, in terms of its effect on people's sense of well-being and happiness. I am particularly interested in advancing this research by having developed a curriculum on self-compassion for those who suffer from mental health and substance use concerns. As more research, particularly in neuroscience and clinical psychology, corroborates the efficacy of contemplative practices in enhancing self-compassion, I am confident that the interest in, and demand for, further self-compassion curriculums will continue to grow. In addition, I have deep respect and love for the Dalai Lama and his teachings. Dr. Robert Thurman, Columbia University Chair of Indo-Tibetan Studies, repeats an inspiring comment by The Dalai Lama at Columbia University: "Education should also be about educating a good heart" (personal communication, Maitripa Institute in April 2016). My dissertation will be grounded in this spirit, providing a valuable and meaningful area of study for those working in the helping professions and their clients.

*The Online Etymology Dictionary* translates the word "compassion" from Latin: *com* means "with, together" and "from Late Latin *passionem* (nominative *passio*) 'suffering, enduring'" (Harper, 2001–2004). In terms of a description for self-compassion, Dr. Kristin Neff, psychologist and associate professor at the University of Texas, provides a process description: self-compassion is "compassion turned inward" (Neff, 2012, p. 79). Later in this dissertation, I refer to other sources on the meaning of compassion.

My desire to be of service by providing a curriculum to foster the development of self-compassion within group psychotherapy was inspired by four pivotal experiences in my life. The first was meeting a Tibetan lama; the second came from spending time in India; the third was through an experience of beauty; and the fourth was my career experience as a counsellor.

My own experience of receiving love and compassion from a high lama, Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche (1930–2002), was profound. The living lineage of Tibetan Buddhism is sustained through the student-mentor relationship, and the power of spiritual mentoring is highly valued. My personal experience reflects this larger transformative process for the development of self-compassion. I was deeply blessed to meet Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche when I was fifteen. Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche was a Tibetan physician, poet, devotional singer, calligrapher, sculptor and a powerful, realized lama/master and scholar who was recognized by other lamas and sanghas. In the Buddhist world, he was particularly known for siddhis (spiritual powers). Furthermore, he was one of the first lamas to initiate Western women as lamas.

My teens were a difficult time and I was fortunate to have Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche encourage me to come and stay with him and his sangha in Cottage Grove, Oregon. I attended school there for a trimester. In the early mornings, we would all meet to engage in Dharma practice. It was a healing experience, being with people who were dedicated to self-liberation and the liberation of others through group practice. When I met Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche, his love for others and for me gave me a sense of being protected with an internal place of refuge. Later in my life, when I was faced with very frightening experiences, his image would ignite in my heart and provide solace. Internal refuge is the process of developing self-trust through self-compassion. The space of refuge is created by relaxing the mind into a different mindset than the afflictive mind. This different mind stream, a positive internal space of peace and quiet, acts as an antidote to the afflictive state. An example of refuge is visualizing an image that represents this and then allowing it to be felt in the heart.

One of the experiences that inspired me to practise and study Buddhism occurred after I had sat with him in a sangha practice. He was gazing upon me and I experienced a sense of freedom and quiescence, together with a profound feeling of bliss. Afterwards, upon reflection, I realized this transmission had become one of the guiding points of my life. Mind to mind transmission is a direct experience from teacher to student. A glimpse of the developed mind of the teacher is a profound experience that can be integrated into the mind of the student.

That experience has stayed with me because it transcended any sense of suffering or limiting view of self and others. On a few occasions, he specifically encouraged me to practise compassion. A relationship with a spiritual mentor can be deeply validating as one does not feel so alone and isolated. The mentor who cares with wisdom is a witness to one's suffering. This can also occur in any context in which one feels deeply cared for by another or others, such as a supportive group therapy program. Feeling deeply cared for can provide the vital context within which self-compassion can develop. I have found that some lamas (male and female) have been unconditional and non-judgmental in their love and compassion, which diminishes the split in oneself that is caused by self-judgement, self-blame and self-criticism. Having this kind of relationship paves the way for self-acceptance. Also, a loving, compassionate therapist can inspire a client to begin self-healing. Therapeutically speaking, such a relationship opens the door to healing early disruptive attachments in the client.

Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche's compassionate presence has stayed with me throughout my life, reassuring me in difficult times. I was fortunate to experience his mind to mind capacity for spiritual guidance, similar to the expression "heart to heart." He often had a penetrating wisdom teaching point with people he met. One of his last comments to me before he died was: "Be compassionate." The seeds were thus sown for me to pursue a life of helping others. He helped me to focus on compassionate service in my life. His teachings have been pivotal in my pursuit of self-compassion academically and professionally as a therapist. For me, and I believe for many other people, providing compassionate service is integral to a sense of well-being in life. After some time in the

counselling field, I also realized that teaching self-compassion was essential for people to achieve sustained improvement in their mental health.

Victor Frankl (2006), a psychiatrist who was a pivotal inspiration in my work with clients, stated that keeping his beloved wife's image ignited in his heart was, in part, what enabled him to survive the Nazi concentration camps. His wife, held in another concentration camp, represented an internal refuge for him, helping him to transcend the inhuman conditions. Similarly, an image of Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche will always be alive within my heart as a compassionate inspiration and a source of guidance.

The second pivotal phase of my inspiration occurred during a sophomore trimester that I spent at a university in India in 1987. This experience led me to observe that a community can also act as a spiritual mentor. Members of a small women's commune considered by some at the time of the "lowest caste," (Dalits or the official name of Scheduled Caste is now given), were able individually to cultivate self-compassion through solidarity and mutual support. These women embarked on the courageous endeavour of living together as a way to protect and support one another against stigma and oppression from the larger social structures. My understanding is that this was unheard of at that time. I was deeply moved by the sense of community that fostered in these women the ability to engender self-compassion through a sense of belonging. The group dynamic of sharing in a safe and supportive environment can provide some of the most profound experiences in the development of self-compassion. Being in a supportive, loving community can also provide a place of refuge.

Later in life, during two Buddhist pilgrimages, India provided other pivotal experiences for me. India is a deeply mystical and spiritual country where many different religious and spiritual practices co-exist in harmony. Although witnessing the country's widespread poverty and suffering elicited a deep empathy from within me, the sense of being overwhelmed was lessened by the inherent sense of sacredness and by some particularly moving experiences. One such experience occurred during a visit to a sacred site, when the rest of the pilgrimage group proceeded ahead of me. I always enjoyed



spending time with the poverty-stricken young children, many of whom followed foreigners wherever they went. On this particular day, five or six children approached me and asked for food or money. I obliged and then walked with them down the mountain path to the local village. Sitting on the ground, there was an elderly blind man who was also unable to walk, and the children proceeded to give him all the food and money they had acquired. It was obvious that they did this out of kindness rather than some kind of obligation. Witnessing such deep compassion in such small children (some as young as three or four) reinforced my abiding belief that there is an intrinsic goodness within us all.

A third pivotal experience in my life occurred in Washington, DC. I had the opportunity to visit a number of art museums and galleries, and in particular to spend some time at the National Gallery of Art. I noticed that my mind settled when contemplating the beauty of the art, and I also experienced a transcendent quality of mind. The awe that magnificent art inspires in me creates a sense of losing my limited self and is akin to a sacred moment and mystical experience. This sense of awe and inspiration from beauty shifts the perspective of heart and mind, and, at times, is an experience beyond suffering. There are many ways to shift into this awareness so that one has reprieve from afflictions. In group therapy, I encourage participants to take the time to experience beauty through a creative endeavour such as being in nature, listening to or playing music, or visualizing something that is beautiful to them. I feel it is an act of deep self-kindness to nourish oneself through beauty. In doing so, one connects to a more expansive experience, which in turn connects to a healing energy. It is a form of self-care and self-compassion to allow and tap into the experience of beauty. Integrating beauty in one's life allows engagement with a mindset different from that of daily problems and narrative.

The fourth pivotal phase that deepened my interest in self-compassion was my career. Having worked as a Registered Clinical Counsellor and a psychotherapist in mental health and substance use since 2002, I have witnessed much suffering related to people's inability to apply self-compassion in their daily lives. This inability seems

common throughout society, not just in those who suffer from mental health concerns, and I see a pervasive need for all human beings to understand, develop and/or integrate self-compassion into their lives. I am passionate about meeting this need, having personally and professionally witnessed the transformations that can occur, as a result of my psychotherapeutic work.

The above four pivotal experiences contribute to the nascent field of self-compassion that in my opinion has immense value for psychotherapy and education. From the outset, I also wish to acknowledge, for the sake of scholarship in the present context, that this field has been nurtured and fostered by Buddhism. The essence of Buddhism is founded upon compassion. Buddha stated in the *Ariguttara Nikaya Sutta*: that the "*tathagata*, the *Arahant*, the Perfectly Enlightened One" [...] "arises [...] out of compassion for the world" (Bodhi, 2005a, p. 50). As part of my doctoral research, I conceptualized and developed a curriculum for a group psychotherapy program on self-compassion that could be used as a tool by therapists working with their clients. The content of the nine modules within my curriculum of self-compassion is provided, at various points, in this dissertation. For example, one of the modules focuses on working with internal patterns, a topic explored by various writers, such as Karen Horney, Pema Chödrön and Arnold Mindell, whom I have referenced. From a Buddhist perspective, mindfulness combined with compassion is a profound tool for undoing deeply ingrained negative internal patterns, as well.

Groups of people have been galvanized to explore compassion through various media such as the Charter for Compassion, an initiative of Karen Armstrong, an influential author and scholar. The Charter for Compassion, developed in 2009, is based on the view that compassion is a common practice in most religious, spiritual, ethnic and cultural groups. The Charter for Compassion provides and encourages networks for communication. Armstrong (2010) also stated that it is a way to bring major religions into harmonious participation (Armstrong, 2010). I agree that the practice of compassion need not be based in any religious or spiritual orientation to be developed and/or

appreciated. In my own personal work, I have never found the language of self-compassion to be relegated to a particular belief system.

Self-compassion is a very broad area of study, involving many factors, and the transformative nature of self-compassion can be experienced in many different ways. Self-compassion is not only a way of viewing oneself but also a skill—the ability to cope with moment-to-moment experience while simultaneously transforming the self. Participating in the development of a self-compassion curriculum, through the research explorations of this dissertation, brings me a sense of participating in a meaningful movement that is benefiting the well-being of society and individuals. It is my heartfelt belief that further development of self-compassion is needed in Western culture, and that Buddhists and Western psychotherapists are meeting this challenge. The importance of self-compassion in our global culture cannot be denied.

Being a practising psychotherapist, I know from experience that a cultivation of gentle warmth and friendliness towards, and acceptance of, one's inner life is essential for the development of healthy self-worth. As Khenpo Gawang (2013), a Buddhist scholar and teacher, points out, with reference to introspective Buddhist practices, one works with the mind gently and with no blame. Furthermore, Khenpo Gawang says that, in order to live meaningfully, one needs to meet one's inner experience with honesty, self-reflection, kindness and love.

I feel that our habitual tendencies, which are largely destructive and negative, prevent us from experiencing our basic nature, Buddha nature, which in Mahayana Buddhism is said to be pure of adventitious afflictions. Yielding to the destructive and ego-driven impulses does not serve us and takes us further away from our true essence. Gawang (2013) feels that, by implementing and working with skilful approaches and perceptions, even deeply ingrained habits of harmful and negative self-deprecation can be shifted. "Dissolving patterns of low self-worth is one of the aims of contemplative meditation. This occurs through the confidence gained by knowing ourselves by means of meditative analysis" (p. 115).

The deeper one descends into mental afflictions, such as greed, jealousy, discontent, and anger and hatred, often accompanied by a sense of suffering alone, the more distorted and inaccurate one's perception of the world becomes. The lens through which one perceives the world and oneself is overshadowed by self-loathing when one is consumed by such afflictions. The social, cultural and economic context of North American life can exacerbate competitiveness and isolation because of its emphasis on material gain, success and the pursuit of power. Dr. Robert Thurman highlights the importance of working with our minds to counter the cultural and social context in which we are embedded (2004). He states that, even though people live lives that seem outwardly and objectively positive, many suffer from self-loathing because of cultural norms such as self-aggrandizement and selfishness in the pursuit of individual success. Many attribute these norms partially to the negative effects of capitalism. This pursuit only leads people to feel more disconnected, alone and despairingly sad—which I believe further stresses the importance of cultivating self-compassion.

Individual pursuit of excessive consumerism is often grounded in the relentless endeavour to always want more and more. There can be an addictive component to consumerism. I use the word "addictive" because addiction can imply impulsivity and an inability to foresee consequences from the impulsivity of that moment. Cultures valuing competition and excessive consumerism can undervalue care of the environment. Globally speaking, frequently one can see that consumerism most directly affects people in need by the environmental costs of overproduction and waste. Having compassion for self and others includes living honourably with the earth, so that we take care of everyone by our actions, those in this current life and those to come in the future. Excessive consumerism can be a way to experience ephemeral pleasure, but over time it can leave people feeling empty inside. This sense of emptiness furthers one to try and find escape through mistaken paths, ultimately leading to depression, anxiety and despair. Self-compassion training enables people to find their own internal resources of self-soothing and self-kindness, hopefully enabling the person to be less apt to pursue comfort in external stimuli.

One of my most painful and sad experiences as a therapist is witnessing the effect of trauma on people, particularly how trauma can erode and diminish one's sense of self-worth and ability to deeply feel one is worthy of self-care and self-kindness. All traumas have the potential to profoundly affect every aspect of a person's being, particularly the psyche in which one lives. I have observed that if developmental trauma is experienced in the form of abuse or severe neglect by one or more significant attachment figures, the afflicted person may not develop the skills to regulate their inner emotional life through self-compassion. The way the significant attachment figure treats that child can become the accustomed way that child learns to experience inner life.

Although attachment theory is related to the general world of development psychology, I have found it helpful in having a framework with developmental trauma. Attachment Theory has contributed to deep understanding of the effects of certain environments and responses on early attachment with the primary caregivers. John Bowlby, psychologist and psychiatrist, was a pioneer in the development of Attachment Theory. Mary Ainsworth, psychologist, also was a major contributor to Attachment Theory and she and her colleague, Sylvia Bell developed a method by which to observe and assess infant-mother interactions called the Strange Situation Test. Ainsworth and Bell (1970) provided a seminal study related to the development of Attachment Theory in which infants were noted to display four classes of behaviour they named "proximity- and contact-seeking behaviors," "contact-maintaining behaviors," "proximity- and interaction-avoiding behaviors," and "contact- and interaction-resisting behaviors" (p. 55). Mario Mikulincer and Phillip Shaver (2007), professors of psychology, extrapolated from this study the three main descriptions used currently in Attachment Theory, which they named "secure, anxious, and avoidant" (p. 8). Mikulincer and Shaver say that Main and Solomon (1990) subsequently created a fourth attachment style of "disorganized/disoriented." They state that the first three attachment styles by Ainsworth and Bell were behaviours based on a study of assessing infants' relationships with their mothers, who left the room and later re-entered. Secure attachment was evidenced by the infant who became naturally upset when the mother left the room, but restored natural

bonding when the mother returned. Anxious attachment was displayed by the infant who became extremely distressed when the mother left the room, but with the reunion, the infant was ambivalent toward the mother with behaviour ranging from clinging to anger. Avoidant attachment behaviour showed the infant displaying a small degree of being distressed when the mother left the room, and when the mother returned tended to avoid the mother. Based on Mary Main's and Judith Solomon's work, Mikulincer and Shaver describe disorganized/disoriented behaviour as exemplified by the infant upon reunion with the mother; whereby, the infant showed odd, bizarre behaviour that was often unpredictable including unresponsive and avoidant behaviours.

My understanding is that the secure, anxious, avoidant and disorganized attachments can affect people's ability to regulate their emotions. With secure attachment, the child's internal world can often be favourably modulated by the caregiver. Because anxious, avoidant and disorganized attachment styles are related to lack of some sense of safety, security and consistency in the familial context, the children may have later difficulty in their lives with developing self-soothing, self-nurturing and self-compassion ways of taking care of themselves.

The impact of trauma often depends on multiple factors, including the nature of the trauma itself and whether the traumatized person received support. Numerous theorists have discussed how the often unconscious but active internal and demeaning voice of the harmful other becomes how one relates to oneself. Without a healthy relationship with one's mind through self-compassion, internal experience may become tormenting and frightening. I particularly like Paul Gilbert's discussion of the "internal threat" of one's own mind by self-attack, feeling overwhelmed, and having self-loathing and shame (2007). He attributes this to the over activation of the emotion regulation "threat and self-protection system" (2014, p. 62).

Trauma is not particular to those who suffer from mental health and substance use. When asked to share stories of significant life events, most people can recall an experience of trauma or tragedy in their lives. The effects of emotional, mental and

psychological trauma are ubiquitous; therefore, people seeking help for their history of trauma is an area of great need in clinical settings. Many people suffer from developmental traumas (early childhood traumas) as a result of abuse or neglect, but may not meet the criteria for PTSD. Even so, the deep emotional wounding that can occur from developmental trauma can potentially interfere with the ability to function fully in several areas of one's life, as well as to experience a deep sense of well-being and quality of life. "Overall lifetime prevalence of PTSD is estimated at about 9%" (Morrison, 2014, p. 219). The prevalence of PTSD is higher in women than men, and more prevalent in younger adults than in older adults (Morrison, 2014).

Changes to the criteria for PTSD in the DSM-5 manual better reflect the comprehensive/complex aspects of trauma than previous editions. For example, DSM-5 (2013) criteria for PTSD now include "negative alterations in cognitions and mood... (PTSD section)." This addition speaks in particular to the possible self-blame that can result from trauma. It is not uncommon for people with PTSD to feel it is their fault and thus experience pervasive and unrelenting guilt. "Persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs or expectations about oneself" can be part of this criteria (Morrison, p. 219). Morrison states that people with PTSD will feel "responsible," in that they could have done something to stop the harm. Also included under the criteria of PTSD in DSM-5 is arousal, which includes the fight response, and self-harm and self-destructive behaviours.

I was fortunate to ask Dr. Ian Macnaughton, well-known Vancouver author and psychotherapist, about why self-compassion is important for people who suffer from trauma. Dr. Macnaughton is extensively trained in several therapeutic modalities, particularly somatic-based therapies. His following words of wisdom I feel have profound meaning and are very helpful:

Self-compassion is fundamental [to our nature]. Trauma goes to our existence—[threat of] life or death.... During trauma there is a split in our awareness—[whereby] awareness is gone ... [compassion] provides a witness consciousness reflective of what someone has gone through that is larger than the trauma ... a container. Self-compassion is doing for self, what is hoped for by a compassionate other ... compassion provides the

safety in the consciousness. (Macnaughton, 2016, personal correspondence)

Over the course of my lifetime, through experience, knowledge and practice, I have observed the following psychological components to therapy related to self-compassion:

1. It is my deep belief and observation that psychological change needs a foundation of self-compassion for significant long-lasting change to occur in the individual. People do not experience profound change without the cultivation of a kinder and warmer relationship with themselves. A cognitive shift is often not enough for personal change and growth if not founded on self-kindness or warmth towards self. Based on my personal and professional observations of human need, I have developed a curriculum designed particularly for people who suffer from mental health and substance-use concerns.
2. Shame, isolation, and self-loathing are common among the more prevalent mental health concerns, such as anxiety and depression. Often these create a sense of distance and disconnection from the very deep yearning for what one wants the most—to experience a sense of community and to feel a sense of togetherness.
3. Self-observation through mindfulness, meditation, reflections and contemplations creates more space for disentangling the self from destructive thoughts and feelings. Self-observation and awareness can help regulate the nervous system and contribute to clarity of mind. One consciously and unconsciously creates a self-image over time. Self-observation and awareness can allow for a more expansive view of oneself rather than the habitual self-limiting concept.
4. I have observed that a lack of self-compassion can cloud one's perception of how much one can reasonably do with finite stamina, time and energy. The loss of stamina and mental and physical exhaustion can diminish the



capacity to be self-compassionate. Through skilful learning of self-compassion, one can balance vitality and self-care. Then, the contribution of the individual can be anchored in wise compassion.

5. I observe that sadness, general malaise, and lack of sustainable meaning and purpose pervade much of human experience. Individuals who lack self-compassion seem to be even more vulnerable to the vicissitudes and adversities of life. I think this comes back to not having a place to go to for refuge. Refuge is a form of solace and means with which to work with life. Self-compassion can serve as a protective boundary from being overwhelmed. Through wise and skilful self-compassion, the intensity of the sadness and malaise does not necessarily lead to despair and a sense of helplessness. Through self-compassion, this sadness and malaise can also be lessened and worked with and even brought onto the path of transformation.

In familial, sociopolitical and cultural conditions, there are multiple causes and structures contributing to the development of self-identity and self-compassion. These conditions in which one is embedded have a profound effect on one's relationships to self and others. Negative events of a person's life may contribute to a sense of disconnection from others, which then diminish the ability to form deep, intimate, sustainable and caring relationships.

I feel the advent of social media is one example of the ubiquitous and diffuse influences impacting almost every individual. Individuals can experience difficulty navigating in a world that is bombarded by social media. Although some people experience this social media as a form of connection with others, the depth of intimacy that is experienced by another person's physical presence and contact can rarely be authenticated through social media. For many, it is difficult to work within these larger sociocultural paradigms to individuate in a way that involves self-compassion and self-love. Self-compassion is not a denial or

an avoidance of the context in which we live but a way to nurture and work with oneself in the most beneficial way possible.

The field of study of sociocultural influences is not the primary focus of this dissertation. However, one of the important issues that comes up in group psychotherapy is the debilitating effects of negative labels, stereotyping and stigmatizing of an individual's self-identity. In my self-compassion group, through group sharing and also discussion, hopefully people empower themselves to see beyond these limiting labels. The Canadian philosopher Ian Hacking describes life experience as fluid and dynamic, free of the concept that a personality is a fixed set of identities. Hacking (1995) discusses the effects of labelling, stating that attached to a label is a set of stereotypical attributes, but he goes beyond the discussion of labelling to describe "the looping effect" (pp. 369–370). The *looping effect* holds the potential of working with what he calls categories, which are ways in which people are classified in groups and in individuals. This *looping effect* holds the potential for negative and positive consequences of classification. "New sorting and theorizing [of classification] induces changes in self-conception and its behaviour of the people classified" (p. 370). The way in which a person relates to another person on the basis of categories can change that person who has been categorized. In the process of dealing with categories that may include stigmatizing stereotypes, individuals need not accept the associated stereotypes. And as Hacking goes on to say, there is a tendency for some to see themselves only according to their life history; however, "Well, if there are new storylines, then there are new stories" (p. 368). New understandings and ways of relating to people in categories can alter the way in which the recipient changes. Rather than yielding to these stereotypical conceptions as fixed, through knowing and awareness, nuances can be assimilated in valuable ways by those being related to and those relating to these classifications: this is called the *looping effect*.

In group psychotherapy, I have observed the positive experiences that can occur from the *looping effect*. Reframing one's life and working with categories and labels in a group context can be transformative for the participants. So the sharing in groups opens the opportunity to hear and experience new ways of perceiving their lives through the integrating of new narratives. I have observed in group psychotherapy that people liberate themselves from the fixed categories and labels that contribute to debilitating shame. The destigmatizing of labels and categories provides the space for the development of self-compassion and new ways of identifying themselves.

6. Self-compassion involves forming a positive emotional relationship within oneself and, in doing so, one is able to tolerate and even enjoy those periods of solitude and silence that might otherwise be tormenting. When one engages in self-attacking, it is difficult to work skilfully with one's own mind and be comfortable in one's body. Acceptance involves experiencing reality with an open heart, moment to moment, from a place of honesty. The process of acceptance does not grasp or reject but works with what arises from within. It brings everything onto the path of self-realization. Often there is a warmth engendered, which allows the experience to arise compassionately within.
7. Self-attacking is but one example of a thought process that can dysregulate the nervous system so one may seek distraction from this inner torment. This avoidance of being present creates the impetus to engage in numbing and unhealthy behaviours. In contrast, I have observed that compassionately accepting oneself without recrimination is a gateway to well-being.
8. Although some claim that a person needs to have self-compassion in order to have compassion for others, I have observed that even those who claim to have low self-compassion often have tremendous compassion for others. However, this is not to say that developing more self-compassion

will not enhance their compassion for others. I have worked with many people who describe themselves as having very little self-compassion, yet at the same time complete acts of great generosity and kindness towards others. I believe that people who have gotten in touch with their own suffering can express a deep sensitivity and regard for others who are in need, regardless of how self-compassionate they are.

9. A loving and supportive relationship with a therapist can provide an intrapsychic integration within the client that is kinder, softer and more patient.
10. Although my primary group curriculum is devised to meet the needs in a secular setting, I have observed a particular need in Buddhist communities for a means of integrating self-compassion since Buddhism does not always provide the therapy that people need for that specific development. I have developed my own unique integration of self-compassion for Buddhists, using a Buddhist practice.
11. Having utilized self-compassion training with several individuals, I have observed how this preliminary work creates internal safety, providing a basis for deeper work for those with psychological and emotional trauma, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
12. Group therapy for self-compassion can help individuals transcend their perception of self in relation to others. In the experience of a shared sense of humanity, the individual can lessen self-grasping and self-referential obsession by sharing the suffering of others. This interdependence of experience in a group has the potential to awaken a deeper understanding and sense of purpose within the individual.

## **2. Integration of Buddhism into Western Psychotherapy as Related to Compassion and Self-Compassion**

This chapter explores aspects of Buddhist philosophy and psychology as applied and/or integrated into Western therapy and teachings. Primary concepts from thinkers who have related some aspects of Eastern psychology, philosophy and contemplative practices to modern Western psychotherapy and teachings on compassion and self-compassion are presented. (Chapter four, on the other hand, focuses on classical Buddhism, highlighting the presentation of historical thought and practices relating to compassion.)

Buddhism is a living philosophy that adapts to time and place, as seen in its spread from Asia to the West. Buddhism embraces adaptation and integration, recognizing the need for flexibility in one's regular practice. This quality is recognized by the Buddha himself who valued the self-reflective examination of personal experience as paramount. Modern times call for an emphasis on self-compassion, especially for Western psychotherapy, with Buddhist philosophies and practices serving as wonderful sources of creative inspiration in many cultural and individual contexts. One specific example of Buddhist contribution to the modern context is that it offers contemplative practices for people overwhelmed by the pace of their lives and the intensity of their emotions. The potential for the quiescent mind is often interrupted by the speed and accessibility with which information is available all the time. I have observed that many people feel that they have difficulty regulating their affective states, and I feel that the Buddhist practices are helpful in providing contemplative methods to skilfully work with this. Buddhist practices and community offer a place in which people can find the means to slow down and work positively with their own minds.

In general, I find one of the beauties of Buddhism is its pliancy. I feel the historical Buddha's life and words are rooted in profound wisdom with amazing love and compassion in action. When sought out, he would contextualize his personal advice for the individual's psychology and for the alleviation of a particular suffering. Such pliancy

carries over to the adaptation of Buddhism to whatever the culture presents in terms of need. The openness of adapting to the paramount needs of our society has no constraints placed upon it within the words of the Buddha, nor in the sense of Buddha's primary message. My interpretation is that modern Buddhists are free to adapt the Buddha-dharma (Buddha's teachings) and its sense of wisdom and compassion to the present moment, with creative and impassioned response to the needs of our time. Of course, this is not accepted by all Buddhists; nonetheless, I believe it is within the scope of Buddhism to value this pliancy. It is a fine edge to remain true to the essentials of wisdom and skilful means while contextualizing into a given moment; but, in honesty, I think Buddhism has the scope for this.

### **Definitions, Terms and Descriptions of Compassion**

Given that there could be and are many ways people understand the meaning of compassion, it would be helpful for us in the present context to have some working definitions and descriptions of compassion and self-compassion. Dr. Thupten Jinpa, who received his Geshe Lharam degree from Ganden University and his PhD from Cambridge University, is Chair of the Board at the Mind and Life Institute, President of the Institute of Tibetan Classics, and principal English translator for H. H. the Dalai Lama, writes extensively on Buddhism and is a pioneer in the field of compassion. I find Dr. Thupten Jinpa's definition of compassion most helpful:

Broadly defined, compassion is *a sense of concern that arises when we are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to see that suffering relieved....* At its core, compassion is the response to the inevitable reality of our human condition—our experience of pain and sorrow...responding...with understanding, patience and kindness.... (2015, pp. xx & xxi)

Dr. Jinpa's description is somewhat similar to the definition offered by Hangartner (2011). Hangartner defines compassion as: "A three-part process: (1) 'I feel for you' (affective); (2) 'I understand you' (cognitive); and (3) 'I want to help you'

(motivational)" (as cited in Siegel & Germer, 2012, p. 12). Dr. Jinpa also includes these three qualities of compassion: "motivational," "affective," and "cognitive."

Generally, traditional teachings in *Mahayana* Buddhism do not talk directly about self-compassion. In 2002, the present Dalai Lama helped clarify the meaning of compassion to include oneself, implying that compassion is not always oriented towards others. Therefore, within this dissertation, it is generally implied that compassion includes the self. His Holiness the current Dalai Lama (2002) clarifies this specifically through explaining *tsewa*, another Tibetan term for compassion.

The Tibetan word for compassion is *tsewa*, which need not necessarily imply that it is directed to someone else. One can have that feeling toward oneself as well. When you say that someone should be compassionate, there is no connotation that you should totally disregard your self-interest. Compassion, or *tsewa*, as it is understood in the Tibetan tradition, is a state of mind or way of being where[by] you extend how you relate to yourself toward others as well. (Davidson & Harrington, 2002a, p. 98)

Sanskrit (ancient language from India): the word *karuṇā* denotes compassion; "kindness" is found in the etymology of *karuṇā* (Wallace, 2010a, p. 127). We can see that loving-kindness and compassion both hold the word "kindness."

Pali (one of the main languages used in Buddhist ancient texts from India): *Karuṇā* is also the word for compassion, "the intention and capacity to relieve and transform suffering and lighten sorrows" (Hanh, 1999, p. 172). *Karuṇā* means in Pali: Kar "to do, to make" + una (Thera, 1968, p. 114). "Una" is action (Whitney, 1924, p. 393). Whitney's definition, which includes action, is important because it points to a constant throughout Buddhist texts: compassion is not only a feeling and state of mind, but also an aspiration to actively help. According to Narada Maha Thera (1968), one of the Buddha's definitions of *karuṇā* is: "That which makes the heart of the good quiver when others are afflicted with sorrow [...] That which dissipates the suffering of others [...]" (p. 114).

Tibetan: *Nying-je* means compassion in Tibetan. "*Nying* means heart and *je* means [...] most exalted" (Ladner, 2004, p. 10). None of the languages mentioned above distinguishes compassion for self from compassion for other.

As we can see, there are many nuanced definitions of compassion that vary in meaning. All of them have informed my sense of compassion but, as mentioned earlier, I particularly resonate with Dr. Jinpa's definition. His illuminates a dynamic process reflective of many levels of being. Compassion can involve a deep sense of sadness when connecting with another's suffering. When one is open to this sadness, it can provide a heartfelt wish for that person to be free of that suffering and the conditions that surround the suffering, which can give rise to an active and often spontaneous engagement with that person to alleviate that suffering.

### **General Nature and Qualities of Compassion**

Lorne Ladner, clinical psychologist, points out that compassion in Western psychology is often seen as an emotion, whereas in Buddhism it is articulated as an optimal mental state (2004). Reginald Ray (2005), a foremost Buddhist teacher, states that, in Tibetan Buddhism, compassion emanates from the heart chakra. The chakras' relevance to this dissertation is in terms of the heart area as an energy system, not the literal physical heart itself; chakras are not physical organs but energy centres. Ladner says that compassion is the highest level of mind and heart in Tibetan Buddhism. Buddhism, in its essence, is about realizing one's compassion so as to enter the path of enlightenment and be of service to others. Actual training in the application of the energy of compassion furthers one along the continuum of growth and development. Ladner says that compassion is not just a state of mind, as mentioned before, but also a practice. He also says that developing compassion in oneself is the most "efficient way to make oneself psychologically healthy, happy and joyful" (2004, p. xvii). He says that the existence of compassion cannot be evaluated by only studying someone's actions, as it is an intrinsic state of mind and heart (Ladner). Praying for someone in silence, for



example, does not involve an overt action towards another person, but can still be an expression of compassion with the intention to help that person. Psychologists Martin Lowenthal and Lar Short (1993) state that compassion is a way of working with oneself and others that involves the heart, while also being the fruition of the work from the heart.

In Buddhism, the intention or aspiration is foundational to both the embodiment and expression of compassion. Compassion embodies the wish to do no harm and to participate in the alleviation of suffering for oneself and for others. This can be through an aspirational wish in meditation (or other ways) or through a direct act of compassion. Karen Armstrong (2010) says: "Compassion can be defined as an attitude of principled, consistent altruism" (p. 9). Altruism is a central component of the Mahayana path. Personally, upholding altruism is a core value of mine and allows the commitment to it to act as a stable way of being in one's life.

Here is another source: George Dreyfus (2002) was the first Westerner to achieve highest Geshe (equivalent to a PhD) status in Tibetan Buddhism. Dreyfus wrote a chapter in *Visions of Compassion* stating that, when compassion is developed within the *bodhisattva*, the person becomes more "equanimous." As the *bodhisattvas* continue to develop along the spiritual path, they are less "overwhelmed by suffering" and "less clearly emotional" (p. 43). When applied to people in general, this would mean that to develop compassion grounded in equanimity, one becomes less reactive. *Bodhisattva* is a term in the *Mahayana* Buddhist tradition and refers to people who dedicate their lives to help all beings find liberation.

"Great compassion" is a *Mahayana* (Great Vehicle) and a *Vajrayana* (Buddhist tantra) term that Lobsang Tharchin (1999), scholar, teacher, and author of Tibetan Buddhism, defines as a profoundly deep compassion that is the wish for suffering and for its causes to be alleviated for all sentient beings equally. The implications of this deepening are profound in that self-absorption gives way to the genuine desire for the release of suffering. In the *Mahayana*, one surrenders the focus on self as merely ego

(ego as selfishness) to dedicate oneself in a courageous, open way to helping others (including oneself) become free of the root causes of suffering. One forms a re-orientation from mere self-centredness to ways of being (an ontological process) that orient the sense of self to a heartfelt wish to help eliminate the suffering of others (including self).

Christopher Germer and Ronald Siegel (2012), authors and psychologists, state that compassion is not only a felt experience of suffering (empathy) but also an active engagement to alleviate the suffering. Active engagement can be seen to be on a continuum—for example, one person may have a momentary, fleeting experience of wanting to alleviate suffering, whereas another person may fully and consistently commit to the alleviation of suffering. As well, the Dalai Lama (1995) encourages actively helping, whenever possible.

The three terms used for causes of suffering in Buddhism are identified as "craving," "ignorance" and "aggression" (Waldron, 2013, p. 160). These terms refer to Buddhism's three different afflictive states of mind, which can be obstacles to natural compassion commonly referred to the following: either "grasping or attachment," "confusion or ignorance" and "aversion or hatred."

### **The Focus on the Self in the Practice of Compassion**

Why focus on the self in the development of compassion? Self-compassion is compassion with its object being the self. Jack Kornfield, a Western psychotherapist and Buddhist teacher, quotes the Buddha: "If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete" (Kornfield, 1996, p. 28). And the Tibetan scholar and teacher, Tashi Tsering (2006), says, regarding self and other, that truly loving oneself leads to not harming others. The first direct mention of the Buddha's teaching that advises one to develop self-love initially, and then develop love towards others, is in Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa's *The Path of Purification*. Buddhaghosa was a Buddhist scholar who lived in India during

the 5th century CE. This is based on the Buddha's words in the Pali texts *Sanyutta Nikaya*, 75; and *Udana*, 47:

"Blessed Ones [Buddha's words in the *Sutras*]:

I visited all quarters with my mind

Nor found I any dearer than myself;

Self is likewise to every other dear;

Who loves himself will never harm another"

(as cited in *Buddhaghosa*, 1956, p. 323).

Buddhaghosa talks about loving oneself, and I feel that self-compassion is one aspect of healthy self-love. Although early Buddhism does not talk explicitly about self-compassion, there are grounds for feeling it is implied, as mentioned earlier in the discussion about the word *tsewa*. The current Dalai Lama (2002) says it is important to know that:

Compassion [starts with] yourself first, and then in a more advanced way the aspiration will embrace others. In a way, high levels of compassion are nothing but an advanced state of that self-interest. That's why it is hard for people who have a strong sense of self-hatred to have genuine compassion toward others. There is no anchor, no basis to start from. (Davidson & Harrington, 2002a, p. 98)

I was fortunate to receive direct teachings from Lama Yangsi Rinpoche on self in its relationship to the development of compassion (personal communication, May 31, 2015). Yangsi Rinpoche is a high scholar (Geshe Lharampa) of the Gelug Geshe training in Tibetan Buddhism and the founder of Maitripa College in Oregon. Pertinent points are as follows: Regarding the debate as to why the focus on self is necessary to the development of compassion, Lama Yangsi refers to the practices of Sevenfold Cause and Effect (which will be described in chapter four), traditionally used for the development of *bodhicitta* (translated as "awakened heart"). Please note spelling can also be *bodhichitta*. He says that these practices are "designed and structured to help human emotions function [in a progressive way so that the practitioner] can experience compassion"

(Yangsi, 2015). He said that the process of emotion moves from feeling and relating, to connecting and expressing. Lama Yangsi states that compassion involves both "foundation and condition." Foundation is the feeling state within oneself that connects with the suffering of self or of other. Condition is what one sees, hears or perceives as suffering that provides the impetus for compassion to arise within oneself. He describes beautifully the experience of compassion as one that involves a "sense of closeness" and empathy—both of which are involved in the development of compassion.

Generally, Buddhist mind-training practices follow a person's emotional process and apply that process to a positive outcome, such as compassion. Lama Yangsi states this feeling-within-oneness makes self-compassion essential to the process because, from self-compassion, one is then able to relate authentically and experientially and with compassion to others. He says that, without self-compassion, compassion for others is mere "visualization, abstraction and/or intellectual." Mind-training practice "takes us past just the suffering" to expression in deeds and the intention to alleviate suffering (Yangsi, 2015).

Another point Lama Yangsi makes is that, in the initial stages of one's practice of developing compassion, one cannot suspend the sense of I or of self. The question he then asks is whether the self can work side by side with the cultivation of compassion. His conclusion is that mind states developed within the self have to be felt by, and related to, the person. I agree, because in order for the compassionate potential for perseverance and natural energy within ourselves to flow, we must cultivate a sense of self-involvement and/or self-evolution.

Furthermore, Lama Yangsi says the actual process of compassion practice must be rooted in an individual mind to "undo the habits" of negativity in that person. The therapeutic use of meditation to undo deeply rooted habitual patterns within individuals is gaining significant ground in Western psychotherapy. Meditation can be seen as a form of self-therapy, enabling the individual to cultivate wholesome qualities within the self. In many of his oral teachings, Lama Yangsi uses the word "dignity" to describe a helpful

attitude by which one carries oneself. These wholesome qualities, once cultivated within the individual, can enhance relationships with others. Yangsi Rinpoche concluded that this profound and healthy relationship with self is the foundation of meditation in Buddhism.

*Sgom* is the Tibetan word for meditation, and it is "defined as a disciplined mental process through which a person cultivates familiarity with a chosen object" (Jinpa, 1993, p. 344). Familiarization as meditation can also be described as stabilization of the mind through a centring process of awareness. Once a person develops an inner relationship, a relationship with self, through the familiarization in meditation, self-confidence and self-trust will ensue. A meditator can cultivate a deeper understanding of the patterns of the mind, thereby achieving the wisdom to cultivate the virtuous qualities within the self.

Self-compassion creates self-trust, which creates self-refuge. This is particularly beneficial for those who have experienced trauma and may have lost their heartfelt trust for self and other. Experiencing self-refuge can be lost if a sense of safety cannot be experienced in one's own body. The sensations associated with the early trauma often linger. Learning to trust again in feeling at home in one's body in a self-compassionate way often marks the beginning of the healing process.

The current Dalai Lama (2002b; 2003) says that all beings commonly share the wish to be free of suffering and the wish for happiness—which means that we are all equal, in terms of these basic desires. The aspiration for happiness is fundamental to humanity. Paul Gilbert, a clinical psychologist and professor, and Choden (2014), practitioner of Buddhism and writer, state that, in Buddhism, equanimity for all beings is founded upon the commonality of the wish for happiness and the wish for freedom from suffering. If one does not have compassion towards oneself, many believe that there is no ground from which to develop authentic compassion for others. Self-compassion ultimately helps one to free oneself from self-centredness and self-preoccupation. Individuals have the potential for compassion, but it must be developed.

The current Dalai Lama uses the phrase "self-interest" when talking about an individual expressing compassion for others. He says it is self-interest because one is developing one's virtuous self in the process. In advanced development of compassion cultivation, wholesome qualities radiate continuously towards self and others.

Again, we might ask, why focus on the self in the practice of compassion? The great literature of the West meets Eastern thought in Shakespeare, who utilizes the Delphi maxim in *Hamlet*, "Know thyself" (as cited in Wilkins, 1994, p. 1): "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man" (Shakespeare, 1992, 1.3.78–80). In Buddhist philosophy, some of the same sentiments are held. Dōgen (13th century CE Zen teacher from Japan) said: "To study the Buddha Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things" (1995, p. 70).

### **The Conceptual Framework of Self in Buddhism for Self-Compassion Today**

I feel there are some misunderstandings that need to be addressed regarding the notion of self in Buddhism. This section addresses the integration of four primary concepts as they relate to self-compassion: self-cherishing and its misapplication to self-worth; self-interest and its role in compassionate and altruistic intention and behaviour; self and ego; and selflessness and misunderstanding of self. These concepts are often misunderstood in the context of self from Buddhist perspectives, as well as in translations and transitions.

It is important to discuss such misunderstandings because Buddhism is being used in various ways. Currently, with the large insurgence of research and application of self-compassion, the term "self" requires further clarification. Although some of the framework of self-compassion is rooted in Western psychotherapy, much of its conceptual framework is of Buddhist origin. It is essential that presenters, teachers and psychotherapists have a clear understanding of the context in which some of the translation and transition problems have led to misunderstandings, which can present

obstacles for participants in self-compassion curriculum settings. Clarifying these misunderstandings gives participants more psychological insight into the spirit and meaning in which these Buddhist concepts were developed. These four misunderstandings arise also for some Buddhist practitioners and are, I believe, partially due to the transition from classical Buddhism to present-day Buddhist usage.

### **Self-cherishing and its misapplication to self-worth**

When Buddhism came to the West, there were misunderstandings about some of the core notions of self, for example, the comment related by Thurman, which came from the audience attending a lecture by the Dalai Lama. Someone said: "Western psychology helps somebody who feels they are nobody become somebody, and Buddhist psychology helps somebody who thinks they are somebody become nobody" (as cited in Thurman, 2004, p. 55). Thurman knew that the Dalai Lama disagreed with the comment because the correct understanding is that selflessness is not akin to being a nobody. It is not the devaluation of the human spirit, as indicated by the term "nobody." Selflessness is to be understood as a state of being that is fluid and constantly changing. Selflessness does not deny self-worth. Many Buddhist scholars do not deny that there is a self that is functioning at a relative level; however, in their view, this self cannot be found independently of such relativity. I find Joseph Loizzo, MD from Harvard, PhD in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies from Columbia University, and founder of The Nalanda Institute for Contemplative Science, very clear on his explication of relativity. I think there can be few people who meet his unique combinations of training and teaching. The two truths are ultimate truth, which deals with emptiness, and conventional truth, relativity or relative truth. I have found Joe Loizzo (2012) wonderfully helpful in integrating the two truths and current psychotherapy. Loizzo is in the tradition of Je Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) who is recognized by all four schools of Tibet as a definitive philosopher. Although Je Tsongkhapa is appreciated by all four schools of Tibet (*Sakya*, *Nyingma*, *Gelug* and *Kagyü*), the view on the two truths has variance in each school. The following description of the two truths is based on Je Tsongkhapa, founder of the *Gelug*

school. Loizzo says that by seeing the conventional truth of relativity, relative truth is not to be denied or separated from ultimate truth. Relativity or the conventional world is a confluence of causes and condition. Simply put in this view, emptiness negates inherent existence of self and phenomena. And relative truth is empty of intrinsic existence, fixations. "[E]mptiness and relativity are equivalent, which Tsong Khapa celebrates..." (Thurman, 1984, p. 11). In the lineage of Je Tsongkhapa, Loizzo interprets 6th century CE Indian pandit Chandrakirti's *Royal Reason of Relativity*. The relative truth can be acknowledged as potentially meaningful and therapeutically viable in relation to cause and effect in that it is functional and experienceable. Loizzo states that relativity is not an illusion, it is "illusion-like" (p. 197). He disagrees with the usage of synonymously equating "illusion" and relativity. It is *like an illusion* in that reality appears to ordinary beings incorrectly; however, that does not deny experience altogether. For example, when one sees one's reflection in a tranquil pool of water, the reflection does refer to that person, albeit that person is empty of substantialism, independence, fixation and findability. Thus, conventional reality is not to be totally refuted but understood.

Loizzo says that a true understanding of relativity can help therapeutically with nongrasping and dissolving the habit of reification. One can be freed into the interconnectability of life without a sense of isolation. This boundary-less field of experience accords with the nature of reality. By according with reality, through the briefly presented insights of the two truths, one can embody as a relative being with openness, limitlessness, and empathetic connection.

Relativity relates to my thesis of self-compassion and curriculum. This is done partially by focusing on and affirming the causes and conditions in people's lives. I affirm that relative truth matters, contextual causes and conditions matter in terms of being brought onto the path of working with and through suffering. Although I do not elaborate or qualify at every point in my curriculum, acknowledgement of these contextual and multiple influences is affirmed. People who have a tendency to be self-critical and self-blaming have the proclivity to assume more responsibility than is accurate. Seeing the big picture of relativity contextually within the infinite influences of



the sociocultural and political factors enables further self-compassion and wisdom in one's own psyche and well-being. Then, one can arise in the field and mandala of ever-changing relativity with mature perspective and endeavour.

To some extent, the denigration of self-worth supposedly related to the Buddhist concept of no-self may be partly based on a misunderstanding of the term *self-cherishing*. Shantideva, the beloved Indian monk and *pandit* (scholar and teacher) from the 8th century CE, in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, uses the term *self-cherishing* to refer to self-clinging—holding oneself as more important than others and concerned only with self-gain. The term *self-cherishing* exemplifies the difficulty of what I understand to be the literal translation of the word from a core text from India of great import to Tibetan Buddhism by Shantideva (mentioned again in chapter four). Many Western psychotherapists who are Buddhist scholars have reframed and reworded the original translation, as it has been misleading to Westerners.

As Rob Preece (2009) so eloquently states, he himself needed to develop some self-cherishing in order to progress on the spiritual path. According to Preece, the Western meaning of self-cherishing connotes care for oneself, and he uses the term "self-preoccupation" instead of self-cherishing. A Jungian and Buddhist psychotherapist since 1987, Preece talks about some of the Western misconceptions of Buddhist principles, particularly in terms of people with a history of trauma. He discusses his own story. He always had a lot of self-criticism when he was younger. When he heard that in Buddhism self-cherishing was a negative state of being, he experienced further self-criticism and more emotional suffering. He felt that he needed to develop greater care for himself, which seemed contradictory to the teaching on self-cherishing. At a London conference in 1999, referred to in *Transforming the mind*, H. H. the Dalai Lama was asked how people can stop self-cherishing when there are already so many mental health problems such as depression, and so on. The Dalai Lama responded by saying that the source of self-hatred is excessive self-cherishing (Dalai Lama, 2003, pp. 80 & 81).

We are not saying that the spiritual practitioner should completely ignore or abandon the goal of self-fulfillment; rather, we are advising him or her to overcome the small-minded selfishness [...] Bodhicitta therefore implies a recognition of the need to fulfill one's true self-interest. (Dalai Lama, 2003, p. 81)

Preece states that, when one's sense of self is deeply injured, it can lead to excessive self-preoccupation. He discusses the need to meet the inner parts (the parts that we want to chastise) with love and compassion rather than criticism, so that we can value ourselves. Pema Chödrön (2005), a well-known Buddhist teacher and author, suggests making friends with aspects of ourselves that we have disowned, judged or loathed, and softening towards self. Preece observes that excessive self-preoccupation is lessened by compassionate letting go of the fixed negative view of self. Preece states that in Buddhism the two main forms of suffering are "ego grasping" and "self-preoccupation" (p. 96).

I agree with Gen Lamrimpa—a Buddhist teacher in the 1980s—who made a good point in one of his talks: self-cherishing is currently an incorrect translation in the vernacular, because *lojong* or mind transformation has, in the Tibetan, a word that is more akin to selfishness. What Shantideva was referring to was a force within the individual that looks after oneself as having greater importance than all others. Therefore, Gen Lamrimpa was saying that, today, Shantideva's term might be translated as *selfishness*. It is easy to see how these nuances of language can lead to misunderstandings. Careful interpretation and skill are required to make these terms relevant and to relate the intent of the wisdom teachings to their therapeutic value for a curriculum in self-compassion. As a psychotherapist and Buddhist translator, Rob Preece does both. He feels it is important that people understand "healthy self-concern" (p. 98), "healthy self-regard and self-assertion" (p. 99) in the development of *bodhicitta*.

Self-worth can give one the impetus and energy for self-development, and low self-worth often underlies a lack of confidence. Kornfield (2008) states that in 1989, during one of his initial world conferences, the Dalai Lama was asked by some of the

Western Buddhist teachers about the prevalent lack of self-worth and the exaggerated self-criticism in the West. Kornfield comments that His Holiness acted surprised and initially did not understand the concept of "self-hatred" (p. 27). The Dalai Lama then responded by saying: "but that's a mistake [...] every being is precious" (p. 27). He indicated that the concept of self-hatred is unknown in his culture.

Tai Situ, a world-renowned lama, gave a talk at the University of British Columbia (UBC) on May 15, 2016 (personal communication). He said he could never understand the dynamic among students of his who had shared with him their self-hatred. He pondered it for many years and finally came to understand that students experienced this dynamic when they had "expectations" of who they thought they should be. This observation taught me that a perceived unrealized fulfillment of expectation could lead to self-hatred. If Tai Situ is correct, self-compassion in unconditional self-acceptance is fundamental to well-being. I note that in a highly competitive society, it is difficult not to internalize a feeling of never being good enough and feeling the need to continuously strive. Competition often leads to comparison; always comparing oneself with others can compromise a sense of self-worth and self-dignity. A competitive society can be a form of oppression in that it directs people away from focusing on their fundamental worth. Some further results of sociocultural pressures of competition that lead to the need to always be more and more productive are discussed in my section on Paul Gilbert's Emotion Regulation Systems. I believe that in my group curriculum on self-compassion, participants have the opportunity to question, challenge and transform societal norms at an individual level.

Healthy self-worth can be enhanced through psychotherapy. By engaging in contemplative practices in compassion towards others and self, one can cultivate and create healthy self-worth. Self-worth can be defined as dignity, genuine care for oneself, self-value and esteem in one's capacity, and it provides the inspiration needed to pursue the cultivation of compassion. Wishing to engage in a contemplative practice is an indication of some level of self-worth. I believe that through a confluence of factors, a sense of self-worth is developed. Low self-worth is often constructed by internalizing

negative messages. A total lack of self-worth is rare. I have found people who lack self-compassion and esteem are particularly helped by seeing the big picture of the arising of an individual within multiple and diverse influences which are often conditions outside the individual's control. By recognizing the contextual construction of one's life, the damaging effects of self-blame can be worked with. Familial influences are also part of the big picture. It is very difficult but worth the aspiration to honour one's own loss around coming from a background that was detrimental to the development of self-compassion while also extending compassion that the same sense of loss may have been shared in the personal upbringing of the parents or caregivers.

When people say they have no self-esteem, they are often making a global statement about themselves that, upon exploration, is not entirely accurate. This kind of negativity and a fixed identity can cloud one's perception of a more balanced view of oneself. When people mindfully explore aspects of self-esteem or self-worth, they can cultivate those aspects in a more accurate, conscious way. I believe that cultivating self-worth also promotes self-compassion. The two are inextricably connected. There are several methods for cultivating self-worth, depending on the theoretical framework you choose.

In a two-day workshop I attended, led by Dr. Germer, I found it interesting that he claimed self-care was the behavioural aspect of self-compassion (2015). I feel that one should not only look at the intrinsic aspect of self-compassion but also the extrinsic compassion of active self-care in terms of self-worth. Self-compassion is not just an internal working with the mind, but it is also how one lives in the world. Actions in the world might include taking care of oneself physically, allowing time for and practicing self-soothing activities, and seeking relationships that are valuable to well-being.

The introduction of a self-compassion curriculum or individual therapy of self-compassion needs to create space for the grieving process that sometimes ensues when the individual in question becomes cognizant of how little he/she has practised self-compassion. Just becoming more aware of the ongoing negative internal dialogue can be

a painful process, and those seeking to fully embrace the self-compassion training need to be reminded that it can take many years to accomplish. It is counter-therapeutic to criticize oneself for not being able to practise self-compassion easily. The focus of the therapy is not to emphasize some imagined goal but to value the moment-to-moment process. The path of intrinsically valuing and working with one's own mind, as it arises naturally, does lead to the cultivation and formation of a more compassionate self. In being a compassionate person in this moment, we cultivate and add to the source and resource for the continuing person in the future to be more compassionate.

### **Self-interest and its role in compassionate and altruistic intention and behaviour**

The second misunderstanding I wish to address is the idea that self-interest implies selfishness. As mentioned before, selfishness is not only seeing one's needs as being more important than, but also losing sight and awareness of, the needs of others. Disconnection, separation and aloneness are often the eventual outcome of this mindset. Self-love and self-compassion are antidotes to selfishness. Balanced and wise self-interest contributes to the whole and greater good.

An illuminating paradox here is one spoken of in lectures by the Dalai Lama: one cannot totally separate self from others, as they are inextricably interconnected. The Dalai Lama (2016c) refers to this paradox as "wise-selfish...foolish-selfish" (p. 85).

If the Buddhist teachings on altruism were really suggesting that we should ignore our own self-interest and abandon it altogether, then logically this would imply that we should not work for the benefit of others either, because, according to Buddhism, one of the by-products of helping others is that you also benefit yourself. (Dalai Lama, 2003, p. 82)

Thupten Jinpa comments about the nature of compassion. He arrived in the West at the age of twenty-nine. He disagreed with some of his fellow Cambridge University students who felt that people always acted for self-gain in being compassionate towards others. Thupten Jinpa (2015a) says that the sincere person's reason for performing compassionately towards another does not come from the standpoint of self-

preoccupation or self-gain. Dass and Bush (1992) state that benevolent activity is ultimately helpful for the practitioner's spiritual fruition and development: when we help others, we help ourselves. When we give unconditionally, we loosen the tight grasp on our ego, thereby offering true compassion, which is essential for spiritual development (Dass & Bush). Jinpa's view is that sincere compassion towards others creates the "by-product of expansiveness," "joy" and a "sense of purpose" for oneself, but it is not the reason or goal for being compassionate (Jinpa). In *Mahayana* Buddhism, it is essential to set the motivation to practise in order to help all beings.

### **Self and ego**

The third misunderstanding involves the use of the term *ego*, as discussed in Buddhism. Some Buddhists see ego as something to be abandoned because the ego is considered to be aligned with selfishness. However, the word *ego* does not necessarily imply something negative, in my mind. Of course, the word ego did not exist in ancient Indic languages. When I use the term ego, I mean a sense of self at any given moment. I agree with C. G. Jung's definition of ego as firstly... "awareness of your body and your existence, and secondly ... your memory data... [It is the] ...centre of consciousness" (1976, p. 11). I have heard many Buddhist teachers discuss ego and it is often not seen in a positive light. Some view it as more akin to selfishness—it is grasping onto the needs of oneself over others' needs. Other teachers refer to the term ego as being self-focused and excessively self-referential, thus creating a sense of separation from others. David Kalupahana (1987), Buddhist scholar, does not feel that one needs an ego to have an "empirical self." I agree with his view that the *empirical self* was not denied by the Buddha. However, ego, the source of afflictions, according to Kalupahana, is not necessary. "[t]he elimination of egoism does not mean the annihilation of the empirical self" (Kalupahana, p. 78). In that Kalupahana equates ego with afflictions, then he is accurate in saying that an enlightened being can still have an *empirical self* of pure compassion free of ego. I feel this is accurate when talking about unhealthy ego; however, I feel there is healthy ego.

In self-compassion group psychotherapy, I differentiate between egoistic behaviour and a healthy ego. Simply put, a healthy ego is consciousness or sense of self that can be brought on the path of self-worth. A healthy ego can help in organizing one's intentionality. In psychotherapy, there is a term often used called "ego strength," which means the ability to handle, tolerate, and/or cope with adversity, personal feedback, or critical self-analysis without collapsing into a place of shame and despair.

I concur with the general Freudian view that ego can moderate decorum around the more primitive parts of oneself. Paul Fleischman, a well-known psychiatrist retired from Yale, said in a talk on April 26, 2016b at the University of British Columbia that he feels Buddhists can find the ego of benefit: "Ego is a great servant but a poor master" (personal communication). Some Buddhists choose to see ego as an aspect of the self that can engage in organizing ethical behaviour and cognition (skilful means).

### **Selflessness and the misunderstanding of self**

The last misunderstanding to be addressed relates to *self* in the word *selflessness*, which is a major teaching of *Mahayana* Buddhism. Since selflessness is one of the major views of Buddhism, a refinement of the word self is necessary. Selflessness is one of the direct realizations of reality that forms the cornerstone of the Buddha's view: in the *Samaññaphala Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya*, the Buddha "[...] knows it as it really is" (Walshe, 2012, p. 107).

Does the focus on self in self-compassion perhaps contradict the Buddhist understanding of *non-self*? I shall briefly discuss the wisdom and views of Buddhist philosophers as they relate to the self for self-compassion; and, in some cases, I indicate how some of these insights can be applied therapeutically. The view of emptiness as an important construct in Buddhism and its harmonization with interdependence will also be explored. This is an important area, since self in Buddhism is understood within this view. Traditionally, of course, the term *self* has been understood differently in the West. I will explore how the Buddhist understanding of self can play an important socio-cultural

role for the mental health of individuals in society. The self will be shown to be important and valid as an object of compassion. I also hope to show how, in Buddhism, the development of skilful means in working with the self can be efficacious for personal development.

The concept of self in Buddhism, when understood properly, does not contradict the concept of selflessness. As with many pivotal views in Buddhism, there are various perspectives, dependent on the school of thought and practice. The depth and breadth of these views of self are extensive and I shall touch only on those that I feel are most relevant to the present research. I believe there is a self; therefore, I do not accept the view of selflessness as meaning there is no self whatsoever on a relative level. The following discourses from various thinkers provide subtle discussion of how selflessness or non-self pertains to the self.

For instance, David Galin (2003) states:

The Buddhist declaration is misunderstood in the West because *anatman* [or *anatta*, in Pali, translated as *non-self*], meaning ‘*self is not an essence or entity*,’ is interpreted as ‘*self does not exist at all*’ by people who have not imagined any scheme of existence other than entities or essences. (p. 108)

I find Galin’s statement meaningful in that the denial of self altogether, in my opinion, can lead to an under-appreciation of the empirical self which ties into the devaluation of ethics and morality. Even in Buddhist communities, the words *no self* are used. This is unfortunate in that when selflessness and non-self are refined, they can become meaningful terms with concepts that can be used to work with one’s mind and actions.

Peter Harvey (2013), eminent historian of Buddhism, states that the actual translation of *anatta* is *non-self*, not *no self*. Harvey feels that the Buddha used these teachings of selflessness heuristically in order to help the individual let go of attachment. Harvey clarifies his distinction on this point by saying there is a self but not a self that is



permanent. "The non-self teaching does not deny that there is a continuity of character in life and, to some extent, from life to life" (Harvey, p. 60).

In the Pali Canon, the Buddha states that a person cannot be found in the aggregates. The aggregates are "form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness" and they are "impermanent, conditioned, dependent arising [the aggregates are dependent on each other], subject to destruction, to vanishing, to fading away, to cessation" (Bodhi, 2005a, p. 307 & p. 354). Vipassana, the Buddhist meditation on the aggregates, facilitates a non-grasping onto a solid self because a solid self cannot be found in any of the aggregates. By according with the nature of aggregates, non-grasping frees the practitioner into the way things really are; that in itself is liberating.

Furthermore, Peter Harvey (2013) claims that rebirth is not a denial of the teaching on *anatta*, as there is a continuation of consciousness that occurs from one life to the next. Robert Thurman (2004) states that the self is not, at one extreme, a separate entity, or nothing at all, at the other extreme. These two primary extremes, which are to be avoided in Middle Way (Madhyamaka) philosophy, apply here to the understanding of self. According to Thurman, eternalism (one extreme) is the view that the self stands on its own, and nihilism (the other extreme) is to deny the self altogether. Brazier (2001), Buddhist author and psychotherapist, states that suffering is created when we engage in either of the two extremes—refusing to acknowledge or amplifying the experience.

Matthieu Ricard (2010), renowned Buddhist teacher and writer, states that every thing and every being is in a constant flux of change—including, of course, the self. Thus, there is no static, solid phenomenon that is not subject to change. He states that all is contingent upon an infinite number of causes and conditions. Thus, everything exists interdependently.

I recognize that self is to be seen according to the Buddhist concept of an arising experience or sense of self that is fleeting and non-findable. One cannot point to any place in the body and mind and say here is the self, this is it. H. H. the Dalai Lama

suggests that self is understood as interdependent with all reality, although not inherent, substantial, eternal or having an essence that is solid and fixed. (2006). Matthieu Ricard (2010) uses three refining terms for the self: it must be thought of as not having "inherent" status, it is not "permanent," and it is not "independent" from everything else (p. 103).

The Dalai Lama (2006) states that denying the functioning self or what is sometimes referred as the empirical self altogether can result in nihilism. In avoiding nihilism through *dependent arising* (a term used in Buddhism), he gives an excellent explanation of a very complex reasoning process of the self. *Dependent arising* means that all phenomena are interdependently arising. "In this context of dependence, [...] impermanent phenomena can function (and are not just figments of the imagination). [...] We are not just mental creation (p. 68). [...] This [functioning] is sufficient proof that he [the Dalai Lama] exists, even though he cannot be found" (p. 63). Parenthetically, I think it important to note that Thupten Jinpa (1993), whom I respect as a superlative translator of Buddhist terms, says that *dependent arising* has different refinements of meaning in different Buddhist schools and in different contexts. For the purposes of this dissertation, the term *dependent arising of phenomena* means the result of the arising and confluence of many causes and conditions.

As mentioned, the Middle Way view of Buddhism is somewhat self-explanatory as a term in that the middle way, according to Thupten Jinpa (1993), and is "between" the two extremes (p. 336). He says eternalism is the other extreme from nihilism. Eternalism is the view of a self or phenomenon that exists forever or a permanent state. Eternalism and reification of self refers to having a solid, fixed view of characteristics, qualities or images that are perceived as a self that is unchangeable. For example: "This is just the way I am." Alexander Berzin (1997)—a respected Tibetan Buddhist scholar—says reification is a view that is "mistaken" because it is not in accordance with reality. Preoccupation with a self that is reified is thus conducive to suffering and a happiness that is episodic (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011). Rather, the self, when seen as arising moment to moment, can be appreciated for its preciousness.

Rob Preece (2009) states that the application and practice of loosening self-reification provides the space for self-compassion. For example, in therapy, the therapist provides an opportunity for clients to let go of their fixed images so as to see themselves as having the capacity to heal. Through various contemplative practices, clients have the opportunity to directly experience their moment-to-moment selves, thus disentangling seemingly intractable negative views of themselves.

I concur with the Buddhist philosophical view that states that the reification and grasping onto self (and to phenomena) is the root of suffering. The importance of this view is that, in my self-compassion curriculum, selflessness is applied carefully, contextually and subtly while working with participants who have inordinate fixed views of self. For example, participants come in with issues that cause them to feel very stuck. The stuckness is partly due to seeing reality and identity as not being subject to the flux of life. Often, people become so attached to certain stories and incidences that they cannot see themselves outside of those narratives. Having this perspective does not, however, diminish my acknowledgment or empathy for their suffering. Using experiential exercises gives participants a taste of their own mind and the opportunity to see the ever-changing nature of thoughts and feelings. These experiential exercises ground the participants in their bodies, giving them an opportunity to disentangle themselves from this stuckness. Having an intellectual understanding of impermanence is not often convincing for someone who is suffering in that state—thus the strong emphasis on experiential exercises in my curriculum. Another way to transcend the constraint of mere didactic intellectualism is through the power of compassion in interactive group therapy. The aloneness and isolation that participants experience with mental health concerns is often mitigated through the experience of being held in a compassionate circle. It is my hope that the dynamic of a compassionate group will dissolve fixed views of self. John Blofeld (1977), Buddhist author and diplomat, states: "Compassion is the prime means to destroy all clinging to the delusionary selfhood" (p. 22).

Through this discussion by many scholars and practitioners regarding the value of a sense of self and its relation to selflessness, I conclude that one need not negate the

use of the term self in self-compassion; thus, the field of self-compassion is a viable area of Buddhist studies and secular curriculum development. The most in-depth aspects of Buddhist inquiry into self may not be applicable for a secular curriculum because it requires a great deal of time, commitment and structured training which is rooted in a request for that training. Also, although I acknowledge the importance of some of the subtle concepts regarding emptiness, such as using a label to mistakenly impute inherent qualities onto phenomena and self (Dalai Lama, 1997b, pp. 335–336), they are not discussed in this dissertation because they are not relevant to a secular curriculum in group psychotherapy. The secular curriculum should honour the participant's request for self-compassion training in a way that respects the participant's worldview. I have observed the wisdom and compassion teachings of Buddhism eminently valuable for self-development through secular curriculum on self-compassion.

Dialogue and commentaries around these four misunderstandings and others that arise around notions of self in Buddhism will continue. Self-compassion research and conceptualization have been developed and will continue to expand. I would like to present some major contributors to the field.

### **Current primary contributors to the field of self-compassion**

Buddhist teachers and Western psychotherapists and psychologists developed some of the conceptual and practice modalities of self-compassion that exist today. I have interwoven Kristin Neff's three constructs with contributions from other thinkers.

Neff (2011) began her empirical research on self-compassion around 2003. Neff is a seminal thinker and pioneer in the quantitative science of self-compassion, and her orientation involves using aspects of Buddhism psychology. She is also a Buddhist practitioner. Prior to Neff's work, Thich Nhat Hahn (a Buddhist monk), Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein and Sharon Salzberg (all Buddhist teachers) and H. H. the Dalai Lama were among the first to bring Buddhist psychology and the concept of self-compassion to the West. Before research into self-compassion began, much of the orientation of

Buddhism coming to the West through psychotherapy was focused on mindfulness practices.

By focusing, along with others, on self-compassion training, Neff was significant in opening up a broader approach to transforming the mind and focusing on positive emotions. For true compassion to occur, Neff claimed it was necessary to master three meaningful approaches to awakening the mind in a compassionate way (Neff, 2011). Neff (2003) presents these three constructs and practices to describe self-compassion: "self-kindness," "common humanity," and "mindfulness" (2003a, p. 230). The opposites of these constructs are also part of Neff's presentation: "self-judgment" (or self-criticism), "isolation," and "over-identification" (p. 230).

### **Kristin Neff's three constructs interwoven with other contributors' thoughts**

#### ***Self-kindness contrasted with self-criticism***

Self-kindness is the open warmth with which one meets inner and outer experiences that are perceived as afflictive. Neff (2011) states that instead of engaging in a self-critical dialogue with oneself when one experiences disappointment or a sense of inadequacy or when one has made a mistake, one engages in a gentle, nurturing and comforting dialogue. According to Neff, this kindness is not the absolving of responsibility but a genuine, honest and accepting approach to one's experience. This approach mitigates against the potential for exaggerated self-attacking or defensive rejecting of one's experience through distortions. Self-criticism—the opposite of self-kindness—is a deep habitual tendency to attack oneself through excessive self-judgemental statements. Carl Rogers (2012), one of the founders of humanistic psychology, talked about "unconditional positive regard" (p. 47), which means having acceptance of oneself whereby one's sense of self-worth is not contingent upon external accolades. Self-acceptance is about the unconditional acceptance of self-worth (Rogers). As understood by Neff, self-acceptance is an aspect of self-kindness and is essential to the cultivation of self-compassion (2011). According to Tara Brach (2003), psychologist

and Buddhist teacher and author, self-acceptance is about being honest and accurate about an inner or outer experience, without engaging in self-judgement. Acceptance is a fundamental aspect of the construct of self-kindness (Gilbert & Choden, 2014; Neff, 2009), which is characteristic of meeting one's experiences openly and honestly without allowing one's defensive ego to distort reality through self-recrimination or self-dismissal.

Self-kindness does not deny what has happened; instead of flagellating or harshly criticizing oneself, one simply engages in a soft and gentle way with what has occurred (Neff, 2011). I notice the following dynamic among those who tend to be overly self-critical: they remember everything for which they blame themselves. A balanced view of recalling their positive contributions can be helpful in therapy. In my view, however, events are not totally one's responsibility nor are they necessarily under one's control. In Buddhism, there is a common phrase: existence is composed of "causes and conditions." But this does not mean that personal experience is created by linear causes; rather, it arises from a convergence of infinite causes and conditions. Thus, one can never single oneself out as being exclusively to blame, as there are no originating causes that are not interdependent. There is responsibility, but the responsibility must be tempered by the realization that it is rooted in a field of causations. Self-kindness is the ability to have wisdom-based empathy for oneself. Empathy is necessary to avoid self-hatred or excessive blame. What usually happens, however, is that the self-critical person gets stuck in the habit of feeling badly about him or herself, thus often becoming less motivated to work on himself/herself without becoming overwhelmed or wanting to numb.

In Neff's view (2011), some people believe self-criticism can serve to motivate them; however, it is known that chronic self-criticism and nonstop self-disparaging comments can lead to a sense of despair, hopelessness and helplessness. Excessive self-criticism is a form of self-aversion, rejecting aspects of self with disdain or the wish to disavow. Herman Hesse said: "There is only a single magic, a single power, a single salvation [...] that is called loving. Well, then, love your suffering. Do not resist it, do not

flee from it. It is your aversion that hurts, nothing else" (as cited in Hayhurst, 2010, p. 51). I like what Hesse says, but I would say love the sufferer. Neff states that the experience of *fear* itself is created by self-criticism. People are driven to accomplish things by their own fear of self-criticism. However, the fear that drives the person will be accompanied by an anxiety that will ultimately compromise one's ability to do well with the task (p. 162). Furthermore, Neff (2011) says that people can misconceive self-compassion as being indulgent. According to Neff, people fear that, by not engaging in self-criticism, they will deplete their drive for self-improvement and accomplishment.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama (2016b) says that compassion can anchor a person in a place of strength; thus, this strength can serve as an impetus for transformation. He makes a crucial point that it is important for compassion to be strong, "compassion ... makes long-lasting, strong will viable" (2016b, p. 8). He states strength is not to be confused with anger, which he does not advocate. He comments on the resiliency of the Tibetan people, which he attributes to calmness in the face of upmost adversity. He states they can take adversity as part of the path of spiritual development. In Tibet, it was part of the compassion teachings to have a calm and spacious mind in responding to difficulties (Dalai Lama). I apply what H. H. the Dalai Lama says here to self-compassion. Self-compassion is not self-indulgence in that it encourages one to face reality in ways that strengthen one's internal resources and resolve in living in accordance with one's values, ethics and ultimate well-being. Self-indulgence can be yielding to emotional whims and comfort zones, but self-compassion can apply discriminative wisdom.

Edward Espe Brown, a well-known Zen practitioner and teacher, gives an example of self-compassion when he speaks directly to the power of self-kindness in spiritual practice. After almost two decades of continual Zen practice, he had a pivotal moment sitting Zazen when an inner voice said: "Why don't you touch what's inside with some warmth and kindness" (2016, p. 67). This has been my experience as well. As a therapist, I have often seen that substantive change is only possible when one is able to meet his/her experience with kindness, acceptance and warmth.

As a therapist, I find it helps clients to recognize that the inner critic is another dynamic of both the conscious and unconscious mind. In therapy, it helps to provide an opportunity to help the client see that this negative self-recrimination does not represent the whole person and that the inner critic often can be developed out of a dynamic response to disruptive attachment to early life (mentioned in chapter one). The way the critic reinforces the negative storyline or experience is so convincing that it can distort memories and/or present certain perceptions of experience. Becoming aware of this dynamic not only gives a person/client freedom in the moment but also provides a space for self-reflection in future dealings with the critic.

There is a Buddhist parable called *Second Arrow* that directly relates to the discussion of self-kindness versus self-criticism, as follows.

The Buddha said:

When touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person sorrows, grieves and laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains: physical and mental. Just as if they were to shoot a man with an arrow and, right afterward, were to shoot him with another one, so that he would feel the pains of two arrows. (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, translated from Pali from the *Sallatha Sutta*; no date)

Thich Nhat Hanh (2011) interprets this teaching by the Buddha as the metaphor for working with inner and outer experiences. The first arrow injures one as a result of an inner event or an external event. A second arrow in the same place further injures one, taking the hurt deeper. Thich Nhat Hanh states that one's negative internal reaction to the first arrow—a resistance to the experience—creates the second arrow. The Buddha encourages one to acknowledge the pain of the first arrow in a restful state. It is important not to "exaggerate" the first arrow with a negative narrative (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2011, p. 220). One's mind creates a second arrow by engaging in a negative reaction to the first. Developing a compassionate mind enables one to avoid turning against oneself to create a "second arrow." Instead, one opens one's heart to a mindful awareness of suffering within oneself.



Neff (2011) states that self-kindness involves a relationship with oneself that is "soothing," gentle, "nurturing" and loving. Self-kindness can relieve over time what Neff states as oscillation between distortions of self that protect oneself and harsh self-deprecation or condemnation. Self-deprecation and its negative link to compassion for others is well described by Shantideva in the 8th century:

For beings do not wish their own true good,  
So how could they intend such good for others' sake?  
This state of mind [*bodhicitta*] so precious and so rare  
Arises truly wondrous, never seen before.  
(Padmakara Translation Group, 1997, p. 36)

Neff (2011) considers compassion an embodiment of the dignity of being human with humility. She recommends that when one becomes aware of engaging in a negative dialogue with oneself, one practises mindfulness. With mindfulness, one relates to oneself with kindness. This is based on the recognition and awareness that the very nature of self-judgement can be damaging to our sense of well-being.

Self-criticism also interferes with a person's ability to apply healthy cognitive strategies to cope with stress (Hall, Row, Wuensch, & Godley, 2013). Neff encourages self-dialogue in which one would speak as if to a dear friend who is suffering. She believes that self-kindness is not a passive approach, but one in which one "actively" engages in "comforting" oneself (Neff, 2011, p. 42). Pema Chödrön discusses self-compassion in terms of "befriending" oneself (Chödrön, 2005). Similarly, for Germer and Neff (2013), self-compassion involves "embracing" one's experience, as opposed to simply reframing an inner negative experience in a positive light (p. 858). This approach is designed to meet the content of our thoughts with kindness, regardless of what they are. The tendency to use self-critical, self-deprecating statements and harsh put-downs is slowly reduced through gentle mindful awareness and compassionate self-talk.

Self-kindness further involves an aspiration to no longer engage in destructive self-talk. "With self-kindness [...] we soothe and nurture ourselves when confronting our

pain rather than getting angry when life falls short of our ideals" (Germer & Neff, 2013, p. 857). Germer and Neff discuss how "harsh" and "belittling" talk discourages one from engaging in life (p. 857). Dogen has stated that the practice of mind training is for "the development of a tender heart" (as cited in Kjolhelde, 2013, p. 14). Even when one is able to sustain a mindful practice of working with one's mind, if it is not embodied with a tender heart, one will ultimately fail to find solace.

### ***Common humanity contrasted with self-isolation***

Neff's second construct is common humanity—the ability to remember and experience in a heartfelt way other people's suffering when one is also suffering (2011). This relates back to the Dalai Lama's comments on *tsewa* (the Tibetan word for compassion), regarding the inseparability of compassion for self and others. In the meditations brought forward from the 13th and 15th centuries, for Mind Training (*lojong*), there is one contemplation that relates to the concept of common humanity: "Just as I shun suffering, so do all sentient beings [...]" (Jinpa, 2006, p. 536). These views are in alignment with the essence of common humanity, which considers the suffering of self to be similar to the suffering of others.

Common humanity for Neff can be rooted in the Buddhist view of the interdependence and interconnectedness of all beings. When one is caught in personal suffering and one remembers the vast extent of sorrowful beings throughout the world, it is possible that one then diminish self-fixation in that suffering can become less self-centred. Neff (2011) says that "common humanity" is the awareness and appreciation of the magnitude of people's suffering and the understanding that one's own struggle with suffering is similar to that of other people. It is to hold within one's awareness a larger perspective of the scope of human suffering, which is a pervasive result of the human condition. In Buddhism, four inevitable sufferings are often identified: birth, old age, sickness and death.

Seeing one's suffering within the larger context of human suffering reduces the sense of isolation, separation and alienation from others (Neff, 2011). An experience of

alienation can not only exacerbate mental health concerns, but also profoundly amplify a view of self as flawed and unworthy. The Twelve Step program is a good example of the positive experience of sharing a common suffering. When participants are able to share their stories and listen to the stories of others, they experience a feeling that they are not alone, which alleviates their suffering. Feelings of being overwhelmed by one's own suffering can be mitigated by remembering that many others are experiencing the same kind of suffering—which is why there is such therapeutic value in group sharing, using a self-compassion curriculum. The shared rejoicing in the achievements of others and the support for those who are still struggling allows for an openness and acceptance for all who are involved in the Twelve Step program.

Neff comments that shame is often a factor in self-isolation. Self-isolation is the opposite of common humanity (as cited in Barnard & Curry, 2011). Laura Barnard and John Curry, colleagues in the Psychology and Neurology department at Duke University, state that as a result of feeling separate, less than or unworthy, one retreats from a sense of common humanity and also one does not reveal who one really is. Self-isolation is distancing oneself from others, which can exacerbate feelings of shame. Brené Brown (2010), research professor and author, states that shame is "the fear of being unworthy of love or belonging" (p. 40).

Erich Fromm (1956) discusses shame within the context of "awareness of human separation" (p. 9). He goes on to say that it is only through the experience of love for self and others that shame can be alleviated. He talks about the power of giving love, which is more healing than taking love. In the case of self-compassion, one is giving love to the self. "Love is an attitude [that] is the same towards all objects, including myself" (p. 53). He goes on to add: "The love for my own self is inseparably connected with the love for any other being" (p. 55). When people experience a genuine self-love, he says, it is antithetical to selfishness. Furthermore, Fromm states that a primarily selfish person is filled with the sense of emptiness and anxiety. Germer and Neff (2013) state that the realization that life is not perfect and that mistakes are made is the realization that we are all part of common humanity. This heartfelt understanding of reality helps us feel less

alone, which "fosters the connected mindset that is inclusive of others" (Germer & Neff, p. 857). It is common in psychotherapy to witness people feeling separate and alone, which tends to lead to self-pity and, consequently, greater self-isolation. A vicious cycle ensues.

Neff (2012) claims that self-pity is not a form of genuine compassion for self or for others because it lacks perspective, given its exclusive focus on self. Her construct of common humanity is an application that facilitates self-compassion instead of self-pity. In common humanity, one resides in the awareness of—as well as the appreciation, understanding and compassion for—others' suffering, knowing that it is similar to the felt suffering within oneself. Self-pity only strengthens the barrier of separation between self and other, and one avoids succumbing to it by cultivating a balanced view of—and a sensitivity and respect for—the suffering of self and others (2012).

When self-compassion is rooted in a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of self and other, it reduces the tendency to fixate on one's storylines and mental afflictions as permanent and intractable. As a therapist, I find it helpful to encourage clients to recognize and develop awareness of their tendency to cling to negative states of mind and the suffering that naturally ensues from this clinging. This recognition can provide the impetus and freedom for them to start to change. Therapeutic modalities can then be applied to constructively make these changes.

As mentioned earlier by Neff, a sense of common humanity can link us with the awareness of the shared experience of difficulties and adversities of life. This is beautifully exemplified by the well-known Buddhist parable of the mustard seed, based on an original *sutta*. Bhikkhuni Kilagotami says: "I [have] gotten past the death of sons; with this the search for men has ended" (Bodhi, 2000, verse 526, *Bhikkhunisamyutta*, pp. 223–224). The Buddha's words were initially held in an oral tradition. Since those early oral statements, there have been many different adaptations. Burlingame (1969) states that a distraught mother brings her deceased child in her arms to Lord Buddha. She begs him to bring the child back to life by medicine. Burlingame relates that the Buddha says

he does have medicine, but it requires that she find a home in the village where no one has died in order to bring back a small amount of mustard seed from that home. The story is about the mother's inner realization when she discovers that everyone has had loss (Burlingame, 1969, p. 107). This is common humanity. Another commentary on this story is by Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2013). He emphasizes the devastating effects of loss on one's life and how it can even lead to insanity. Thanissaro Bhikkhu states that, through the powerful effects of being in the presence of a skilled and powerful Buddha, Kisagotami achieves momentary clarity of mind, which creates openness to learning from her experience. Then, from her own experience of shared or common humanity, Kisagotami undergoes an inner transformation. Common humanity is the recognition—and possibly also the experience—of *transcendent wisdom* (often referred to as the sixth paramita, discussed in chapter four). In this process, there is a deep abiding awareness of the equanimity of suffering of self and other, which can engender limitless compassion.

As briefly mentioned, Buddhist scholars and practitioners recognize that karma experienced by the individual has many dimensions of causes and effects, thought by some Buddhists to include even random causes. We do not have complete control over the many factors that play into our lives—where we are born, the mindset of others who may harm us, genetic makeup, collective karma, etc. One can have compassion for others who suffer in ways unimaginable to us because we know that they, too, have very little control over their immediate circumstances.

Neff states that common humanity acknowledges the frailty and uncertainty of our existence. I feel this can be related to the "existential anxiety" (a term with origins in existential philosophy) that is experienced by so many. Existential anxiety acknowledges how fragile our existence is and that our life is contextually uncertain. It is a truism that we all leave this life alone and have to relinquish the objects and people of our attachments. H. H. the Dalai Lama says that by experiencing a deep, loving relationship with oneself, one can care for others more and, I feel, in doing so, has less propensity of feeling alone.

Just as we naturally experience feelings of pain and pleasure, we also have an innate sense of 'I' toward which we instinctively feel affection. It is because of the affection we hold for ourselves that we feel fondness and love for those around us; our self-affection is the source of the compassion we feel for others. (Dalai Lama, 2011, p. 50)

### ***Mindfulness contrasted with over-identification***

Neff's third construct is mindfulness contrasted with over-identification. Here is a commonly used description of mindfulness: "The awareness that emerges through paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Mindfulness is known to be a skill that can be cultivated. In Pali, *anussati* is translated as "recollection; memory; mindfulness" (Mahathera, 1968). Dr. Jinpa states: "the Pali term translated as mindfulness includes both *anusati* as well as *sati*" (2017, personal communication). Neff and Germer (2013) describe mindfulness as the ability to rest in equanimity, regardless of the variations of experience. However, in their work with self-compassion, mindfulness is relating to one's inner experience of suffering with "balanced awareness" (p. 29). They say another difference between mindfulness and self-compassion is that the focus of mindfulness can be on the inner experience such as body, emotions, sensations and thoughts; whereas in self-compassion, the focus is on the one who experiences. Together with other contributors in this dissertation, I use the term *mindfulness* in the more general context of the awareness of any experience that arises.

Generally, it is thought that mindfulness means not grasping onto positive or negative impulses or pursuing their implications but allowing for a moment-to-moment acceptance of experience, and experiencing an experience just as it is. Fundamentally, mindfulness is the cultivation of a state of awareness. While aware, some Buddhists say there can be also be a self that is observing the moment-to-moment experience. When one is experiencing an afflicted state, one does not become over-identified with the story around the afflicted feeling (Brach, 2003). As Christopher Germer (2009) says, one does not become "self-absorbed" into the afflicted state, thereby losing awareness.

"Mindfulness can be thwarted by two opposite alternatives: over-identification and avoidance," claim Barnard and Curry (2011, p. 290), and it is a practice that enables one to avoid succumbing to either of those two patterns (Barnard & Curry, 2011). Over-identification, according to Neff (2011), arises when one grasps onto a negative storyline and fixates on self-recrimination. Over-identification carries with it reification of self by involving fixed views that prevent one from experiencing a changing self. Over-identification further amplifies the suffering, with thoughts and feelings often becoming obsessive.

Mindfulness is an effective practice for reducing over-identification with emotion. It has the important and helpful function of allowing one to see the suffering emotion for what it is—momentary and not fixed. It involves the awareness that acknowledges an experience as it is. Mindfulness also involves wakeful awareness so one can see the nature of emotions, arising and dissolving. It allows for the potential to let go of harmful emotions by not clinging to their content.

For Neff, the third construct of mindfulness allows for the existence of painful emotions and thoughts without grasping or having aversion to them. One stage of mindfulness practice is to rest in the awareness of these painful afflictions. Compassion involves some self-discipline, in that a person needs to gain distance from habitual responses. This distance or pause allows one to orchestrate mindfulness in the moment so as to make a healthy choice. Remembering to be mindful can be brought back into awareness by what Tara Brach (2009) calls "intention" and "attention." We can have the intention for positive self-regard while, at the same time, sustain attention on this positive state of mind.

Neff's research (2011) refers to three contrasting components: "self-criticism, self-isolation and self-absorption [over-identification]," and Germer (2009) relates them to the fight, flight and freeze responses (p. 85). Germer further elaborates that self-absorption can be seen as a freezing response as one gets stuck, ruminating on a negative response without awareness.

I feel that Neff's three positive constructs for self-compassion—self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness—may benefit from a fourth positive construct: loving-kindness towards self. Loving-kindness is more than just kindness. It is possible that Neff's three positive constructs do not give the active development of compassion (the ingredient of loving-kindness), which is the application of skilful means to find happiness and to achieve well-being. Loving-kindness as a meditation practice directed towards self can be one such skilful means of actualizing self-compassion. The impetus for wanting to transform and to help oneself, is an important part of self-compassion. In my view, the addition of a fourth construct of loving-kindness provides increased opportunity for active applications and practices in order to change. Perhaps that is why loving-kindness is an integral part of all three of the major curricula to cultivate compassion, as will be discussed in chapter seven, those being Compassion-Focused Therapy, Compassion Cultivation Training, and Mindful Self-Compassion program. In Tibetan Buddhism, H. H. the Dalai Lama (1998) stresses that compassion is often described as the wish and action for the alleviation of suffering, whereas loving-kindness is the wish for happiness.

## **Paul Gilbert**

Paul Gilbert exemplifies learning, dialogue and the application of Buddhism and Western psychological systems. A professor at the University of Derby, England, Paul Gilbert is the main founder of Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT). The skills he teaches involve principles derived from neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, Buddhism, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and developmental models related to early attachment theory.

Gilbert (2009a) suggests that we have three primary "emotion regulation systems": 1) "incentive/resource-focused"; 2) "threat-focused, protection-and safety-seeking"; and 3) "non-wanting/affiliative-focused" (p. 22). When the incentive resource-seeking model is involved, one achieves pleasure by continually seeking comfort for the sense desires and one wishes for praise and acknowledgement from others. It is known



that in materialistic societies, the culture promotes an emphasis on excitement through competition and getting ahead through power and drive.

Gilbert (2009a) identifies three primary feelings associated with the threat–protection system: "anxiety, anger and disgust" (p. 23). These emotions are activated in the part of the brain known as the amygdala, which is involved in activating the flight, fight and freeze response. He says that self-recrimination, self-criticism and self-shaming can activate this threat-protection system in the brain. The "incentive/resource-focused" system has a very interesting relationship to the threat-focused protection system in that if one is highly driven and is chronically attacking oneself for not doing enough, this self-attacking activates the threat-focused system. He states that frustration arising from one's drives being impeded as well as from not accomplishing what one most wants to accomplish or achieve one's deep life aspirations can trigger the threat-focused system (2009a; 2014). This can result in people being overstressed, revved up, fearful and anxious. The "non-wanting/affiliative-focused" system (2009a, p. 22) involves one being content with one's inner and outer experiences just as they are—also described as the "soothing and contentment system" (p. 24). When this system is in play, one suspends trying to change, fix or strive for things; one feels no discontentment; the experience does not need to be any more or less than what it is; it is enough. When we are in a place of deep compassion, love or safety within ourselves or in relation with others, this emotion-regulation system is activated. Gilbert and Choden (2014) state that the soothing and contentment system also allows one freedom from being dominated by the threat-protection system. When this is the case, the mind is able to contemplate and use rational skills.

Gilbert states that children are oriented towards one or another of these emotional systems through various forms of attachments with their caregivers. Children develop a propensity towards shame and self-recrimination when the attachment style is predominantly characterized by a feeling of lack of safety—either emotional or physical or both. This pattern of attachment can lead to an over-activated threat-and-protection system, which can then lower the availability of the affiliative-soothing system. If a

child's caregivers fail to provide a nurturing environment, the child's ability to comfort or sooth himself/herself can be greatly reduced at that time and possibly later in life. The person can then become habitually hypervigilant to threat-focused stimuli, unconsciously and consciously responding to life experiences with avoidance, aggression, placating or other defended modes of survival. Gilbert's Compassion-Focused Therapy involves teaching skills derived from various modalities to activate and increase the affiliative self-soothing emotion-regulation system, which will be explained briefly in chapter seven.

### **Other Contributors to Working with the Self Therapeutically**

Pema Chödrön, Karen Horney, Arnold Mindell, Tara Brach, and others have contributed important approaches to working with the self, with particular relevance to compassion and self-compassion. In mental healthcare, self-compassion is a vital construct in terms of waking up to, and transforming, deeply engrained negative patterns towards self and others. My personal observation is that it is only when these deeply ingrained patterns are met with compassion that a steady transformation can take place. Negative patterns are often unconscious and, over time, erode mental health and well-being. Psychiatrist Karen Horney's work frames my discussion of the development and mitigation of certain habitual patterns (1976). Although the patterns that Horney presents entail a response from the person to others, I am primarily using Horney's constructs in relation to self. I also use some work on habitual patterns from Pema Chödrön (2005) who discusses three patterns in which one can engage when dealing with an unconscious and unpleasant inner experience: "self-soothing, self-aggression and self-numbing."

Pema Chödrön, in discussing her four R's—which stand for "recognize, refrain, relax and resolve"—honours the mind/body connection. For her, recognizing means acknowledging the negative habitual tendency; refraining means not engaging in this habitual tendency or patterning; relaxing means calming the nervous system through contemplative practice; and resolving means acknowledging that one has accomplished a shift through these efforts and has set the intention to not repeat the same negative habit.

The accomplishment of resolving can include *rejoicing*, which is emphasized in many Buddhist practices. I know this from my own experience in Buddhism. In mindfulness practice of Tibetan Buddhism, Douglas Veenhof, a Buddhist teacher, particularly emphasizes that one can "rejoice" when one remembers or comes back to awareness. He feels rejoicing is an integral segment of meditational practices because it serves as a genuine inspiration to sustain one's energy to practise. Veenhof further elaborates by saying that the rejoicing process is the joy of being "lucid again" (Veenhof, 2014).

I think that the four R's discussed by Chödrön can be a way of working with the patterns that Karen Horney presented. Horney (1976) has identified patterns towards others called "compulsive drives" or psychological survival and coping responses established in childhood in response to abuse or neglect (p. 12). These patterns or drives are then employed later in life at inappropriate times. For example, Horney suggests three primary patterns: "moving towards," "moving against," and "moving away" (pp. 14–16). As mentioned, I have taken the same patterns from Horney and applied them to relating to oneself.

Horney presents "moving towards" as an excessive pleasing, conciliating and placating of another's needs. In my view, the construct can still apply when working with the self: one can be moved to excessively please and placate one's own needs. I see this placation as related to self-soothing, insofar as self-soothing can be an excessive self-indulgence. One of the primary aspects of today's culture is the search for self-soothing, which can range on a continuum from healthy to destructive. Examples of healthy self-soothing in our culture might include taking a relaxing bath, listening to music that is uplifting, getting a massage. Destructive self-soothing is exemplified by drug use, excessive TV-watching or over-eating.

Horney states that "moving against" is a pattern of being aggressive towards others. In terms of working with oneself, it can be indicative of self-aggression, whereas "moving away" is a form of splitting off from self and numbing. "Moving away" from

oneself can be actual or through fantasy and/or can result in disconnecting from one's feelings. In my opinion, the "four R's of recognizing, refraining, relaxing, and resolving" by Chödrön (2005) can be applied to working therapeutically with the three primary "neurotic trends" by Horney (1976, p. 15). I feel the four R's can be an active practice in working with Horney's unconscious patterns. Firstly, one "recognizes" (first R by Chödrön) which of Horney's three patterns one is engaging in at that moment. Then, one could ask oneself if one is unconsciously responding from one's past or responding in a way that is contextually reasonable and applicable? If not responding from the past, one could proceed to the next R—"refraining" from engaging in the old pattern. "Relaxing" is the third R. Chödrön states that "resolving" means to try to not repeat the pattern while also rejoicing in the acknowledging that one has worked on not engaging in the pattern. In relation to Horney's three constructs, resolving could then be applied if one does not engage in these old patterns and one makes the commitment or resolves not to repeat them into the future.

Arnold Mindell, physicist, Jungian analyst, and founder of Process-Oriented Psychology, has a dynamic psychotherapeutic way of allowing blocked and thwarted experiences to unfold and transform, and in my self-compassion curriculum this way of working is applied within the session to the inner critic. Mindell has made a creative contribution in working with the self that includes the natural healing propensities of the unconscious. Mindell (2002) discusses what he calls "sensory channels" that are very important in helping people shift from a stuck place. The channels devised by Mindell are as follows: "body feeling or proprioception," "visualization," "hearing," "movement or kinesthesia," "relationships," and "world phenomena" (p. 22). Individuals primarily perceive the world through their senses. The channels are the primary means and the sensory function by which an individual perceives and then makes sense of the world. A channel, such as feeling, within the body could include sensations, pain, twitching or any physical sensation of comfort or discomfort. He says certain forms of yoga would utilize this body feeling channel. Being aware of changes of breath and breathing is part of this channel. Visualization could include flashes of colour or form. The visual channel is

being used (his term is "occupied" when used with awareness), for example, when images arise such as religious or spiritual figures spontaneously appearing to the mind's eye. The auditory channel or hearing may include the sounds one hears. The inflections of sounds, voice tones, and speech rhythm are aspects of sound perceived by the hearer. According to Mindell, this can include listening to the inner dialogue with oneself. The kinaesthetic or movement channel can involve dance, shifting one's body in relation to affect and posture. The relationship channel is the quality of feeling one has while relating to a person or persons, from the continuum of conflict to harmony with others (2002). My observations are that people are often in the relationship channel such as worrying about loved ones, fear of abandonment and rejection, and rumination around hurt. Mindell says that in regards to the world channel, it is focusing on major divisions and events that may involve tragedy or injustice or attempts of great peace or virtuous activities on a societal scale.

Mindell says a person can be stuck in a particular channel. A channel is a sensory experience for the person in that particular moment. A channel may primarily be "occupied" or under-occupied or unoccupied. People use particular channels in a habitual and repeated manner while under-utilizing or being totally unaware of other channels available to them. By shifting from an occupied channel and into a less occupied one, the person may engage in a creative process revealing new understandings (Mindell, p. 23). "Process work" by Mindell involves the following: the psychotherapist or client identifies the channel that is occupied when discussing a symptom or problem. The person can "amplify" the experience of a symptom, such as a relationship problem or world problem. Amplification occurs in the channel in which the client is working, and the therapist asks that person to increase the symptom; when this occurs, the client often shifts to a new channel naturally. Spontaneously, another channel will appear. Then, with awareness, the person follows the process as it unfolds in the new channel. Through this process of spontaneously perceiving and following the same problem in a different channel, a deeper understanding occurs. According to Mindell, this can promote insight or healing.

Not only do people shift their awareness by working with new channels, but they may also gain a new perspective as to how they can possibly change.

Another process used by Mindell is working with "edges." In Mindell's work, he uses the concept of primary and secondary processes. The primary process refers to what the person identifies with at that moment. I would like to give an example: A person may be riddled with pervasive guilt, and identify as: "I am such a bad person." The secondary process is the unconscious part that is often more true of the person, such as "I am a good person with some qualities of kindness."

Mindell uses the term "edges," which refer to where consciousness ends or a boundary of one's awareness. He also refers to the existing limitations of self-concept for the individual. When a person can move past an edge in consciousness, new information emerges for possible transformation (p. 67). An edge also refers to when one gets close to the awareness of the emerging secondary process. It may be frightening to the person to become aware of or admit to a part of oneself with which one does not identify. One of the reasons people initially may get stuck in one channel is because the new information and consciousness around a problem may be too painful and bring them to an uncomfortable edge. As soon as a person reaches his/her edge, the channel occupied might change spontaneously to another channel. This sudden switching from a channel may create a foggy awareness in the person (p. 65). If the person can stay with an edge with awareness, one can obtain insight and understanding of new possibilities of being (Mindell).

Though Mindell elaborates edges clearly in his books, it is difficult in the scope of this dissertation to present a clear conceptual framework of his work. I have found working with edges is actually not as difficult as it seems and can be very helpful. The work has a subtle, organic way of unfolding. In working with edges, in the interchange between the therapist and the client, there is work with overt and covert processes: overt may be behaviours, body reactions and responses, and covert may be images and feelings.

In my self-compassion curriculum, the six channels by Mindell can be presented by the facilitator and applied in a dynamic way in working with the inner critic. As the inner critic is partly based on the over-identification of the individual on a repetitive fixed negative image of self, the process method allows the space to step out of this over-identification into a bigger perspective and experience. Just as in this dissertation, where I do not go very deeply into Process-Oriented Psychology itself, I have found an introduction, such as the one provided above, sufficiently helpful to participants in working with the inner critic when it is combined with an experiential exercise. After the session, a take-home assignment is given to participants with the following suggestions: Reflect upon a minor problem in which one seems to always respond with a form of self-criticism; focus on the minor problem and get in touch with the channel in which one perceives or experiences the problem; make a mental note of that channel; with awareness, gently amplify the symptom or channel. For example, perhaps one's dog has a minor illness. One might notice that one becomes self-critical when one cannot control worry for the dog: "What is wrong with me that I cannot stop obsessing?" With the self-criticism, one is aware of the experience of pain in one's body (*body feeling or proprioception*). One then gently amplifies the experience of pain in the body in the proprioceptive channel. Then, with awareness, one allows the mind to just rest in the unfolding of experience. A shift to another channel will often ensue. One follows that new channel with openness, awareness and compassion. Should a participant wish to share the process when the group reconvenes, he or she is welcome to do so verbally. The participant may prefer to journal or use whatever creative means to express the experience.

I would like now to consider the work of Tara Brach (2003), who discusses taking a pause so as to cultivate awareness and non-reactivity. Mental suffering can prevent an individual from gaining enough distance from negativity to have genuine compassion for the self and others. Brach, a psychologist and well-known author and *vipassana* teacher, discusses "the sacred pause," whereby one attends to one's inner experience so as to become centred and present (p. 71). It involves becoming aware of the present moment in

a non-critical way. This process of reminding ourselves to wake up from our habitual patterning creates enough mental space for us to disengage from this patterning. Our deep habitual patterning can be so entrenched that we forget to stay awake and aware. Instead of responding to life with genuine openness and presence, we react from this place of deep habituation.

Zen teachers, such as Thich Nhat Hanh and Ezra Bayda, discuss pausing as well and disengaging from a reactive mind through the breath. Bayda (2008), author and Zen master, recommends the "Three Breaths Practice," whereby one engages in three deep breaths so as to disentangle from a reactionary stance and become aware of being in the body-mind and the present moment (p. 70). Beginning with the famous adage from Socrates, "Know thyself," Bayda discusses three stages of Zen practice that lead to awakening: the "me phase, being awareness, and being kindness" (p. 5). The focus of the *me phase* is on cultivating awareness and understanding of—as well as open curiosity about—the afflicted states that inhibit one's ability to develop. Through the process of working with these afflicted states in a friendly and open manner, one begins to liberate oneself from what Tara Brach refers to as a "trance." Brach defines trance as forgetting who we are—forgetting to be aware. Trance is when one is caught in the afflictive and habitual states of mind. One cannot then truly experience compassion coming from oneself. She says trance is a sense of separation rather than a sense of being part of the whole. Trances occur when one is lost in "unworthiness" or "fear" (Brach, p. 7), creating a deep-seated disconnection from self and others. Negative beliefs about feelings, thoughts and oneself obscure one's ability to relate to anything or anyone in a holistic way and therefore impede one's ability to be present to others and to the world. Bayda's concept—*being awareness*—is the second phase of transforming excessive self-referencing into a larger awareness of being that is vast and spacious. The third phase—*being kindness*—is orientated towards the cultivation of deep compassion and loving-kindness for self and other. His stages of Zen practice are important to the cultivation of self-compassion in that there is a balanced perspective between working on one's



afflicted states and cultivating the positive intrinsic potentials of compassion and loving-kindness.

Understanding how Buddhism defines and describes compassion has been helpful to the integration of self-compassion within Western Psychotherapy. The way Buddhism elaborates the meaning of self further clarifies and deepens therapeutic applications of self-compassion. The field of self-compassion has contributed greatly to the general understanding in society that compassion includes self. Buddhist mindfulness has informed Western psychotherapy; however, compassion teachings can be gleaned from Western as well as Eastern teachings. For the most part, individuals who have strongly utilized Buddhist thought and psychology have pervasively influenced the advent of self-compassion as a field of therapeutic modality and research. The ongoing development of self-compassion hopefully will continue to find balance and integration among scientific research, Western modalities of therapy, educational models of group curriculums and Buddhism.

### **3. Further Contemporary Buddhist Discourses and Applications on Self-Compassion in the Therapeutic Context**

This chapter explores a number of topics relevant to self-compassion in the therapeutic context. Mindfulness is important because of its special significance to self-compassion. Historical roots of mindfulness and breath awareness are explored because of their current common usage. Concerns about current usages of mindfulness and self-compassion in modern society will be presented. Contributions from some contemporary Buddhist teachers and other Western psychotherapists to the understanding and perspectives of self-compassion in contemporary psychology will be explored. Buddhist concepts are interwoven with current discussions in the West of mind and brain.

#### **Historical Roots of Mindfulness and Breath Awareness**

Because mindfulness is a major component and approach of my curriculum, it is important and ethical to honour its historical roots and the spirit in which it was originally taught. Mindfulness is interwoven throughout this dissertation as it relates to specific areas. The section that follows specifically comments on mindfulness and breath awareness. Mindfulness of breath is taught by the Buddha in *Anapanasati Sutta*, Majjhima Nikāya, 118 (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995). Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, in their translation, say that the mindfulness of breath is especially important because it is foundational to the four *Jhanas* (1995, p. 39)—the various states of development achieved through meditation and *samadhi*. In the *Anapanasati Sutta*, mindfulness of breath and explanation of breathing technique precede the specific application to the four foundations of mindfulness. The four foundations of mindfulness are thus rooted in the mindfulness of breath (Nanamoli and Bodhi, 1995).

I would like to summarize some of the Buddha's techniques for breath meditation that are relevant to this dissertation. First, Nanamoli and Bodhi state that the Buddha speaks of noticing the duration of breath and mindfulness in the form of bodily sensation such as the deep inhalation and exhalation and/or shallow inhalation and exhalation.

Then, the Buddha talks about "rapture ... pleasure [and] mental formations" (Nanamoli, & Bodhi, p. 944), while continuing to observe the breath. An interesting point made by the Buddha here is the value of rapture and joy so that one can experience the mental formations with peace. The third component is the application of breath to mind, which involves experiential affirmation or contemplating "I shall breath in [and out] liberating the mind" (p. 944). I find it a helpful tool or practice for self-compassion curriculum, and in group exercises, I have seen benefit from breath awareness. Breath awareness can be foundational on the Buddhist path to liberation as a technique to pacify gross afflictive states of mind into a more peaceful and relaxed state. It also enables a focus for concentration that is readily accessible to the practitioner, a universal focus not contingent upon cultural or religious orientation. The fourth component is "impermanence," which the Buddha describes as a process of "Contemplating ... fading away ... cessation [and] relinquishment" (p. 944).

Self-compassion training involves relinquishing the fixed view of oneself in a negative light, which I feel cannot be done on a purely cognitive level. Through breath work, the experiential moment-to-moment awareness of the arising and falling of thoughts and feelings can be known, lived, and felt.

### **Mindfulness as Integrated into Self-Compassion**

Mindfulness in the West has become a pervasive model for mental well-being and health since Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (1990) started to become popular in the early 1990s. Kabat-Zinn is one of the hallmark figures in the introduction of mindfulness to the West. Meditation can contribute to mental well-being and is therefore not only a significant focus in Buddhist philosophy, but also an inherent part of the Buddhist practices of calm abiding and mindfulness. Calm abiding (*shamatha*) has the benefit of conferring flexibility in dealing with the contents of one's mind, which benefits mental well-being. Gen Lamrimpa (1992) uses the word "pliancy" (p. 50). In flexibility, one is able to rest in a calm awareness without being subsumed in one's

emotional reactions. Mindfulness is an essential practice modality currently being applied to compassion and self-compassion. Mindfulness is integral, essential and inseparable training for self-compassion (Neff, 2011; Germer, 2009a; Gilbert & Choden, 2014). For Neff, the mindfulness component of self-compassion is primarily about not grasping onto negative internal thoughts, patterns and themes, since mindfulness prevents fixation.

At lectures on Buddhism, I have heard teachers repeat the fact that mindfulness is rooted in Buddhism, and that this fact needs to be acknowledged. I agree, as it is important to bear in mind the context and original intention of mindfulness. Mindfulness of breath is elaborated in detail in the Buddha's words in *The Anapanasati Sutta* in the *Epitome of the Pali Canon* (2012) attributed to the time of the Buddha (pp. 113–118). In Buddhism, mindfulness entails practices that can cultivate deeper-than-normal qualities of experience and of wakefulness. Mindfulness is trainable. Unfortunately, mindfulness is sometimes taken out of the context in which it was taught and the intention is lost. Without systematic practice and training anchored in a consistent discipline and method, some capacities of mindfulness are overlooked or neglected. The teaching of mindfulness can be too simplistic and render it unsustainable. Mindfulness includes profound training so as to yield benefits such as *samadhi*—a term for a specific kind of meditative concentration—which is related to stabilizing the mind, resulting in a certain degree of restful peacefulness. In the *Sutras*, the practice of mindfulness is rooted contextually in ethics, meditation training, wisdom and compassion. Potentially, with the wrong intention, mindfulness could be used for mere gain of personal or institutional power. Mindfulness, under improper instruction, can have deleterious effects on a person's psychological health—for example, alienating the practitioner from his/her own experience. Rather than heightening the experience through the awareness of mindfulness, it can deaden and alienate. An absolute schism between one's awareness and one's thoughts or feelings can create mental confusion and disorientation.

After over a decade of psychotherapeutic practice, I have found that mindfulness alone does not suffice to cope with suffering. For optimal therapeutic value, a gentle, kind, accepting and compassionate relationship with oneself is necessary, and

mindfulness is only one step in this direction of dealing with suffering. Here, again, loving-kindness meditation can be useful, with self-compassion providing a safe space in which one can disentangle oneself from the affliction.

In Buddhism, mindfulness practice is anchored in the intention of compassion for self and others. For instance, Germer and Neff (2013) state that self-compassion is not a matter of reframing a negative as a positive, but of meeting one's experience with the qualities of mindfulness and self-acceptance (p. 858). When combined with compassion, mindfulness deepens experience because the mindfulness is rooted in a sustained intention. In this case, experience is the object of the subjective awareness. Mindfulness leads to a deeper appreciation and that can, in turn, make the experiences of one's life precious, vivid and more meaningful. For this reason, Germer and Neff (2015) use mindful and compassion approaches for trauma. Gilbert states that "[trauma survivors of childhood experiences] do not necessarily find cognitive restructuring emotionally reassuring" (as cited in Germer & Neff, 2015, p. 46).

Mindfulness and compassion are presented as interrelated constructs by psychologists and psychiatrists such as Neff, Germer, and Gilbert. In a book by Germer, Siegel, and Fulton (2013), they give tribute to Salzberg for her meditations on mindfulness that cultivate the following skills: "(1) focused attention or concentration; (2) open monitoring or mindfulness *per se*; and (3) loving-kindness and compassion (Salzberg, 2011)" (p. 78). Conceptually, I feel that the terms "mindful compassion" or "mindful self-compassion" represents well the interrelationship between the two words.

### **Critique and controversies of mindfulness**

Mindfulness has become a subject of research in education, neuroscience, psychology and other fields since its early popularity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Because mindfulness is now such a significant part of current research in self-compassion studies, I provide critiques based upon where mindfulness education should not be applied, and with what reservations? The six

critiques I present are mindfulness' overuse and indiscriminate application, lack of proper training and practice, over-promotion and unrealistic expectations, it is often not a therapy unto itself, inapplicability for certain client populations, and loss of context and historical acknowledge of the spirit in which it was meant.

There are particular concerns in establishing curricula, revolving around some of the indiscriminate uses of mindfulness-based approaches in group psychotherapy. Germer (2013) states that "...by 2013 there were over 2,200 articles and over 60 mindfulness treatment and research centers in the United States alone..." (p. 12).

Six of these concerns are as follows:

**1. Sometimes therapists apply mindfulness because it is in vogue.** This concern does not apply to well-respected and established mindfulness practices, such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention for Alcohol and Substance Use Disorders, Dialectical Behavioural Therapy, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, Mindfulness-Based Approaches to Eating Disorders, Mindfulness-Based Depression Treatment, etc. Although mindfulness practices have been successfully introduced in a variety of settings, such as correction facilities, academic settings and healthcare settings, my concern is that mindfulness is sometimes indiscriminately and pervasively applied. There has been controversy around the use of mindfulness training in the military (see below) (Cullen, 2011).

**2. Sometimes therapists apply mindfulness without having had proper mindfulness training.** Dimidjian and Linehan (2003) state: "[P]rocedures for training therapists and ensuring competence represent areas of significant controversy in the field" (p. 169). A thorough training in mindfulness practices needs to be coupled with daily experiential practice by the therapist. Also, the therapist needs to carefully screen client populations in order to provide the right timing and sequence in the application of mindfulness in a treatment plan. For example, sometimes it may be best for a client to

engage in distraction techniques instead of mindfulness. These distraction techniques may be a helpful and necessary way to cope with somaticizing and unwelcomed thoughts that are overwhelming from a trauma reaction. Mindfulness is not to be forced as a method or technique. I believe techniques should serve the client and never be adhered to for their sake. The client's feedback through verbal and nonverbal cues are essential for the therapist to listen to and respond with deep sensitivity in order to determine whether mindfulness is appropriate and therapeutic at that moment. I have found that, particularly with clients with a complex history of trauma, it is essential for the application of mindfulness to start in small increments of time. The therapist needs to provide the encouragement for the client to regulate his/her own internal monitoring of mindfulness so that he/she can determine when to take a break. I feel that sometimes when this is not emphasized the client may go along with the mindfulness exercise because he/she feels one "should." By passing the responsibility and control to the client it allows mindfulness not to be a forced experience and can allow the client to gain more self-awareness of when painful and unwelcomed feelings begin to become overwhelming. It is known that the opening of awareness in one's own mind through mindfulness can also bring forth unwelcomed memories and somatic associations to these memories. Thus, a gentle approach is paramount. Part of the ethics of informed consent is that the client is aware of the nature of the treatment. In this case, the client is informed that the meditative aspects of mindfulness may open up aspects of the psyche that were previously dormant or unconscious and potentially painful.

**3. People can have overly high expectations of mindfulness practice, believing that it automatically engenders positive therapeutic change.** People can be misled by pop psychology, therapists and the media over-promoting the notion that mindfulness generates immediate results. The promotion of mindfulness using overzealous claims of quick results can be misleading to the hopeful public. Many people struggle to be five minutes alone with their own mind. By encouraging realism about the results of mindfulness, people may actually commit more readily and consistently to the practice without getting discouraged and dismayed.

**4. Mindfulness cannot always stand alone as a therapy, especially with psychiatric populations.** Often, clients need to initially approach their suffering through careful introspection of past conditions. This allows them to gain insight into what early conditioning led them to become the individuals they are. Mindfulness is not so much a practice of looking at the causes of suffering, as much as it is a set of techniques that grant people relief from their life stories, so that they do not grasp onto the storyline around their suffering. In *Buddhist Practice on Western Ground*, Harvey Aronson (2004), co-director of the Tibetan Buddhist centre in Houston and psychotherapist, discusses "content versus process" (p. 43). "Content" is understanding self through self-reflection and analysis, and "process" is akin to "observational skills" (p. 43)—a letting go of the grasping of sensations, thoughts, feelings, etc. In my view, there needs to be a balance between content- and process-based approaches in psychotherapy. Skilful therapeutic discernment is required in assessing the timing and appropriateness of these two therapeutic styles.

**5. Mindfulness can be misused by practitioners, clients and therapists alike.** If mindfulness is taught incorrectly or applied without a full understanding, it can render the student emotionally distanced and detached from self, from others and from the world around them. "Reactive defensive detachment" is a term Aronson uses when people misunderstand the common usage in Buddhism of nonattachment. In Buddhism, the meaning of non-attachment is often akin to non-clinging. *Reactive defensive detachment* is a defensive response when one feels personally attacked (Aronson, 2004, p. 189) or alienated from society. It is the avoidance of painful experience by the mechanism of apathy rather than true nonattachment: "[...] avoiding pain through disengagement" (p. 190). I find people sometimes talk about wanting to learn to meditate so as to feel less pain, have no thoughts and stifle emotions. For many, they do not always practise meditation with the right spirit and understanding. It may be an escape from reality as opposed to an openness to experience.

Unfortunately, there is a perception by some people that mindfulness is only simple awareness or watching the breath. This is not so. For example, mindfulness of



breath is elaborated in detail in the Buddha's words in *The Anapanasati Sutta* in the *Epitome of the Pali Canon* (2012) attributed to the time of the Buddha (pp. 113–118). Mindfulness has been practised for at least 2,600 years, utilizing complex, profound techniques that probably number in the hundreds. There is a common saying in Buddhism that the Buddha taught 84,000 teachings, meaning that there was no one way of teaching universally to all beings. Each individual has a different level of consciousness; thus, the teaching is in accordance with his/her level of understanding, learning ability and capacity for integration. The Buddha did not subscribe to dogma. Each person has to use his/her self-analysis to enliven the meaning personally. Fleischman says a "limitation on meditation is the belief that it is always good for everyone" (2016a). I would say meditation should not be touted as a definitive answer to all problems as there are many other approaches that may be more helpful for an individual than meditation. When Dr. Ken Verni (2015) discusses mindfulness meditation he says, "mindfulness is not prescriptive" (p. 22). I feel the overuse and over-application of mindfulness meditation has sometimes led to lack of sensitivity to the individual needs within a group setting. For example, in a chronic pain group, a therapist may be over-zealous in applying a mindfulness technique for the whole group while one or more individuals may have their symptoms exacerbated past their threshold for integration. If the therapist is sensitive to these variances, she or he can skilfully work with these needs in ways that clients can comfortably pace themselves. By pushing too hard or without application to the individual, the therapist is not empowering clients to practice self-compassion.

Traditionally, mindfulness is combined with ethics, morality and, I would add, compassion, so that it cannot be used destructively. When mindfulness is taught, it is important that it be presented within the context of the right intention or motivation. Mindfulness should not be separated from compassion or compassion from mindfulness. Mindfulness can be taught by teachers who do not acknowledge or present a depth of understanding, thereby creating "dumbed down versions of mindfulness" (Thompson, 2014, p. 98). In other words, it can be harmful to over-decontextualize mindfulness from the Buddhist pedagogy and practice. Mindfulness is within the Eightfold Path, which is

an integrated system of teachings. All eight paths go together to achieve full awakening. I like the description of the eight by Goldstein and Kornfield (1987): "[...] right understanding, right aim, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration" (p. 434). One obvious reason why one should not take mindfulness out of its context within the other eight is that the intent of the Buddha obviously included bringing the whole person onto the path.

Within mindfulness itself, there are many practices, some of which are complex—such as the mindfulness training that goes back to the Buddha. According to Alan Wallace, an author and scholar of Tibetan Buddhism, says that the mindfulness training consists of the "four applications of mindfulness," which concerns "body, feelings, mental events and phenomena" (2011, p. vi). These four applications can be found in the *Satipatthana Sutta* (Pali) (Bodhi, 2005a, pp. 281-290). The training in which different approaches of mindfulness develop different skill sets indicates further complexity.

Stanley and Jha (2010) studied mindfulness used by military personnel in their homes in terms of memory improvement and emotion regulation (as cited in Cullen, 2011). Cullen states that Stanley and Jha brought to bear the positive results of mindfulness training that involved "...working memory capacity and affective experience in military service members preparing for deployment" (p. 191). Cullen mentions the controversy around military use of mindfulness. In my opinion, one of the essential issues around merging the secular with the spiritual is that the right intention needs to be with the right training.

**6. "[Cognitive science] has yet to be informed by the kind of ethical and contemplative perspective that Buddhism upholds"** (Thompson, 2014, p. 98). Evan Thompson is a professor of philosophy at the University of British Columbia. The heart of ethics in Buddhism is compassion. I feel that the same spirited upholding of ethics which Thompson champions for research in the cognitive sciences is necessary for mindfulness therapy research as well. It might be said that, by taking something out of a spiritual context and putting it into a secular, the original meaning and intention can be

lost in transition. The spiritual context can be protected when it is merged with the secular if the right intention is rooted in compassion. In saying all this, I do not mean to imply that mindfulness cannot be used effectively in many different contexts, including secular applications. In particular, I feel that the advent of "mindfulness" in Western psychotherapy has provided a tremendous resource and method.

### **Concerns regarding self-compassion**

I have the same concerns about the field of self-compassion that I have about some of the current usages of mindfulness. There have been many waves from Buddhism impacting Western society. As mentioned, one of the waves was mindfulness and another wave appeared through the field of compassion, which can now be related to self-compassion. My primary concerns, beside those briefly mentioned above, are indiscriminate application, improper training, overzealous emphasis of results, and decontextualization.

The indiscriminate application of self-compassion can result from the use of the term as a buzzword leading to a situation where it could easily be misunderstood. For example some people take self-compassion to mean self-entitlement or self-indulgence. A more accurate understanding of self-compassion is that it is rooted in equanimity. The goal of the application of self-compassion is that: I feel the same quality of compassion for myself as I feel for others.

I believe proper training of facilitators and therapists in self-compassion is important. This includes doing one's own personal inner work and bringing self-awareness to the cultivation of self-compassion. In training, inner work is as important as content. Proper training for facilitators and therapists is emphasized by the three major group curricula I know of: Compassion-Focused Therapy, Compassion Cultivation Training, and the Mindful Self-Compassion program (discussed in chapter seven).

As a therapist, I'm especially concerned about an overzealous emphasis on quick and easy results. Awareness, time, discipline, effort and patience are required to cultivate sustained self-compassion.

The last concern is decontextualization. This refers to the simplistic selecting out and use of one aspect from the vast Buddhist system, which was always meant to be an integrated and interdependent set of thoughts, ideas and practices. For example, in Buddhism the application of compassion goes hand in hand with wisdom. It is my hope that my work here will contribute in some small way to preserving and protecting the profundity of cultivating compassion as the field of self-compassion continues to be brought into mainstream society.

This last section of chapter three explores contemporary Buddhist discourses and their application in the therapeutic context. Buddhist concepts are interwoven with Western psychology.

### **RAIN and Three Marks of Existence**

Another example of Buddhism being integrated into Western psychology is the combination of mindfulness with the practice of RAIN and the Buddhist concept of the "three marks of existence." Developed by *vipassana* teacher Michele McDonald, RAIN is a way to practise mindfulness using the following four-stage process: "recognize, allow/accept, investigate and non-identification" (as cited in Baraz, 2010, p. 111). James Baraz is co-founder of Spirit Rock Meditation Center. In my clinical practice, I find the modality of RAIN especially helpful in working with afflictive emotions, ruminative thinking and unpleasant sensations in the body. It helps to decrease self-obsession, and individuals find it very helpful. Various authors, such as Tara Brach, James Baraz and Rick Hanson, have also cited RAIN as a helpful way to practise mindfulness. The embodiment of both mindfulness and compassion practices allows for a sound and applicable way to work with the mind in RAIN. With the presentation of RAIN, I shall

interweave the Buddhist concept of the Three Dharma Seals, also called the three marks of existence.

Thich Nhat Hanh states: "[A]ll teachings of the Buddha bear the Three Dharma Seals" (1999, p. 21). The Three Seals are insights that can be ascertained through the practice of mindfulness. "Three key insights [The Three Seals] emerge over time: 1. Suffering arises in everyone's mind. 2. Our thoughts, feelings, and sensations are all transitory. 3. Our sense of self is also continuously in flux" (Morgan, Morgan, & Germer, 2013, p. 79). The number of seals and the conceptual framework of the seals depend upon which school of Buddhist thought is followed. Tibetan Buddhists add a fourth seal: 4. Nirvana is peace. Thich Nhat Hanh (1999) states that the transmission of Buddhism from southern Asia includes "suffering," "impermanence" and "nonself" (p. 131).

The first letter of RAIN stands for *recognize*. Recognition can begin with the acknowledgement of unpleasant and/or negative sensations, thoughts or emotions in the body. These states of suffering relate to the first Dharma Seal. Suffering in Pali is called *dukkha* from the Access to Insight website (2013). Bringing awareness into the present moment of what is happening in the body/mind allows one to begin to disentangle from entrenched patterning. When working with awareness, it is important to first recognize when our minds are "scattering" or "sinking" (Dalai Lama, 1966, p. 74). Scattering mind can occur when one becomes bored and the mind grasps onto other internal or external activities, scattering the thoughts. Sinking mind can occur, at its grossest level, when awareness is lost in a sense of sleepiness or weight in the body (Dalai Lama, 1966). Thoughts and emotions cause harm to our psyche, body and mind as expressions of suffering in our lives. Descriptors of a scattered or agitated mind might include anxiety, restlessness, and discontent. A sinking mind might involve depression, despair and mental fatigue.

Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche (2012), renowned lama of *Vajrayana* Buddhism, states that a sinking mind "lacks clarity" and is like a mental fog of "sleepiness and drowsiness" (p. 46). A distractible mind is a flooding of scattered thoughts and afflictive emotions. He

states that these two states of mind—sinking mind and distractible mind—are hindrances to meditation, although both can be addressed through methods of what he refers to as "relaxation and tightening" (p. 46). The method of "tightening" is applied through mindfulness when the mind is sinking, and the method of "relaxing [...] loosening [...] letting go" and not over-exerting is applied to the distracted mind (p. 46). Similarly, body positions are aligned to work with the mind: posture is strengthened with sinking mind and posture is relaxed with distractible mind.

In the application of RAIN, when a person becomes overwhelmed or lost in an afflicted state of scattered or sinking mind, he/she starts by *recognizing the thought and/or emotion*. This recognizing can include becoming aware of the sensations in the body associated with the thought and/or emotion. The person may make a mental note, acknowledging the thought, emotion or sensation, or may state the inner experience out loud.

Research at the UCLA School of Medicine has shown that the very act of "labelling" an emotion and/or thought that is distressing has a settling effect upon the amygdala related to the flight and fright responses and concurrently activates blood flow towards the prefrontal cortex involved in mindfulness (as cited in Baraz, 2010). The processes of recognizing and awareness can be used interchangeably here.

*Allowing and accepting* are the second steps in the RAIN process. These form parts of a basic practice of mindfulness whereby one rests in a state of simply observing what is happening in the body and mind without resistance, suppression or elaboration. Tara Brach (2013) states that this practice meets the unpleasant experience with the quality of openness. Carl Rogers affirms the value of self-acceptance: "One way of putting this is that I feel that I have become more adequate in letting myself become who I am [...] the curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I change" (Rogers, 1961, p. 17). This relates to "allow and accept" in that when one has an experience of gentle warmth towards oneself, one is more likely to let go of the unpleasant experience. Tara Brach states that some people confuse acceptance with

abandoning motivation and impetus to change. These people might prefer to yield to deeply ingrained habits that keep a person stuck. She states that people are often afraid that if they "accept" their suffering, it will interfere with the motivation to change. Meeting our inner experience with kindness will, she says, allow for an opening up as opposed to a shutting down or tightening in a person. The shutting-down quality is often fear-based and does not lead to change (Brach, 2003). She also says that acceptance is not a form of being "passive," "self-indulgence," or imposing a limited view on oneself (pp. 39–40). Instead of yielding to our immediate impetus to engage or disengage in a negative commentary of an inner experience, she believes it is important to be honest and to have a kind awareness of the present moment of the experience. With regard to passivity, acceptance means not to suppress or fixate, but to allow the feelings and thoughts and sensations to arise, moment to moment, with honesty. Once this happens, one may engage in an active way to create change (Brach, 2003).

*Investigate* is the third step of RAIN. Marsha Linehan's approach in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, of which she was the founder, emphasizes observing experience as opposed to evaluating it. This entails having an open curiosity about what one is observing (Linehan, 1993). One engages in an internal dialogue—dialogue with oneself—from a place of open curiosity. Instead of judging and engaging in some kind of critical discourse, one can simply ask oneself questions. As Baraz states, one shows a sincere interest in oneself. Observing experience is a form of discernment, whereas being judgemental about self or others can be negative—a form of blame.

The last step of RAIN is *non-identification*, which involves not engaging in a storyline around a feeling, thought and/or sensation that one has recognized. It means relating to the present moment, to the feeling, thought or sensation, instead of getting lost in past narratives that reinforce a fixed storyline of who one perceives oneself to be. Various studies in trauma work have shown that fueling a storyline with repeated narratives can reinforce the trauma. It is only helpful to express the disturbance when a person is grounded in the body with mindfulness. In this context, resting with mindful

awareness in the present negative experience allows for the negative to be integrated, and allows the individual to subsequently move on or let go (Siegel, 2008).

In Buddhist mindfulness practice, the metaphor of clouds passing in the sky is often invoked and applies to non-identification. Thoughts, feelings and sensations in the body are like the clouds passing in the sky. Behind the clouds is an open, vast, spacious and luminous mind that is accessible only when one is settled in the body-mind and not grasping or experiencing aversion. Mindfulness involves seeing with awareness one's thoughts, feelings and sensations as clouds passing in the sky. According to Tara Brach, the more one identifies with the "clouds" as the entire sky, the more one "forgets" who one is. The ability to remember and rest in vast sky with open-heartedness allows one to wake up from a "trance" (Brach, 2003, p. 18).

Non-identification relates to the concepts of impermanence and the lack of a fixed self, as the second and third seal. When one is able to recognize the impermanence of states of being, and that the moment-to-moment experience is a continuously changing phenomenon of self, one is less apt to grasp onto a storyline as if it were immutable to change. Buddhism, in general, asserts that the self is always changing; there is no "inherently existing" (Dalai Lama, 2006, p. 127) and "permanent, solid, indivisible entity called 'self or 'I'" (Dalai Lama, 1997a, p. 28). With the practice of non-identification and, ideally, the experience of it in an abiding way, grasping and attachment or aversion is lessened. Non-identification is simply being aware and staying in the present moment, where past narratives and future fantasies no longer act as obstacles for the letting-go process of afflictive states. We can now see how the two seals of impermanence and non-self are integral to non-identification.

### **The Union of Wisdom and Compassion**

Germer and Siegel (2012) stress that, when wisdom or compassion is developed, consciousness of the other is enhanced as well. In addition, Victor Weisskopf (1964), a Western theoretical physicist, states that intelligence through the acquisition of



knowledge is associated with meaningful compassion. "Knowledge without compassion is inhuman. Compassion without knowledge is ineffective."

In Tibetan Buddhism, there is a special emphasis on balancing wisdom with compassion. Reason is seen as one aspect of wisdom and emotion as one aspect of compassion; thus, in my self-compassion curriculum, I hope to integrate both of these aspects. The Dalai Lama stated that reason is "human intelligence [...] transforming human emotions" (2016a). When a person's emotional life is overwhelmed by suffering, the ability to ignite deep intelligence is compromised. This is one of the reasons why I focus so much on the body in my group therapy. When one is relaxed and in a quiescent space in his/her body, the emotions naturally become settled and the reasoning faculty of the prefrontal cortex becomes more available.

I would therefore like to explore some practice modalities that focus on the development of compassion, from some prominent Buddhist practitioners. Matthieu Ricard (2015) says that compassion and wisdom are essential trainings and that they are interrelated. If one's perception of reality is distorted by a lack of wisdom, one will suffer from mental confusion and that will obscure one's ability to experience genuine compassion for self and others. Wisdom is founded upon a primary concept of Buddhism: "right view," one of the eight practices of the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is part of the four noble truths. The four noble truths are as follows: 1) life is fraught with and full of dissatisfaction; 2) the root of this dissatisfaction is proclivity to craving and grasping; 3) dissatisfaction can cease; and 4) cessation of suffering is achieved by applying the path (Ricard, 2008, p. 49), which is often referred to as the Eightfold Path.

*View* is a term used in Buddhism, generally referring (in Tibetan Buddhism) to the wisdom of emptiness that explores the truth about reality. There are two points of focus regarding the discussion of the emptiness of reality: self and phenomena (Gawang, 2013). Ultimate and relative reality have already been briefly explored in this dissertation. In Tibetan Buddhism, the image of the mythical bird, Garuda, with features of an eagle, cannot take flight without the two wings of "wisdom and method" (Beer, 2003, p. 77). In

Buddhism, the method primarily refers to compassion, or skilful means. Buddha says that compassion is the highest form of all morality and requires skilful means for development. The Buddha is able to witness suffering with the eye of wisdom, equanimity, patience and compassion (Thich Nhat Hanh). Thich Nhat Hanh (1999) illustrates that the gentle and serene smile of a Buddha is indicative of wisdom and compassion. Both form the basis for different practices. The wisdom aspect holds a vast and deep view of understanding.

Tibetan Buddhism shows that compassion should be combined with the understanding of interdependence. To only wish for our own happiness leads us to a further sense of separation, disconnection and depression. The profound teaching of compassion and interdependence is that all actions matter. One can see how a small action can sometimes have profound effect on a family, community, or an area in the world. For example, when one injures another, not only does it affect that person and the recipient of the injury but often his/her loved ones and even the social community. Awareness of this interdependence may result in meaningful social action for some people. In social action groups, this awareness of interdependence is implicit. Social action groups can raise awareness of how action creates effects throughout the community, thus encouraging greater reflection upon an individual's responsibility for choices and decisions.

### **Altruism and Compassion**

In his book, *Altruism*, Ricard (2015) states that: "loving-kindness and compassion are the two faces of altruism" (p. 12) and each has a different objective. In the context of altruism for oneself and for others, the objective of loving-kindness is happiness and the objective of compassion is freedom from suffering. He points out that compassion involves not only the awareness of, but also the active aspiration to alleviate suffering. Compassion always involves a relationship to suffering (Ricard). Ricard uses the word

"consideration" for compassion for others. He says altruistic love is a facet of compassion and integral to the understanding and practice of compassion.

Gilbert and Choden (2014) say that compassion is not just empathy or sympathy because these are feeling states that do not necessarily require any action. Ricard (2008) states that compassion is often combined with altruistic love in that it not only involves the wish to relieve suffering but also the heartfelt hope for others' happiness. In my own life, it has been most transformative to receive compassion and love from lamas. The inspiration to develop self-compassion is often based upon such an experience of love and compassion from others. As loving-kindness and compassion are two of the Four Immeasurables (loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity), the conceptual and practice modalities of the Four Immeasurables are vital to my curriculum for self-compassion.

Glenn Mullin (2016), Buddhist teacher, identifies and describes three kinds of compassion: "mere compassion, wise compassion and boundaryless compassion." *Mere compassion* is simply resonating with another's suffering without alleviating their suffering. *Wise compassion* is anchored in wisdom and the understanding of impermanence and karma. He states this form of compassion may be a deep awareness of one's limitations and strengths in relationship to others. The third kind of compassion is boundaryless, which is rooted in compassion that comes from a deep aspiration to help all beings (what I consider to be *bodhicitta*). He states compassion comes from a place in which we are able to be helpful as we know how to help without interfering. This third kind of compassion is energizing in that it provides joy and happiness (Mullin).

### **Self-Compassion and Loving-Kindness Practices**

From a psychotherapeutic level, I believe one cannot achieve lasting happiness without honouring one's suffering with self-compassion. The belief that suffering can cease or change is a huge factor in one's sense of hope. Loving-kindness involves engendering towards self and others a sense of well-being, happiness and safety. The

Buddha taught that different teachings are appropriate for different recipients. The practice that resonates with the individual is a specific journey. Loving-kindness (*metta*, in Sanskrit) and meditational statements such as "May I be safe," etc., can be helpful for someone who is very afraid. This practice is a form of self-compassion for someone who feels very alone with his/her fears. In the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, the Buddha encouraged the monks who were afraid of being alone in the forest because of negative energies surrounding them to practise loving-kindness so as to transcend their fears (Buddharakkhita, 1995).

Of course, self-compassion and loving-kindness work together as ways to improve mental health and well-being. In all the curricula known to me for the development of self-compassion, loving-kindness is an essential, integral component. Neff (2011) has a beautiful *metta* practice that she suggests people use when experiencing suffering, and these statements are related to her three constructs for self-compassion:

This is a moment of suffering [mindfulness].

Suffering is a part of life [common humanity].

May I be kind to myself [*self-kindness* represents this line and the last].

May I give myself the compassion I need. (p. 119)

#### **Four Immeasurables and Loving-Kindness**

The Four Immeasurables (loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity) are referred to by Wallace and Shapiro (2006), Western teachers of Buddhist psychotherapy, as the "four cultivations of the heart" (p. 36). I like this description, as it can be relevant to secular studies because one does not need to be religious to appreciate the symbol of the heart in the cultivation of oneself. The Four Immeasurables are important to the discussion of self-compassion because loving-kindness meditation and practice are often used in clinical studies and Buddhist practice centres to develop compassion for self and others. Equanimity is a component of—and, arguably,

foundational to—mindfulness practice in that it involves holding emotions within a balanced perspective. Equanimity is defined by Thich Nhat Hahn as "even-mindedness or letting go" (1999, p. 174). The way I interpret his usage of the term letting go and its relation to equanimity is that by letting go of clinging to transitory events (inner or outer), one can abide in a peaceful and stable mind. There may be the experience of afflictive emotions, but one lets go so as to not reside there; in other words, not to lose one's centre. In terms of self-compassion, equanimity is important in enabling oneself to avoid self-indulgence (strong self-attachment) and disconnection or detachment from one's self (strong self-aversion). Equanimity holds the middle ground between these two extremes. In both my personal and professional life, of the Four Immeasurables, the one that people mention to me to be the most difficult and yearned for is equanimity. People often see that they experience the other three immeasurables in different parts of their life; however, equanimity which is peace, stability and centredness (not wavered by external negativity) is greatly aspired to and wished for but is illusive for the most part. People often would like to feel less caught in affective reactions and displays of internal imbalance.

Thich Nhat Hahn (1999) states that equanimity means remembering the big picture. He uses the metaphor of sitting on a mountain, overlooking all sides of the mountain with equal perspective (p. 174). Hanh says the word in Sanskrit for equanimity is *upeksha* ("*upa* means *over* and *iksh* means *to look*") (p. 174). He extrapolates the following metaphor: from the top of a mountain, one has a vast view, not restricted by any side of the mountain (p. 174). He also holds that equanimity is the experience of valuing oneself in the same way as one values all others. (This relates to Kristin Neff's "common humanity" in that one does not forget that others may be suffering just as much as oneself.) Yangsi Rinpoche related equanimity in action through his recollections of the Dalai Lama's teachings heard throughout Rinpoche's life. Rinpoche said that H. H. the Dalai Lama always starts his teachings with the attitude that *we are all the same*. Yangsi Rinpoche went on to say that this creates a sense of interconnection and removes barriers (personal communication, February 25, 2017).

Thich Nhat Hanh (1999) stresses that each immeasurable, if not rooted in equanimity, can result in the following: loving-kindness can become "possessive" (p. 175); compassion without equanimity can lead one to mental exhaustion or to being overwhelmed by the suffering of some and perhaps indifferent to the suffering of others. John Makransky, Buddhist scholar and author, states compassion that is not founded in equanimity can result in some people having feelings of superiority in the face of another's suffering. Also, one might feel pity rather than compassion towards another. I would add that compassion without equanimity can lead in some to feelings of inferiority, such as a sense of inadequacy, futility or lack of power. Makransky says that empathetic joy without the even-mindedness and nonattachment found through equanimity can lead to the extreme of uncentred ebullience or "ungrounded giddiness" (Makransky, 2012, p. 66). Empathetic joy without equanimity can lead to momentary exaltation and shallow solutions to life's quest. Equanimity is the ability to hold one's centre in a non-reactive way to emotions and thoughts. In my opinion, equanimity without the other three might lead to a cold and distant non-relatedness.

### **A practice by Thich Nhat Hanh for self-compassion using loving-kindness**

Loving-kindness, the first of the Four Immeasurables, is one of the main practices used in cultivating self-compassion. Loving-kindness meditation is the generation of positive phrases of good wishes and feelings of love from oneself (the meditator) to five different people, one after another. First, one evokes the image of the person towards whom one is generating the loving-kindness. In between each loving-kindness meditation for each person, one then gently dissolves the image of that person being held in the mind. One starts by directing loving-kindness towards oneself, then towards people for whom one feels plutonic love and affection, then towards strangers or people for whom one's feelings are neutral, then towards enemies, and then to all sentient beings in the universe. This practice comes from the *Path of Purification* from Buddhaghosa. Thich Nhat Hanh (2015) discusses this practice in an article—"How to Love Yourself and Others"—encouraging us to look more profoundly at ourselves. He encourages the use of

the five *skandas* or *heaps* (the constituents associated with the self) as a method of exploring ourselves more deeply. The *skandas* or *heaps* are "form, feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness" (p. 80). "In order to bring about harmony, reconciliation [and] healing within, you have to understand yourself" (p. 80). In order to get away from a merely cognitive approach to loving-kindness, one applies loving-kindness specifically to each of one's own *skandas* or *heaps*.

### **Self-Confidence from a Buddhist perspective: Tulku Thondup**

Tulku Thondup (1996), a Buddhist scholar who taught at Harvard, states that confidence is what we need in order to develop both our strengths and our positive qualities. He talks about how culture puts pressure on children from a very young age to perform and to compete with others—which, he believes, ultimately undermines self-confidence and self-worth. The following are some of his thoughts on this issue.

Our true nature is Buddha nature. "It is total, everlasting, universal peace, openness, selflessness, oneness, and joy" (Thondup, 1996, p. 20). He quotes Shakyamuni from the sutra of the *Haivajra*: "Living beings are Buddha in their true nature, but their nature is obscured by casual or sudden afflictions. When the afflictions are cleansed, living beings themselves are the very Buddha" (p. 20). He states there is great benefit to be derived from focusing on our strengths, personal qualities and actions, even if they sometimes seem insignificant, because this trains our minds to remain positive. He goes on to say that every time we succeed in not succumbing, obsessing or fixating on negative qualities, we make progress in transforming our minds. Our minds are naturally orientated towards fear; thus, we need to work hard and diligently to direct them towards openness. Our minds are constantly judging in reference to the self, which is a form of self-clinging. It is important to suspend judgement and to try to be with the openness of experience—the moment-to-moment impermanence of things. Rejoicing in small successes helps us to overcome our fear-based mind and to focus on our positive strengths, personal qualities and actions (pp. 53-55). This is necessary to keep us inspired

on the path. Meditation allows us to gain confidence in our inner experience, which will, in turn, help us cope with life on a daily basis. Without this concentration and quietude, Thondup says we end up being thrown around by the vicissitudes of life without much awareness. Even when life is extremely painful, we can use meditation to cultivate the ability to cope (Thondup).

For Buddhist practitioners, seeing oneself as one really is—a compassionate being—is a form of self-compassion. As the word *compassion* in Tibetan does not separate the notion of self from other, this practice is an evocation of one's compassionate nature as well as compassion towards others (Thondup). One of the basic views of Tibetan Buddhism is that, in its primordial state, the nature of the individual is akin to Buddha nature. The focus on positive emotions in psychology emphasizes that the power of the positive resonates with the true, dynamic potential within the individual. Thus, the power of positive emotions can lead to, and contribute to the path towards, Buddhahood. Focusing on positive emotions or states of mind in psychology also resonates with the following contribution of Buddhism: basic foundational goodness is the seed within every individual that has the potential to evolve towards freedom and, for some Buddhists, this process of evolution involves a flow in the mind of ever-new, fresh and irreversible enlightenment.

Why does cultivation of the positive have such sustainable power? It is rooted in the view that love and empathy accord with the reality of Buddha nature and with the natural state of mind; these states can therefore expand infinitely. Negative states of mind, on the other hand, are adventitious to the mind's basic nature. Cultivation of positive states can be developed without limit because they are aligned with basic goodness (Dalai Lama, 2002b). He states that "our fundamental nature is compassionate, and that of cooperation, not conflict" (p. 68). Though he says this, he mentions this nature is not permanent. In pedagogy and teaching, this premise of compassionate nature can be fundamental to how human nature is perceived. It can become a philosophic lens through which human nature is viewed and it can greatly influence people and their actions (Dalai Lama, 2002b). With the focus of long-term meditators, this area can, ideally, be further



explored and expounded upon through research. Also, the radical perspective of this positive view of reality has influenced the development of some modern psychotherapeutic practices, even if the perspective is not accepted in its entirety.

### **Psychological Clarification of Terms in their Transition to the West**

The Dalai Lama says that Tibetans and Indians experience, and have a reference for, emotions even though "neither Sanskrit nor classical Tibetan has a word for 'emotion,' as the concept is used in modern languages and cultures" (Dalai Lama, 2005, p. 175). However, George Dreyfus (2002) says this word was so frequently used and queried by Westerners that lamas and scholars began to try to relate to the term.

I should like to explore from a psychological standpoint some terms used in society today that can be misunderstood in relation to self-compassion such as sadness and pity. Some Western psychotherapists view sadness as an afflictive emotion, especially if experienced over a long period of time.

In a commentary on the foundational text of Buddhist "epistemology and psychology" called in Tibetan, *Lorig*: "awareness (*lo*) and knowledge (*rig*)" (Tsering, 2006, p. 8) afflictions in *Lorig* are described as "6 root afflictions [...] and 20 secondary afflictions" (Lati & Napper 1980, pp. 37–38). The study of *Lorig* and its relationship to psychology is beyond the scope of this dissertation but I find it interesting that sadness is not listed under afflictions in *Lorig*; nonetheless, sadness is a word used by Buddhists to describe emotion and is a meaningful word in the understanding of compassion. Certainly, many people would consider sadness to be a component of dissatisfaction, which is *dukkha*—the first noble truth of Buddhism. Personally, I really appreciate what Wallace states that getting in touch with sadness can be a precursor to cultivating compassion (Wallace, 2010b). Buddhism, in the first noble truth, accepts that sadness is an inevitable truth of ordinary life. Wallace also comments that, in Buddhism, sadness is not necessarily an emotional affliction. When an individual experiences sadness with

awareness, it can open the heart. The balance between self- and other-compassion is what prevents self-pity.

Pity is sometimes used interchangeably with compassion. Yet self-compassion is neither feeling sorry for oneself nor wishing for one's own happiness in a way that fails to recognize that suffering is shared by many. One can experience sorrow for one's suffering without becoming self-indulgent. With self-pity, there is a sense of separateness, whereby one experiences one's suffering as worse than anyone else's, which can be a form of selfishness. The loss of mindfulness of the larger reality outside one's emotional, mental and psychological states can lead to a ruminative preoccupation with self. By realizing the shared common experience of dissatisfaction (Buddhism's first noble truth), one does not get lost in self-pity and one indulges in less self-absorption. In relation to others, pity can have the quality of looking down on someone from a place of superior attitude (Morgan, Morgan, & Germer, 2013). Pity is "unequal standing between the giver and the receiver of kindness" (Morgan, et al., p. 85). This looking down on someone can create a sense of separateness, as opposed to what Neff refers to as "common humanity" or "shared suffering."

## **Mind and Brain**

There is an ongoing debate about the relationship between mind and brain across several disciplines of study: education, counselling, psychology, psychiatry and neuroscience (to name a few). I have studied some explanations of mind according to Buddhism, and there are many (depending on the lineage or school), and it is my understanding that none claim the mind is totally subsumed in the brain. I found H. H. the Dalai Lama's (2005) contribution to this discussion so helpful that I would like to include several of his comments. According to him, the study of mind in Buddhism is based on the motivation to free the individual from suffering. He draws upon the meeting of Buddhism and science insofar as both approaches have an interest in studying consciousness based on observation of experience. In Buddhism, "mental

phenomena...must be viewed in terms of their temporal sequence and their experiential nature...[and] lack of physical sense organ" (p. 167). "Subjectivity" refers to the "mental" aspects of consciousness (p. 167). H. H. the Dalai Lama discusses the positive exchange between Buddhism and neuroscience. "Buddhism has much to learn [from neuroscience] about the brain mechanisms related to mental events..." (p. 179). Just focusing on the neurological, however, removes what Buddhism considers the most important aspect of mind, the "subjective experience" (p. 170).

The discussion of mind and brain is relevant to a curriculum on self-compassion. I feel mind is the basis of compassion. Buddhist orientation does not equate mind and brain as one and the same; however, if participants in my group self-compassion curriculum believe they are the same, it is both an option and honoured. As a therapist, I feel it is vital and essential for participants to have an opportunity to discuss what mind means to them based upon the meaning they ascribe to the term. Importantly, whatever is their meaningful description of mind, such as heart or soul, is discussed in a group process. As a therapist, I find that most individuals relate to self-compassion from a place of heart. Hearing other peoples' views may provide an opportunity for a more expansive and individual experience. In addition, the experiential exercises hopefully allow for a broader and more spacious experience of mind. The mind is experienced differently when a person is in a deeply relaxed state. For example, part of one of the recommended take-home assignments is to practise a contemplative meditation in the first ten minutes of waking for at least one week. Upon first awakening, one has an opportunity to get a glimpse of mind before the proliferation of thoughts set in. Setting these few minutes aside can prevent the immediate overstimulation that arouses and activates the nervous system. In that many people go right into autopilot upon awakening through the engagement with tasks and activities, it is recommended to not engage in multiple tasks such as checking emails right away. I find the discussion and experiential exercises can often alter the nature and spirit of engagement with the participant's own mind.

Interpretations and terms used for mind vary in Buddhism but for Tibetan Buddhist psychology, *Lorig* is a primary source for the discussion of mind. *Lorig* is based

in Asanga's *Compendium of Knowledge, Abhidharmasamuchchaya* (Rinbochay & Napper, 1980). Asanga was a fourth century CE seminal Indian scholar of Mahayana Buddhism. In *Lorig*, often the common term for the nature of mind is what Geshe Tsering (2006), a current day Buddhist scholar, refers to as "clear and knowing" (pp. 16–17). Tsering states that the term *clear* refers to the "non-material," "unobstructed," or "space[like]" nature of mind (p. 17). In and of itself, the "clear" nature does not have the capacity to know, even though it is fundamental to mind; but mind is also knowing. Knowing meaning the ability to "know [cognize] an object" (p. 17). Other terms Geshe Tsering uses to describe the nature of mind are "subjective event [and] dynamic agent" (p. 17). For the discussion pertinent to this area of the dissertation on mind and brain, what is important to note from the translation of Lati Rinbochay and Napper (1980) of *Lorig* is that the mind is not matter (p. 11). Thus, as H. H. the current Dalai Lama points out, when even the last vestige of subtle energy ceases at death, still the mind continues. The definition of "clear and knowing" is sometimes restated by him to be that the consciousness is "luminous and knowing." "It is luminous in the double sense that its nature is clear and that it illuminates..." (p. 129). Mind illuminates the "darkness" and objects can be known (Dalai Lama, 2002c, p. 129). Joe Loizzo discusses the definition of mind as "pure capacity" and "lucid ...awareness" (p. 58). This is important in that therapeutically it gives a dynamic definition by which to work with whatever arises (Loizzo, 2012, p. 58).

I feel the definition of mind needs continuing collaborative discussion as mind and brain are used interchangeably without careful consideration and analysis. After many years of lecturing, renowned psychiatrist Daniel Siegel (2011) found that, of 90,000 mental health professionals, 95% had never defined *mind* during their course of study. Siegel stated that when 40 scientists were asked how mind and brain might be defined, none of these scientists was able to define *mind*. I believe that research and exploration of mind are essential for deepening the understanding of factors that contribute to learning and education.

This dissertation utilizes contemporary interpretations of mind from Dr. Evan Thompson and from Buddhist philosophy. From classical cognitive scientists, to current thinkers such as Evan Thompson, with his *embodied* approach to cognitive science, the debate of mind and brain continues. According to Thompson (2014), a brain is needed, but mind involves a different experience of existence. The mind is not subsumed in the brain. Cognition is not just from the brain. He also makes the point that there is a "relational" quality of mind (2014) and that mind is "enactive" in that it includes the body and includes one's interaction with the surrounding environment (Thompson, 2007). Buddhism and science share similarities and many views through which they can dialogue. Buddhist philosophy is "every bit as sophisticated and technical as Western philosophy [...]" in the shared topics of analysis, "cognition, concepts and consciousness" (Thompson, 2014, p. 43).

One of the pillars of cognitive science is neuroscience. With the strong influx of research in mindfulness over the past half-century, there is now a large body of work focused on the neuroscience of mindfulness. Thompson (2014) thinks that the "humanities," not neuroscience, should be at the forefront of understanding the mind (p. 43). Disciplines such as philosophy are, in his view, essential to knowledge of the self and to a field of inquiry in cognitive science, and he feels that self-knowledge would also benefit from some aspects of Buddhism, such as contemplative methodologies and profound ethics.

Daniel Siegel described on his website as an *interpersonal neurobiologist* that "the human mind is a relational and embodied process that regulates the flow of energy and information" (Siegel, 2010, p. 52). He says there are three factors of dynamic exchange within the *flow of energy and information*: "brain, mind and relationships" (Siegel, 2012). Among many of Siegel's contributions, I really appreciate his understanding of the brain as extending to the entire nervous system. I find a second area of particular value is his inclusion of the relational processes. The mind modulates the dynamic interchange between self and others, and the mind interacts and is changed by this dynamic interplay. This is a significant contribution because dealing with relational

context is a large part of group psychotherapy. Skill development is presented in psychoeducational and experiential ways in working with relationship issues from the past and in the present as part of the self-compassion curriculum. The profound effects of the relational are honoured in my self-compassion group therapy with time and space.

Further discussion about mind includes indications that aspects of mind, such as dreams, imagination and awareness, cannot be quantified. Furthermore, the transcendent function of awareness is a significant human experience. We might *know* awareness as experience but it is not findable for empirical, objective scientific measurement. In mindfulness therapy, there is a metacognitive skill of awareness of mental processes. The knower observing the process cannot be pinpointed in some part of the brain.

By not just working with what can be observed or measured, one can appreciate that there is a fluid and not completely knowable process occurring. This view provides a deeper understanding of the complexity of human nature. Working from this perspective enhances the value of intuition and the creative; it certainly leads to a vaster view of human nature, meaning and potential, and to potential new directions in education and psychotherapy.

The current schools of thought that interest me are those whose descriptions of mind include relationship with mind's own subjective components: the brain, the body and the interaction with the world around. Daniel Siegel talks about this in the *Neurobiology of We*. I align myself particularly with the Dalai Lama's school of thought. He has been working with neurobiologists for decades. His view is that there is a continual exchange between gross and subtle consciousness. The more subtle the consciousness, the greater the disparity between brain and mind. The most subtle mind is "gnosis or wisdom" (Gyatso, Lhundrub, & Cabezón, 2011, p. 19), "[...] not sensory in nature [...]" and purely mind (p. 14). This subtle mind or most subtle consciousness is not findable.

In his book, *Psychotherapy without a Self*, Mark Epstein (2007), MD and psychotherapist, refers to an "oceanic" mind (p. 80). Simultaneously, many levels of mind are available: Geshe Tsering (2006) says that the subtle "mind is mere experience, it is not matter" (p. 15). He goes on to say that gross minds, partly sense consciousnesses, are interconnected and dependent on the nervous system and the brain. Yet, in and of themselves, they are not physical constituents.

As we have seen in Buddhism, mind is a very complex term, encompassing a wide range of mental aspects, from subtle to gross. The study of mind is vast and profound. In Buddhism, mind is central and mind training is at the heart of Buddhist practices. In my curriculum, I provide exercises whereby people can strive to experience through meditation deep states of mind in their quest for well-being.

Thus, I think the discussion of mind is vital to understanding mental health and mental well-being. As a psychotherapist, the beauty of feeling that mind is not only brain, resonates with what is held in the more empathetic expansive, transformative realm of the mind. It enables the contemplative practices to resonate at a deeper level, in my opinion, and allows greater pliancy in integrating experiences. I also believe it accords with traditional Buddhist perspectives. Even in a secular setting, this can be presented as a viable option of interpretation. As a Buddhist, I see that the mind is not fabricated or created; therefore, by seeing the mind as not limited or subsumed into brain, the sense of deeper connectedness can be enhanced. I wish that there continues to be a productive and open dialogue between science and Buddhism about mind and brain.

In the next chapter we shall move from contemporary discourse to some classical sources. Honouring those sources through a brief exploration will bring to light how valuable Buddhism has been to psychotherapy.

#### **4. Classical and Traditional Buddhism in Relation to Compassion**

Self-compassion, as briefly mentioned, is not directly spoken of in classical Buddhist philosophy and religion. As mentioned in chapter two, in one of the Tibetan definitions of *compassion*, compassion includes self and other. The closest direct reference is from *The Path of Purification*. Nonetheless, it is understood that all liberation involves some element of self-compassion. In a lecture in June 2016, Lama Yangsi stated that, in the *Lam Rim* (Lama Tzong Khalpa's *Graduated Path to Enlightenment*), self-compassion is "implied." In *Lam Rim*, the greatest form of self-compassion is when one develops and sustains the "wish for self-liberation from suffering." From self-liberation, one can truly generate the wish for self-liberation for all (Yangsi, personal communication, 2016).

This chapter is an introduction of themes pertinent to this dissertation, and I am drawing from traditional Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, psychology and classical practices. Although secular application is the orientation of my curriculum, much of its essence derives from traditional Buddhism. Another important aspect of Buddhism that I mentioned before but mention again for its utmost importance, is that compassion is trainable, and many of the practices that follow exemplify that point. Compassion is not always readily available as a result of one's will or one's desire for it and therefore needs to be cultivated through methodology.

The following are areas of Buddhist philosophy and religious practices selected because of their importance to the principles and practices of compassion and self-compassion. It is important to note that the chosen selections are a mere overview of some Buddhist contributions that I have deemed most applicable to the dissertation. Each selection stands on its own, but its particular relevance to self-compassion or compassion concludes that section. It is my hope and wish that the underlying Buddhist qualities that inform research into self-compassion and my curriculum are conveyed through the following selections.



- ❖ The historical Buddha's teachings
- ❖ *Brahmaviharas* (also called Four Immeasurables, four Divine Abidings, Four Divine Abodes, four illimitables, or sublime abidings)
- ❖ History and discussion of compassion from philosophic and practice perspectives of Buddhism regarding the self
- ❖ Dharma Seals
- ❖ *Paramitas* (six perfections)
- ❖ Karma
- ❖ Meditation and the five faults
- ❖ Shantideva and forgiveness
- ❖ Eleven categories of Je Tsongkhapa
- ❖ Buddha nature
- ❖ Universal applicability of traditional practices

### **The Historical Buddha's Teaching**

According to Peter Harvey (2013), Shakyamuni Buddha's birth date is uncertain. Current researchers believe the date to be between 566 and 486 BCE, but Harvey refers to Theravadin Buddhist sources, based in the Pali language in ancient India, which set the date at between 623 and 543 BCE (p. 8). Among the earliest documents, the Pali Canon of the Buddha's life and teachings is said by Peter Harvey to be written around 20 BCE. The Pali Canon rests upon oral tradition and is the primary text for Theravadin Buddhism.

One of the most beloved early compilations from the Pali Canon is *Dhammapada*, a collection of salient teachings of the Buddha. In my opinion, the following verse from the *Dhammapada* reveals a wholesome development with consequential values to compassion.

The refraining from all that is harmful,

the undertaking of what is skillful,  
the cleansing of one's mind—  
this is the teaching of the Awakened.  
(Verse 183 from *Dhammapada*, Wallis, 2004, p. 41)

The above salient words of the Buddha I wish to apply this verse to the practice of self-compassion. That is, one can begin with practising awareness around the intention of doing no harm to self. This acts as a foundation for the second point: engaging in skilful means to cultivate self-compassion in one's personal life. The very nature of self-compassion has a purifying effect on one's mind in that one is able to focus on cultivating positive intrinsic potentials as opposed to yielding to negative habitual patterns.

Teachings from the Buddha's life further inform the understanding of compassion. I have highlighted a few of the Buddha's experiences that I, especially seeing from a psychotherapeutic angle of understanding, feel encapsulate self-compassion and compassion towards others. The Buddha came into the world in the paradox of great light and great suffering. His mother died around the time of his birth. The mother-child bond is so sacred that, to me, it would seem that the infant must have experienced a profound sense of psychological loss. The paradox is that, from this suffering emerged a person who released himself and countless others from bondage. Suffering can propel one to search for ways to understand and seek freedom from suffering. I have often heard it said, in Buddhist communities, that suffering was the impetus for the Buddha's search for freedom. Many people come to psychotherapy because of suffering and the hope for alleviation of mental health concerns.

Mahathera and Narada (1997) refer to the story that, after near starvation due to ascetic practices, Shakyamuni Buddha recalled a childhood experience. While sitting by himself under an apple tree, he observed worms in the earth suffering and being killed during the ploughing season. He was overwhelmed by the suffering of these sentient

beings. The recollection re-awoke a profound compassion. He paused to meditate and, out of this reawakening of compassion, a great sense of peace and joy ensued (Mahathera & Narada, 1997). David Brazier (2001) relates another story about the Buddha and compassion. Sujata, a young lady who milked cows, provided Buddha with milk while he lay dying as a result of ascetic practice. Her immediate, unconditional compassion helped re-awaken him to memories and experiences of compassion, thus enabling him to embark on a new path, which led to his enlightenment (Brazier, p. 30). According to Brazier, the Buddha realized that his engagement in ascetic practices was not leading him to well-being and happiness. In my opinion, Sujata also re-awoke his self-compassion. Buddha's life began in a palace of extreme self-indulgence, from which he turned to the asceticism of extreme self-denial, and then to his great teaching of the middle way (Brazier) and his formal leaving of his wife and newborn child. I consider self-compassion to be the middle ground between the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-denial. Although almost overwhelmed by suffering, Shakyamuni Buddha felt a motivation to liberate himself from that suffering. "The Buddhist tradition sees his leaving of his family as done for the benefit of all beings; moreover, after he became a Buddha, he is said to have returned to his home town and taught his family" (Harvey, p. 18). The point is that the Buddha's great anguish in leaving his family also motivated him to seek personal liberation. No one denies the Buddha's anguish, but he said throughout it that he would return to enable his family to achieve something of great value; the teachings after his enlightenment would provide them with the supreme liberation from all suffering. He felt that, in order to liberate others, he had to liberate himself, which was partly what motivated him to leave ordinary life behind; he would then liberate others using the truths he discovered. Herein is a foundational point of Buddhism: self-compassion can lead to liberation—not just for oneself, in a selfish way, but for the benefit of all. Bodhi (2005a) indicated that the Buddha doubted that his enlightenment experience could be shared with the world; he felt that no one would understand the difficult and complex means to liberation. He was dissuaded by Brahma Sahampati, who existed in the non-earthly higher realms, from resting in meditative equipoise and bliss. The Buddha wondered if anyone would understand—much less be able to practise—his complex and profound

teachings. In a fascinating exchange with this metaphysical being, Brahma Sahampati, Buddha learned that there were some beings with just a "little dust in their eyes" (Bodhi, 2005a, p. 71). In the Buddha's words, he checked that out for himself: "Out of compassion for beings, I surveyed the world with the eye of Buddha" (p. 71). Through the Buddha's capacity for omniscience, he was then able to see the world's beings and to understand that his teaching would be helpful and that there would be those capable of following such an abstruse path. Then, The Buddha turned, out of compassion for the world, to teach for 45 years (Brown, 2013). Perhaps in his meditative equipoise, the Buddha found ways to impart his realizations other than by directly teaching the beings of this planet. However, out of this decision and his compassion, he taught for the remainder of his life.

His teaching style involved using wisdom to discern the capacity of each and every student. I find it inspiring that the historical Buddha spoke to the *Bhikkus* (monks) of several methods of working with "taints" ("unwholesome") qualities. In the *Sabbasava Sutta*, the Buddha provides various applications to working with taints (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995). For example, the taints "can be abandoned by seeing ... restraining ... using [*using* means to use things for their function, not for indulgence] ... enduring ... avoiding ... removing and developing" (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 91). In terms of the self-compassion curriculum, many techniques and applications are provided non-dogmatically, in that clients can choose what works best for them in particular situations.

German philosopher Lama Anagarika Govinda (1969) states that the soteriological nature of Buddhism is always part of any psychological application of the Buddha's teachings. In the Buddha's life, he taught in accordance with a particular individual's ability and need for spiritual development, and he taught many different things, depending on the student at hand, some of which appeared contradictory. "It [the Buddha's wisdom in a teaching] is a question of a selection out of the wealth of inner experiences in view of their application in a given direction" for the recipient (Govinda, 1969, p. 35). I appreciate that Harvey has astute understanding of the Buddha's teaching modality. He points out that the Buddha continually emphasised wanting the student to

engage in "experiential testing" of his teaching (2013, p. 30). Every question posed was responded to by the Buddha with a different style which ranged from analytic to even dismissing the question altogether if it was rooted in a spurious agenda by the questioner (Harvey).

This was the Buddha's androgogic style. Buddha was not wedded to doctrinal terminology. He related to the person before him, rather than from a fixed doctrine, as evidenced by the following example. Harvey states that the Brahmans had ceremonies involving sacrifices of blood so as to be at one, at death, with Brahma. Some Brahmans asked the Buddha how to connect with Brahma. The Buddha responded that rather than through these sacrifices, the connection with Brahma could be achieved through the contemplative practice of compassion that arose with or out of the meditation on loving-kindness (Harvey). I feel the Buddha was open to the subjective experience of the person.

Schultz and Schultz (2016) state that Carl Stumpf, German philosopher, describes the subjective phenomenological approach as being "... unbiased description of immediate experience as it occurs" (p. 385). I only mention this definition because I feel phenomenological psychology has applied such an approach in the relationship between therapist and client. In present day therapy, as a therapist, I try to relate to the phenomenological world referred to by Stumpf above, as the client's understanding of his/her experience as it arises. In saying so, I feel there is a similar relationship with the style of the Buddha's teachings. It is my belief that a skilled therapist relates to who and where the client is at psychologically, including the client's referencing terms and values, needs and ability to integrate meaningfully what transpires in the psychotherapeutic relationship. The Buddha's life shows that he did not have an agenda other than that of deeply helping the person alleviate suffering and I believe a skilful therapist has similar values and motivation.

## ***Brahmaviharas***

The *brahmaviharas* of the oral tradition—the four Divine Abidings have been briefly mentioned; however, I should like to elaborate, as they are an important component of my curriculum. The *brahmaviharas* are called different titles by different authors and in different times: Four Immeasurables, four Divine Abidings, Four Divine Abodes, four illimitables, or four sublime abidings. I have used the title given by each translator out of respect for his interpretation. *Brahmavihara* is Pali and *brahmaviharah* is Sanskrit. The Buddha speaks in the *Subha Sutta II* of the four Divine Abodes: loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity (Bodhi, 2005a, p. 177). Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa wrote *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, one of the primary texts of Buddhism in the fifth century CE, in which he says that the Buddha taught the *brahmaviharas*.

Lama Govinda (1973) translates the *brahmaviharas* ("dwelling in God," p. 90) as the four "illimitables" (1969, p. 122). Govinda (1969) states that understanding Shakyamuni as a God is a misunderstanding, as the cultivation of the *brahmaviharas* is to be understood as the potential capacity within all beings for "divine" realization. In Pali, the ancient Indian language that the historical Buddha spoke, the *brahmaviharas* are rendered by Lama Govinda as *metta*, *karuṇā*, *mudita* and *upekkha*: Govinda translates *metta* as "sympathy" (generally it is translated as love or loving-kindness); *karuṇā* means "compassion"; *mudita* means "sympathetic joy" or sometimes just "joy"; *upekkha* is defined as "equanimity" (1969, p. 122). All together, in the spirit of Theravadin Buddhism, they represent a healthy state of mind.

Thich Nhat Hahn (1998) defines *vihara* as the "abode or a dwelling place [...] of true love" (p.169). He says that these Four Divine Abodes are considered immeasurable because the more one reflects on and contemplates them, and the more one applies these practices to one's life, the more one is able to radiate these positive states of mind and to feel the deep interconnectedness and interdependence of all phenomena. Thupten Jinpa (2015b) translates the four *brahmaviharas* as "sublime abidings" (p. 71). When one

abides in these states, the sublimity is transformative. In Tibetan Buddhism, the Four Immeasurables are found in many daily practices at the point in the practice where one sets the motivation and intention to include all beings.

In *The Path of Purification*, the "four Divine Abidings" are "loving-kindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity" (Buddhaghosa, p. 321). Buddhaghosa states that, in loving-kindness, it is important to reflect on the consequences of "hate" and the benefits of "patience" (p. 321). "First of all, it [loving-kindness] should be developed only towards oneself" (Buddhaghosa, p. 322). By first authentically embodying love towards oneself through the practice of loving-kindness, one is able to be more compassionate, joyful and equanimous towards others.

In terms of current descriptions of self-compassion, non-aggression to self is implicit, as is patience with one's own healing process. It is my understanding that this practice of loving-kindness meditation is one of the first direct references in Buddhist texts to self-love or self-compassion. The Buddha's words in the Pali texts *Vibhanga*, 272, and *Digha Nikaya*, 250, state: "He dwells pervading the entire world with his heart endured with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, measureless, free from enmity, and free from affliction" (as cited in Buddhaghosa, pp. 333–334). The heart of Buddhism is recognizing and experiencing interdependence and interconnectedness—the loving-kindness meditation (sometimes called *Metta Bhāvanā*) weakens the "barriers" between the practitioner, the beloved, the stranger, the enemy and all beings (p. 333). The breaking of the "barrier" dissolves the illusion of solid separateness and a reified self. Barbara Miller (1979), scholar, stated that this practice dissolves "painful egotism" (p. 209). Maitreya (2014) gives a glimpse into the advanced *bodhisattva* mind in that the utter separation of self from other does not exist. The *bodhisattva* at this level sees the benefit for another to be just as important as one's own well-being, given the interdependence of all beings, as perceived with a "pure" mind free of afflictive emotions and thoughts (p. 79).

It is difficult to categorically separate self-compassion from other-compassion because, in Buddhism, compassion is boundless. In *The Path of Purification* (in the section of the divine abidings, also known as the Four Immeasurables), Buddhaghosa says that, by nature, compassion is unobstructed. The more one practises compassion, the more the sharp division between self and others is lessened. In addition, this practice can lead to infinite compassion that is unobstructed by self-grasping (Buddhaghosa). For practice, the object or focus of compassion can be self or others; however, sometimes one may be orientated primarily towards self-compassion and, at other times, other-focused. The placement of one's focus and orientation can be contextually based.

The Four Immeasurables of Buddhism are found in many practices. The first two of the Immeasurables are loving-kindness (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*) and are seen as having two different objectives. Sensitivity about suffering and the wish to become free from suffering denote compassion. Love is the wish for another's happiness and can be extended through activity towards a cultivation of the causes and conditions for happiness and joy. One of the premises of Buddhism in general is that just wishing for happiness is insufficient. Foundational to the process of happiness is educating oneself as to what brings about happiness and what does not.

I now would like to particularly and briefly describe the last two Immeasurables. Empathic joy (*mudita*) involves experiencing joy for others so that their suffering does not overwhelm one. Wallace (2010b) states that empathetic joy helps one to keep an open perspective by remembering that, when a person experiences even a temporary reprieve, lapse or freedom from suffering, a moment of joy or happiness can ensue. One generates the fourth Immeasurable, equanimity (*upekkha*), towards self and others in the sense that one holds all beings dear. This last aspect reflects equanimity. For Theravadin Buddhists and for Tibetan Buddhists, according to Alan Wallace, equanimity is "even-mindedness" and "impartiality" (2010a, p. 150). For *Mahayana* practitioners, equanimity is seeing the equality of all beings while radiating out loving-kindness, compassion and empathetic joy. Equanimity holds three of the Four Immeasurables in harmony and without defilements (Wallace, 2010a). Buddhaghosa also defines equanimity as impartiality and



regarding all beings as equal. "It is manifested as the quieting of resentment and approval" (p. 344).

The more one practises the Four Immeasurables in a heartfelt way, the more unobstructed and infinite becomes the resultant energy for the practitioner. Miller (1979) states that the Four Immeasurables break barriers between self and others by providing a practice to decrease the inordinately self-centred mind. Hofmann, Grossman and Hinton (2011) state that the four *brahmaviharas* constitute the heart of Buddhist ethics.

I am deeply indebted to the *Metta Bhavana* for my curriculum. The *Metta Bhavana* (from Pali—literally, the cultivation of loving-kindness) is a practice that others and I use in modules of curricula to cultivate self-compassion. For that reason, I would like to introduce here the *Metta Bhavana* practice. *Metta* is similar to the word for "friend" (Wallace, 2010a). *Metta Bhavana* "cultivates a limitless heart," according to the Buddha (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2011). Thanissaro Bhikkhu says *metta* can be translated from Pali as "goodwill." In my curriculum, I use Pema Chödrön's "limitless" heart (1994) for inspiration. The *Metta Bhavana* practice is to develop loving-kindness towards all equally, in order to inspire and realize equanimity.

Joseph Goldstein (2015), Buddhist teacher and writer, sees *metta* meditation as having a different focus and orientation than other meditations, which may focus on emptiness or selflessness. "You are actually dealing with the concept of self: *metta* toward self" (p. 184). *Metta* works with the empirical self in order to transcend the boundaries of selfishness. Traditionally, the energy of *metta* is of loving-kindness; however, one can follow that with the energy of compassion and empathetic joy, which is a joyous expression of one's own and other people's happiness. Then one continues by radiating the energy out towards all beings and throughout the universe (Buddhaghosa).

The Four Immeasurables are one of the modules in my curriculum and I would like to briefly explain how I adapt them. In my self-compassion group, I use the word *virtues* rather than *Immeasurables*, as it is a term more applicable to the secular approach.

The Immeasurables are taught in the spirit of generating positive emotions toward self and other. The first one, loving-kindness is a powerful method of positive affirmations and protective heart-felt wishes to self and others. Loving-kindness can dehabituate self-attacking and self-destructive tendencies because I feel the power of love is the most transformative form of energy. Also, there is a sense of safety that is imparted by making the aspirations and wishes of the practices of loving-kindness as it relates to self-compassion with associative soothing and calming effects. The practice provides a place of self-refuge. With the second Immeasurable, compassion is inclusive of self, and we have seen how vital this is to one's well-being. The transformative power and healing effects of group therapy are evidenced by what people experience as empathetic joy, the third Immeasurable. The intimacy and closeness that is felt in group over time allows the opportunity for people to experience and express empathetic joy or rejoicing for successes in the personal transformation of others and self. There is a reciprocal relationship of authentic validation through joy that leads to further inspiration to continue with this endeavour. The last Immeasurable is equanimity: an evenness, stability of mind, and a sense of centredness with self and others. As a psychotherapist, I observe that, as with the other three, equanimity is partially developed by the experience of safety and security in one's upbringing based upon healthy secure attachment and a sense of belonging. Early wounding can trigger anxiety, fear, and dread, and I believe the Four Immeasurables can be a practice to heal some of these internal negative responses and reactions to self and others. When in harmony, they go together as a synergistic means for optimum mental health and happiness. They mutually support each other so that one can open one's heart without being overwhelmed.

### **History and Discussion of Compassion from Philosophical and Practice Perspectives of Buddhism Regarding the Self**

Lama Govinda, who was probably the most influential pioneer in bringing to the public the transmission of Tibetan Buddhism in the mid-1900s, stresses that it is the individual who achieves enlightenment. He says the individual has all the potential within

himself/herself for enlightenment, which he calls "completeness": "Completeness can only be established within ourselves" (1973, p. 82). The Buddha felt this was so important that he gave it as his final teaching: "Make of yourself a light. Rely upon yourself [...]" (as cited in Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 1966, p. 11). In Buddhism, the philosophy and religion are focused on the transformation of mind. Shantideva (2006) often stresses the power of the mind of the individual rather than an individual's strict focus on transforming the external world. The focus of the individual should not be on external difficulties but on one's own mind, as illustrated by the following metaphor: when faced with perilous ground, one can protect one's feet by covering them with leather rather than trying to cover the entire earth itself (p. 63). I interpret this to mean that one can learn to cope with the inevitable fact that life has difficulties by training one's mind and by developing skills such as self-compassion.

For further elaboration of this perspective, I will focus on the Tibetan Buddhist's view, distilled primarily from Je Tsongkhapa, who brought to Tibet the necessity for ethics and logic (Jinpa, 1993). He refined a philosophy within the Middle Way school of Nagarjuna (an Indian pandit and founder of Madhyamaka who lived around the second and third century CE). Prasangika Madhyamaka is the primary school that Je Tsongkhapa is known to have developed. Prasangika (translated as a *consequentialist* school (Garfield & Edelglass, 2011)) had a profound effect on Tibetan philosophy.

Alex Berzin (2004) says that the self denied in this school of thought is "an impossible soul." The word "impossible" targets the view of self as inherent, fixed, independent, substantial, and findable (Berzin, 2004). When known in this context, the *concept* of self therefore does not deny that it is a function or an arising in the field of interdependence. Alexander Berzin feels the "impossible" or mistaken way of seeing the self can be exposed through meditation that uses "discernment" as its modality. Through systematic discernment, the self cannot be found as reified in any way, whereas ordinary perception of the self is of an "impossible" self (Berzin). In therapy this can be important because by not seeing a fixed self, change is possible. One of the direct ways I have found in working with misperceptions of a fixed self is by having clients contemplate

impermanence in their life. Impermanence need not contribute to despair; rather, it is also a concept that can enhance hope and possibility for change.

H. H. the Dalai Lama is primarily of the school of Prasangika Madhyamaka. For Je Tsongkhapa, emptiness refers to what the self is not: the self lacks inherent existence; it is not findable, fixed independent or ever the same over time (Dalai Lama, 1997b, pp. 148–156). Nevertheless, the Buddha did not deny the "conventional, empirical self" (Harvey, 2013, p. 59). At the Mind Life Conference in December 2015, during a presentation by Tibetan Buddhist scholar Jay Garfield, session 3, *The Self—What It Isn't*, Garfield talked about two common mistakes: seeing the self in the moment as "intrinsic" and throughout time as "permanent." Both of these lead to the view of self that is solidified. What I liked about what the Dalai Lama said in his dialogue with Garfield was that it is the "I am" that is the object to be repudiated, not "a sense of self." When I heard this dialogue, I liked H. H. the Dalai Lama's comment because for me "I am" infers someone with an identity stuck in time and space, which is the identity to be refuted. Later in his talk, Garfield does state that there is a "conventional person" who lives in this life. By nature, we have a propensity for self-grasping and thinking that the innate, permanent self exists, which is an illusion.

It is generally taught in Prasangika Madhyamaka (of which, for example, Dr. Robert Thurman is a practitioner) that there are two truths, briefly discussed earlier in this thesis: the ultimate truth, which is "the negation of the inherent existence" in self and phenomena, and the conventional truth, which talks more in terms of the relative interconnection of dependent arising of self and phenomena (whilst self and phenomena are empty of inherent existence). During a lecture on April 8, 2016, at Maitripa College, Thurman stated that the Buddha never refuted a relative self. "One does exist but not the way one thinks one exists (personal communication)."

H. H. the Dalai Lama (2006), in *How to See Yourself as You Really Are*, states that the self is not imaginary; it "functions" interdependently, albeit impermanently and momentarily. He defines self as a form of functioning, dependent in the context of

interdependence. In 1993, at a public talk in Arizona, the Dalai Lama gave a powerful statement to demonstrate how the false view of reified self could be worked with dynamically in the moment. Basically, he said he had a sense of self in that moment, which enabled him to give the talk. Whilst knowing that nothing is innately fixed, he experienced a self that was communicating, participating and sharing Dharma with the audience. According to Thurman (2004), *dependent* can be defined as dependent upon infinite causes and conditions. If one recognizes that the relative self is dependent on numerous and infinite factors, this means that the use of the word "self" in self-compassion is valid in Buddhism.

Glenn Mullin (2016) has a wonderful webinar presentation on the reification of the self. He states that the "sense of self is conceptual [...] vastness of self is the meaning of emptiness." Mullin goes on to say that, in Buddhism, the image of the moon reflecting in the water is used to talk about the illusory self. He says that people who have what he refers to as a "false self" will see this reflection of the moon in the water to be the real moon. Like the metaphor of the moon reflected in the water, people with a strong sense of the false self also fail to see its illusory nature. Mullin refers to the example in Buddhism of the three circles, which is often used to describe experience: the self, the object, and the interactive process of the two. One cannot separate the three definitively because they arise interdependently upon each other. "The three circles help to correctly navigate emptiness [while using the] conventional construct" of self. Each of the components of the circle cannot exist by itself (Mullin).

From a psychotherapeutic level, working with the sense of self has important implications. The sense of self includes having meaningful boundaries, values, life quest, continuity of experience and memory. My discussion includes two unhealthy extremes that involve the sense of self. On the one extreme, having no sense of self is not healthy as it can lead to mental confusion, disorientation, and lack of stability. There is no internal navigation that is directing being in the world with one's true values. The other extreme is to have a rigid, solid and closed sense of self that is unopen to self-reflection, personal transformation and adjustment in relationships. In the self-compassion

curriculum, the self is presented from a perspective that avoids these two extremes. Seeing the self as a fluid, changing and adaptable being can be worked with through exploration of moment to moment dynamics in people's lives which includes discovery of values and personal meaning, and the pertinent issues they are struggling with.

### **Dharma Seals**

The Dharma Seals are considered integral components of Dharma thought; they are the Buddha's teachings and are recognized by most schools of Buddhism. The seals vary in number (three or, in most cases, four) and in elaboration. As mentioned in chapter three, the three Dharma Seals that are of relevance to this dissertation are "impermanence, suffering and non-self" (Hanh, 1999, p. 131). Some Western psychotherapists who utilize their therapy modalities in conjunction with Eastern philosophy apply the Dharma Seals in their work. Dharma Seals are Buddhist in origin; however, in this chapter, I emphasize how they have been integrated into current discussion in the West and their applicability to the Western mind.

Impermanence is the first Dharma Seal. Mindfulness and impermanence can be intertwined. The actual practice of mindfulness is applying awareness, moment to moment, with the arising of each internal or external stimulus. The ability to let go of the clinging to particular thought patterns and habitual reactions is deeply rooted in the understanding and appreciation of impermanence. Mindfulness is the appreciation of the moment-to-moment arising of thoughts, feelings, sensations and impulses, whilst being aware of their impermanence. As we can see from the literature on the applied development of compassion, the integration of mindfulness into the cultivation of compassion curriculums has been of significant value.

Generally, dissatisfaction or suffering (*dukkha*) is the second Dharma Seal, and it is due to our afflictive states. We create an extra layer of suffering, either by our misperception of reality or by clinging (the cause of suffering) to impermanent, afflictive states. Recognizing suffering through mindfulness allows one to begin a healing process

rather than continuing down the path of self-torment through rumination with one's negative thoughts and feelings. Neff's construct of self-kindness I believe can involve working with our own internal *dukkha* in a way that is most beneficial to our mental well-being.

The third Dharma Seal is selflessness, which is a view in Buddhism that sees self as being fluid and ever-changing. Ladner (2004) says that, in order for one to begin to liberate oneself from suffering, one must be aware of what is causing the suffering. He states that confusion or ignorance is grounded in "mistaken and inaccurate thoughts" (2004, p. 14). The mistaken thought is that one perceives the self to be permanent and solid, outside the vast interplay of causes and conditions.

Labelling or imputation is a term the Dalai Lama and Berzin use, along with others, applied to experience (1997). Labelling is naming an object by the cognizing mind. Labelling, when not seen for what it is (a functioning of the mind affixing solidity and permanence onto that which is free-flowing and impermanent), contributes to a false view of self. The mind labels or imputes a static identifiable essence onto a continuous energy flow that cannot be pinned down. This labelling can lead to and arise from ignorance, which is fundamental to a view of self that leads to suffering. A fixed label is imputed upon flowing energy by the conceptual mind. The interpretation used here is Prasangika Madhyamaka: "... the co-emergent ignorance [that] is the implicit habitual misapprehension of actual reality ... the conditioned ignorance of an imaginary process through which individual perception discerns its object" (Jinpa, 1993, pp. 314–315). Ignorance is the misapprehension of the way things and beings are. Appearance is given the status of being totally real, even though the way it appears is not the way it is, ever changing.

One of the values of mindfulness training is the relaxation of the view of self as fixed. Western psychotherapy has utilized mindfulness-training-based practices of Buddhist origin in many streams of Western psychotherapy. Mindfulness is one method of experiencing the self in a non-fixed way, disciplining the mind to see the arising of

moment-to-moment experience. Using mindfulness with self-compassion creates enough space around thoughts and feelings to avoid a negative identity fixation. Compassion is vast, immeasurable, boundless and contrary to any view of self as fixed; thus, this can lead to an experience of boundless self. Fluidity of thoughts, feelings and perceptions are experienced in mindfulness practice. The mind is fluid and this experience of non-fixed self opens up the space for change and transformation. Ideally, one gains a certain ease with one's own mind and experience. By being able to avoid grasping onto the content of our experiences through mindfulness meditation, this flexibility and ease can become helpful in one's meditation practice. By practising a mindfulness method to simply observe internal states as they arise and dissolve without grasping onto them contributes to quiescence of mind, which brings with it a greater potential to experience the mind's nature. According to Anne Harrington (2002), Professor of History of Science at Harvard University, the current Dalai Lama states "the natural state" of mind "is gentleness" (p. 22).

A fourth seal, Nirvana, was spoken of by the Buddha in the Samyukta Agama sutra, according to Thich Nhat Hanh. Nirvana literally means "a state beyond sorrow" (Jinpa, 1993, p. 351). It is the mind that is beyond emotions that are negative and afflictive; it is achieved through the realization of emptiness and blossoms into a state of mind that has no suffering (Jinpa, 1993, p. 351). One can relate the fourth seal to modern psychotherapy, in that it points to the mind's capacity and potential to mitigate sorrow and ultimately abide in a state of peace and joy.

In therapy, I note that most people are searching for some form of peace. Whether they call it a state free of suffering or a state of connection with the divine, nature or a sense of belonging, I have found contemplative practices allow some experience of that for which we are all yearning. My further observation is that when people endeavour to engage in contemplative practices, their world view starts to shift in terms of the potential of their minds, and of their lives.



### ***Paramitas* (six perfections)**

The six *paramitas* hold the heart of *Mahayana* Buddhism. Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche (1989) translates *paramitas* as "reaching the other shore" (p. 232). "The six paramitas of the Sanskrit heritage are: giving, virtue, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom. Later *Mahayana* texts add four more: resolution, skilful means, power, and knowledge" (Bodhi, 2005b), which are not covered in this dissertation.

Depending on the text and translator, the names for the six *paramitas* may be different and are in a different order. Thupten Jinpa's translation of the six *paramitas* as "perfections" and their sequence is as follows: "1) generosity; 2) ethical discipline; 3) patience; 4) perseverance, or joyous effort; 5) meditative concentration; 6) discriminative awareness or wisdom..." (1993, p. 358).

We can see Jinpa's translation is a more familiar one when we contrast it to Robert Thurman's translation of the *paramitas* as "transcendent virtues" (2004, p. 41). Thurman's translation and sequencing of the six virtues throughout his book *Infinite Life* are as the chapters "wisdom," "generosity," "justice," "patience," "creativity," and "contemplation."

**Wisdom:** Wisdom involves the understanding of emptiness—or *Sunyata*, in Sanskrit. The view of emptiness, when properly understood, can be an essential component to change (Thurman). "It is complete openness without obstruction that allows everything to occur" (Gawang, 2013, vii.). Because everything is free of stuckness and fixedness, everything is malleable. The potential for change is limitless. This breadth of freedom is seldom envisioned. One of the issues that comes up in psychotherapy is that people often say, with resignation, "This is who I am; this is just my personality." The openness Gawang refers to is seeing all things as capable of change, including one's inner patterns. Hope can be born from such a view.

Wisdom is the understanding of the interdependence of all beings, which is also the awakening of compassion. Hopkins translates the Tibetan word, *shes-rab*, as *wisdom*,

whereas Berzin (2003–2016) translates it as "discriminating awareness". The Sanskrit equivalent is *prajna*. Berzin defines wisdom as

[t]he mental factor that decisively discriminates between what is correct and what is incorrect, or between what is helpful and what is harmful, or between what is appropriate or what is inappropriate, or between what is reality and what is not reality. (Berzin, 2003–2016)

In the *Diamond Sutra*, a *Mahayana* sutra, are four lines that the Buddha said were examples of how to give wisdom teachings:

As a lamp, a cataract, a star in space  
an illusion, a dewdrop, a bubble  
a dream, a cloud, a flash of lightning  
view all created things like this.  
(Red Pine, Trans., 2001, p. 27)

**Generosity:** Generosity is giving without expecting praise, accolades or any reward from others. There are three types of generosity in Buddhism: giving material belongings, helping others decrease fear ("protection to the defenseless"), and inspiring others in the teachings of the Dharma (Thurman, p. 107). Here, again, we can see the importance of self-compassion: "Now that you have successively nurtured yourself, you can practice generosity with others" (Thurman, 2004, p. 117).

**Justice:** Justice is the application of an ethical and moral life. Thurman (2004) says it is actively giving up an ego-based lifestyle. "The main lesson here is that lessening your entanglement in superficial concerns and interactions is caring for yourself [...] being loving towards yourself, and establishing the basis of justice and love towards others" (p. 154).

**Patience:** Patience is mainly taught within the context of not acting on anger in a destructive way. Thurman mainly refers to Shantideva's commentary on the application of patience with anger. The profound effects that acting destructively with anger can have

on our spiritual life and our emotional well-being can take tremendous effort to rectify and remedy once the damage is done. In Buddhist philosophy, use of the antidote of patience, which includes pausing and applying awareness through mindfulness, can not only prevent the intensity and duration of anger, but can also nullify it entirely in the moment. Shantideva (2006) says the following:

No evil is there similar to anger  
No austerity to be compared with patience  
Steep yourself, therefore, in patience  
In various ways, insistently. (p. 77)

**Creativity:** Thurman (2004) describes creativity as "effort," "striving," "vigor," "energy," and "diligence" from the "Sanskrit word for it, *virya*" (p. 216). He discusses four common ways of being in the world that are destructive in terms of developing creativity: "laziness, addiction, self-loathing, and despair" (p. 217).

He states that, of these four ways of being in the world that are habitual in nature, self-loathing is the "most distinctively modern and the most destructive" (p. 212). I find his observation meaningful, as it is also mine, both professionally and in my personal surroundings. Self-loathing seems so ubiquitous, that it is one of the main reasons I chose self-compassion as an area of study. There is a fragility that goes along with self-loathing. One can see this fragility in the way people with self-loathing present themselves. This can be expressed in the extremes ranging from being overly self-defended to being very vulnerable. I believe that self-loathing is often a result of not trusting oneself or knowing the beauty of the self in its wholeness. This confusion and ignorance often leaves people desperate. This desperation can lead the person to destructive escapism or in a constructive mode, to find deep connection. So many people I know struggle to even remotely access the part of themselves that is self-loving or self-compassionate. Self-loathing is often concealed in destructive forms of indulgent distractions and escape. The ultimate result of these indulgences leads to negative consequences, low self-esteem, and despair (i.e., spending excessively, over satiating oneself in food and drink, substance

use, etc.). Another observation I have of people with self-loathing is that they feel uncomfortable expressing their strengths to others: they are fearful of being considered conceited or superior. Over time, this compromising of presenting the positive strengths, may be imprinted or habituated in the self-view or psyche of the person.

On another level, this turning against oneself, in the form of self-loathing, seems all too common when people feel alone and disconnected from self and others. For most, without a sense of community, self-compassion and self-love seem like an impossible state to achieve. A competitive society may enhance the feeling of disconnection in a life that is fraught with struggle to survive. This may lead to loss in the sense of belonging to one's cultural, spiritual, and or religious roots.

Ideally, one creatively accepts and deals with the natural vicissitudes of life. The more people protect themselves from these vicissitudes unskillfully, the more one hears people comment on the meaninglessness of things, which again can be the fertile ground for self-loathing. So the question, again, is how to feel alive in ever-changing lives with openness, love, compassion, patience and generosity. This acceptance can be developed. Khenpo Gawang (2013), a Tibetan lama, says that we can need to work on our habitual reactions diligently with method and practice: "That is why wishing and hoping that things will change is not enough to remove our problematic habitual patterns" (p. 86). In reference to habituations, Geshe Tashi Tsering (2006) feels that causes of our suffering are primarily due to ingrained patterns in the mind derived from mental habits. Modern psychotherapy adds that mental habits are influenced and partly created by sociocultural determinations.

**Contemplation:** Contemplation includes both *shamatha* (calm abiding meditation) and *vipassyanā* (insight meditation) to realize emptiness. Thurman (2004) states that contemplation allows the previous *paramitas* to be strengthened. Furthermore, while developing contemplation, it yields its own rewards. Thurman describes contemplation as the last of the six *paramitas*. He feels that contemplation needs to be

embedded in the four *brahmaviharas* so that one can still remain open to the reality of interconnection in our daily lives.

In relation to contemplation and meditation, I should like to conclude with the five hindrances to meditation: "Sensual desire, ill-will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse and doubt" (Bodhi, 2005a, p. 227). In my opinion, meditation must be one of the most vital gifts from the East to the West. Meditation can be found and has been developed in almost every world religion. Buddhism has refined it extensively. An example of an adaptation from *Sutras*, the teachings of the Shakyamuni Buddha, to modern times is evidenced in Germer's commentary with the five hindrances.

Germer (2009) applies these five hindrances as a method of developing more awareness around the mind in relation to self-compassion, although he uses the following terms instead: "grasping [sensual desire], aversion [ill-will], weariness [dullness and drowsiness], agitation [restlessness and remorse], and doubt" (p. 207). In my curriculum, under the topic of mindfulness, participants can explore which of the five are obstacles to their ability to meditation or practise mindfulness. I describe each one using Germer's terms, as opposed to the traditional Buddhist text.

To me, the *paramitas* are virtuous states of mind from which behaviour flows. The six *paramitas* are meant to be mutually supportive to each other. In Buddhism, they are considered a complete path to enlightenment, albeit over eons of time of development. For modern society, they can inform the foundation for ethics. For the individual, conscious living of *wisdom, generosity, justice, patience, creativity and contemplation* can be guiding lights in the development of compassion and meritorious ways of being in the world.

### **Karma as It Relates to Self-Compassion**

Kyabgon Traleg Rinpoche (2015) writes meaningfully about the Buddha's views on karma. Karma literally means *action* but the concept of karma itself is more of a

complex interplay of dynamic factors. Traditionally in Buddhism, it is often thought of as cause and effect. Traleg Rinpoche breaks the Buddha's views into three components: firstly, people are responsible for their actions; secondly, the way those actions play out in the universe is unpredictable and not set or predetermined from the moment of action itself. The third point captures the Buddha's unspoken truth regarding karma. Rinpoche calls it "character." If a person makes a terrible mistake and can acknowledge it, with sincere heartfelt regret, he/she can become a better person, as a result. This is what the Buddha calls *character*, which is the ability to transform ourselves through the actions of our lives. Traleg Rinpoche therefore focuses on how we cope and work with the results of karma in the moment, which includes inner and outer positive and negative events, to achieve "character formation" (p. 36). He considers the essence of karma to be our invaluable capacity to become something we want, and that such a transformation is possible. When we are faced with the seeds of karma, we have an opportunity to respond in a way that furthers our development as human beings. Such *character formation* is an important component of action and result (Traleg).

Working with karma, one can change the way one relates to oneself and to life events. There is great wisdom in understanding karma as, on a therapeutic level, people may take the time to pause before acting in ways that may be unwholesome, preventing further suffering. In individual therapy sessions, clients may want to use the term karma and discuss their own feelings about personal karma and its implications for their lives. If a client, Buddhist or not, uses the term karma, the usage is honoured. However, for the purposes of my self-compassion curriculum, karma, although a term now employed in present-day culture, will not be introduced by the facilitator, rather he or she will use "cause and effect." Cause and effect is introduced in a simplified, non-philosophical approach that does not imply life-to-life linkage of cause and effect. In self-compassion therapy, cause and effect is an important tool in understanding that one's behaviour has consequences that align with input from the cause, i.e., the effect of liver damage from the cause of excessive and chronic alcohol use.

Also, the concept of *character formation* is a term I find helpful in the self-compassion curriculum in one's stance toward life's challenges.

*Character formation* can be an effective concept for working with adversity. Using *character formation* to work with external adversity or internal affliction clients have the opportunity in the moment to cope in a way that has efficacious implications for the future; it will help them to develop themselves positively. *Character formation* as a concept can be inspiring. The client's response to what arises in life can make each moment, no matter the content, an opportunity for growth. In the group using the curriculum, as mentioned, we do not engage in prolonged orientation of unravelling the past. Working with the present in the best way possible for each participant is the goal. The concepts of cause and effect and of *character formation* can be viable to psychotherapy because they help participants to use their present situation to develop themselves.

### **Meditation and the Five Faults**

Meditation is integral to the self-compassion programs discussed in this dissertation, including mine. Maitreya, a visionary from around the 4th century CE, discusses the five faults, which formed part of his teachings called the *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes (Madhyanta-Vibhaga)*. "The five enemies [faults] of meditation [are] laziness, forgetting instructions, mental scattering or mental sinking, not taking action to restore the object of meditation, and taking unnecessary action" (Tharchin, 1999, pp. 262–270). Laziness relates to mental laxity or the lack of vividness in one's meditation. Forgetting what one is doing and the intention of practise is referred to as forgetting instructions, according to Lobsang Tharchin. Mental scattering is distraction and being carried away by multiple thoughts. Mental sinking is a sleepy, dull, or foggy mind (Kyabgon, 2012). Not taking action or not remembering what one is doing is self-explanatory. Taking unnecessary action is exemplified in Tharchin's observation

that, when one is already deeply concentrated, one furthers the effort, even though concentration has already been achieved.

The five faults are taught directly in the self-compassion curriculum in relation to mediation and contemplation. Knowledge is not enough in understanding meditation. Experiential exercises are essential for people to understand, integrate and commit to a daily practice, should participants choose to do so. The five faults are very helpful in working with common difficulties as they arise for the meditator. *Mental scattering* and *mental sinking* are useful concepts not just for meditation but also for people who have hypo or hyperaroused nervous systems. The experiential exercises can allow participants to make some adjustments moment to moment to these states of mind, and also gain confidence in regulating their nervous system.

### **Shantideva and Forgiveness**

One's misdeeds and unwholesome actions can be a major obstacle to self-compassion if perceived in a chronic state of shame and guilt. Often people feel unworthy of self-compassion because of previous negative actions. A form of forgiveness, not just of another person, but within and for oneself is vital. One can get so stuck in and overwhelmed by guilt that it is very helpful to have some means and method to work with this. Buddhism can provide one valuable method derived from Shantideva (2006), who had a significant influence as a seminal philosopher from India in all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Shantideva's poetic composition using the first-person voice is a beautiful confession from his book, *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (2006). His confession is sincerely heartfelt and diligent in his aspiration of asking for protection. The pain the practitioner, in this case, Shantideva, has caused creates great anguish in his mind. Shantideva goes on to say that virtues are protection. He meditates in front of the whole field of Buddhas, specifying the Buddha of compassion, "*Avalokita*" (p. 44), who, in his mind, act as witnesses of his confession. Shantideva's main purpose is to eradicate his harmful



intentions and deeds out of fear and sorrow of the pain to come from these deeds. Shantideva concludes the process with the commitment to never repeat these harmful actions. As stated in the words of the Buddha, in verse 157 in the *Dhammapada*: "If you hold yourself dear, you should guard yourself well" (Wallis, 2004, p. 34).

Later in transition to Tibetan Buddhism, Shantideva's process was organized into a particular practice, which is often called the four opponent powers and is a sequential four-part process. The four opponent powers are "regret, reliance, opponent force, promise" (Wallace, 1997, iii). In my curriculum, I adapt these four opponent powers to the practice of working with one's past harmful, unwholesome, or unskillful conduct that cause inordinate self-torment. In Buddhism, self-forgiveness is not based on being an inherently "bad" person. It is based on an efficacious process of acknowledgment, responsibility and letting go. Self-forgiveness is an important part of self-compassion.

From a Tibetan Buddhist perspective, self-forgiveness can occur with the practice of the following four sequential aspects: 1. heartfelt, sincere regret (*regret*); 2. turning to a method or skill to work with and rectify the negative effects of the action (*reliance*); 3. contemplation or meditation of that skill and applying it to the process (*opponent force*); 4. making a sincere commitment to not repeat the same unwholesome action (*promise*).

In psychotherapy, it is essential to work with how guilt affects one's identity, for example, self-hatred, self-loathing, and self-recrimination. Often people see no way out but to suffer. They are preoccupied with chronic guilt and think it is justified because they feel it is a way to punish themselves for a mistake. It is helpful in therapy to ask the participants to reflect on their intention at the time of the mistake. Often the intention is not malicious or at least not embedded in such a destructive unwholesomeness as they had envisioned. This insight can lessen the suffering around guilt, shame and self-loathing. Also, through the four sequential processes (in my curriculum in the section on self-forgiveness), there is hope of some alleviation of this guilt and protection of the mind.

The four-step process can provide a form of self-transformation that enables one to free oneself from preoccupation with a past deed. Also, the promise, the fourth aspect, can enhance deeper awareness and choice in the future when conditions trigger the possibility of repeating the action. In relation to the promise aspect, I use the word "try" to not repeat an action as opposed to "I will not...", as I do not want to add to further guilt and shame should a person not be able to abide by this.

### **The Eleven Categories of Je Tsongkhapa**

The Eleven Categories were developed by Je Tsongkhapa, a 14th century Tibetan scholar. He gleaned and integrated the categories from aspects of the Sevenfold Cause and Effect and *lojong* ("mind training") (Tharchin, 1999). Both *lojong* approach and the Sevenfold Cause and Effect approach are rooted in the teachings of the historical Buddha (Tharchin, 1999). I have chosen to discuss the Eleven Categories because of their focus on developing *bodhicitta* and compassion, which of course includes self. The eleven categories discussion involves a very complex system of integration.

To clarify, the Eleven Categories is comprised of two sets of approaches. Each set involves seven points. The two sets are *Lam Rim* (Sevenfold Cause and Effect) and *lojong* (*lojong* includes *Seven-Point Mind Training*). One can read the Sevenfold Cause and Effect in Je Tsongkhapa's *Lam Rim Chen Mo* (2004), a *Lam Rim* text.

The following distinction between *Lam Rim* and the specific development of Tibetan *Lojong* is made by Dr. Jinpa (2006). *Lam Rim* is a "rigorously systematized approach" (p. 5). In contrast, *mind training* is not this and is, in fact, simplistic and does not have a "complex reasoning process" (p. 6). Atiśa taught two separate teachings: *Lam Rim*, which was taught publicly at the time and is referred to as "*stages of the path*," and *mind training*, "which was taught in secret," and is considered "scattered sayings" (p. 11); however, Atiśa never "explicitly authored a mind training text in the sense of a coherently organized work" (p. 11). *Seven-Point Mind Training* was put into the "key elements...of seven points" by Geshe Chekawa, who was "one of the first" to do so (p. 11). "Chekawa's

*Seven-Point Mind Training* became so influential that for many later authors...[it] became almost equivalent to mind-training itself" (p. 9).

I have endeavoured to discuss the Eleven Categories at some length because it demonstrates that there is a means of cultivation that shows the intricacy by which Tibetan Buddhism conjoined method with wisdom. The focus of the *mind training* is on cultivating and fostering a good heart—a heart that is gentle, loving, kind and patient. This particular practice reflects how compassion can be developed and how one can be trained in a step-by-step meditative practice to achieve a good heart (Tharchin).

As mentioned, two practices form the Eleven Categories: Sevenfold Cause and Effect and *lojong*. They signify a beautiful synthesis of two major practices from Buddhism in India. Also, they demonstrate an important Buddhist belief—that compassion can be trained—and the methodology for training reached, in my estimation, unparalleled levels of excellence in Indo-Tibetan practices. These approaches are from *Mahayana* Buddhism and they reflect the *Mahayana* spirit of developing compassion and Bodhicitta, according to Tharchin.

The Eleven Categories cultivate *bodhichitta* (*awakened mind* and heart). According to Dr. Jinpa, "*Bodhi* means "*enlightenment*" (1993, p. 285). The dictionary of spoken Sanskrit translates the Sanskrit *citta* as *mind* or *heart* (Ranjini, Paranjape, Ramapriyan, Gaurav, Glashoff, et al., 2005) and, in Chinese and Japanese, *chitta* means *heart*. Berzin feels Bodhichitta's meaning is inclusive of intellect, emotions and all sense perceptions of external input, thus his translation: "... the closest equivalent is the word 'experience' ... experience is merely ... whatever occurs" (1997, p. 60). According to Berzin, *chitta* would imply all subjective experience by an individual in a given moment. Bodhichitta is awakened experience (Berzin, 1997). Tharchin says Je Tsongkhapa's integration of the two practices was like two powerful rivers merging into a river of even greater strength, skilful effectiveness and capacity to awaken *Bodhichitta* (p. 14).

I would like to present the two lineages of these two approaches. According to Lobsang Tharchin, The Sevenfold Cause and Effect instruction has the following lineage. It was passed from the "... Buddha, to Maitreya, to Asanga, to Lama Serlingpa, to Lama Atisha, to Je Tsongkapa, and then throughout lineage Lamas down to the present" (Tharchin, 1999, p. 14).

Lobsang Tharchin (1999), says the *lojong* lineage is as follows: Buddha, Manjushri, Shantideva, Serlingpa, Atiśa, Lama Dromton Gyalwey Jung-ne, Potowa Rinchen Sel, Sharawa Yonten Drak, Chekawa Yeshe Dorje (p. 6), and in accordance with Dr. Jinpa's earlier statement, Chekawa Yeshe Dorje then wrote down these teachings in the form of the *Seven-Point Mind Training*. Chekawa Yeshe Dorje was a twelfth century Geshe.

As one can see, both approaches have Atiśa within the lineages. According to Dr. Thupten Jinpa, "...within Atiśa's instructions, there are two distinct approaches—as mentioned, stages of the path [*Lam Rim*] (which was taught publicly) and *mind training* (which was taught in secret)..." (p. 7).

Sometimes, when reading classical Buddhist writings, a misunderstanding arises: that the essence of the Sevenfold Cause and Effect and *lojong* is solely other-focused. By this I mean that the "other" is given all importance. Perhaps this misconception is somewhat rooted in the translation of these texts. An example of this, as mentioned before, is that H. H. the Dalai Lama says that *tsewa* (compassion) implies self, not just other (Davidson & Harrington, 2002a). Also, all individual mind streams are held to be of equal value.

Sevenfold Cause and Effect and *lojong* (*Seven-Point Mind Training*) and their instructions are foundational to the understanding of compassion in Tibetan Buddhism. Importantly, we will see how these methodologies are employed to cultivate compassion. Techniques for developing compassion have been used for centuries, enabling many people to achieve unconditional and unwavering compassion and love. The cultivation of

a compassionate heart involves groundwork, a foundation and a process in being brought from a wish to a reality. Thoughts can be transformed, afflictive emotions can be transformed, and mind, body and speech can be brought onto the path of such transformation through actual means and methods.

A traditional Tibetan, born and raised in Tibet, Sermey Khensur Lobsang Tharchin wrote about the Eleven Categories in *Achieving Bodhicitta* (1999). I primarily use his resource for the Eleven Categories. Lobsang Tharchin's presentation of the Sevenfold Cause and Effect constitutes one approach integrated into the Eleven Categories.

### **The Sevenfold Cause and Effect Instruction**

This is a meditational practice, whereby one progresses from one point to the next, all the way through the following seven:

1. "Recognizing that all beings have been my mother" (p. 24)
2. "Recalling the kindness of all mother beings" (p. 33)
3. "Repaying the kindness of all mother beings" (p. 37)
4. "Loving-kindness for all beings" (p. 46)
5. "Great compassion for all beings" (p. 50)
6. "Extraordinary compassion for all beings" (p. 53)
7. "The result: Bodhicitta" (p. 55).

*Bodhicitta* is the potential seed in the mind itself and is used to achieve Buddhahood (Tharchin).

### ***Lojong***

Dr. Thupten Jinpa (2006) in his book, *Mind Training, The Great Collection*, presents one of the most knowledgeable and clear collections of texts of *lojong* in English. The following includes some of the highlights from the introduction to that

book. According to him, *mind training* is recognized and valued in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Dr. Jinpa writes that *mind training* can be traced back to Atiśa, even though the specific term was not used by Atiśa. The term *mind training*, Jinpa says, was first used by Geshe Chekawa and by Langri Thangpa, a century after Atiśa. "...[T]he Tibetan *mind training* genre is well known today to the English-speaking world...[as] Langri Thanpa's *Eight Verses on Mind Training* and Chekawa's *Seven-Point Mind Training*" (p. 2). Geshe Chekawa's was probably the first to take Atiśa's primary teachings and present them in the format of the *Seven-Point Mind Training*, and Geshe Chekawa then shared it publicly.

I appreciate the deep understanding that Dr. Jinpa brings to the term *lojong*. One of the translations he gives for *lo* is "mind"; however, *jong* has more elaborate meanings: "... a process of training, habituation, cultivation, and cleansing induces a profound transformation ..." which leads to a focus on others, as opposed to on the self-centered mind (pp. 1 & 2). Dr. Thupten Jinpa mentions that "broadly speaking, all the teachings of the Buddha...can be characterized as mind training in all four senses described above" (p. 2).

Some salient aspects of *mind training* by Thupten Jinpa:

1. *Mind training* "reverses" feeling oneself to be more important than others and the process of perceiving self as inherently existing. A further important point is to see that self-cherishing (or selfishness) is the target of "blame."
2. *Tonglen* is a major contribution to mind training. According to Jinpa, it is one of the significant contributions globally to spiritual practice and is particularly important in the development of loving-kindness and compassion.
3. Within the continuum of mental afflictions, the key application and antidote is compassion.
4. One takes misfortunes and hardships and transforms them into a spiritual path (Jinpa, p. 3).

I shall now discuss Geshe Chekawa's *Seven-Point Mind Training* (*lojong* practice), from a commentary by Lobsang Tharchin. The first point of the *Seven-Point Mind Training* is made up of four preliminary practices: "leisure and fortune," "impermanence," "taking refuge" and "karma" (pp. 66–69). One should contemplate these preliminaries—firstly, focusing on the preciousness of being born in a human body, free from major obstructions for seeking the Dharma path; secondly, focusing on impermanence and death (we only have so much time to practise and do not know how long this time is); thirdly, focusing on taking refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, where the Buddha is The Awakened One, the Dharma is the teachings, and the Sangha is the Buddhist community); and, fourthly, focusing on karma (which means action, but generally refers to cause and effect). In contemplating karma, we see that all action leaves an imprint on the continuum of consciousness—an imprint that can lead to negative, positive or neutral results. Jinpa (2006) gives an example of the capacity to eat as neutral karma; the result of this capacity is neither wholesome nor unwholesome but it can be converted to one of these. *Neutral* refers to the result of the karma of having the capacity to eat.

The second point is "the main instruction on how to practise Bodhichitta" (p. 70), which is to surrender self-cherishing—defined by Tharchin as self-centred mind, to love and compassion for all. The third point is "the method of turning bad experiences into causes for enlightenment" (p. 105). Geshe Rabten (1996) elaborates on this point in *Advice from a Spiritual Friend*, saying that, when on the *lojong* path, one can even use adversity for personal development. In Buddhism, this is symbolized by the peacock who is able to ingest poison, and the beautiful colours of the peacock's fanned feathers are said to be the result of the ingested and metabolized poison. If one first understands the view of emptiness and rests one's mind in that view, then when the objective world is causing suffering, one can recognize the way it appears as an illusion.

The fourth point is "a summary of how to practise throughout your life" (Tharchin, 1999, p. 117) "[t]he five strengths—the strength of intention, the strength of the white seeds (virtues), the strength of repeated practice, the strength of removing obstacles and the strength of the wishing prayer" (pp. 117–128). The right intention involves all body, speech and mind being orientated towards cultivating *bodhichitta*. The "white seeds" refer to cultivating virtuous karma. Repeated practice is to cut through habitual patterns of thinking, feeling and being, through the application of strong discipline. "The strength of removing obstacles" is, at its essence, the dissolution of the self-centred mind—which, if properly applied, can be a skilful method for working with afflictive states of mind. *The wishing prayer* is dedicating the merit. The dedication is as follows:

[T]he positive energy and good karma means sharing it and giving it away—firstly, for the supreme purpose of reaching buddhahood, the state of perfect peace and, secondly, for the temporary gift of peace and freedom from suffering on our planet. (Gawang, 2013, p. 52)

The fifth point is "signs of having mastered the Lojong instruction" (Tharchin, 1999, p. 141), which is eloquently summed up by Tharchin: "Simply, did it [the mind] become softer and gentler, or did it become more hardened and insensitive?" (p.142). I find this question important in terms of assessing one's progress along the path.

The sixth point is "the 18 Lojong pledges" (p. 154). "*Damtsik* [pledges, in Tibetan] means something that cannot be ignored, given up or abandoned; it is something that must be kept" (p. 154). Jamgon Kongtrul (1987) describes pledges as "commitments" or "promises" (p. 30). The relevance to self-compassion in these pledges is found in Lobsang Tharchin's commentary, where he gives a very strict approach to working with one's own afflictions. He states that one should not indulge in one's afflictive emotions and should apply a remedy right away. Capitulating and yielding to the impulse of the emotion will only increase it. Not immediately applying the antidote to the afflictive emotion obscures one's noble qualities.



The seventh point is "the 22 Lojong precepts" (Tharchin, p. 194), which Jamgon Kongtrul describes as "guidelines for mind training" (p. 37). These 22 precepts are practices orientated towards positive mind-training. They are short, pithy directives or moral guidelines for mental and behavioural activities in daily life.

***Equalizing and exchanging self and others, and tonglen***

*Lojong* (known as *mind transformation*, "mind training" or *Seven-Point Mind Training*) is one of the best-known practices for cultivating compassion. *Lojong* includes the following: *Seven-Point Mind Training* inclusive of Shantideva's "Equalizing and Exchanging Self and Others and *Tonglen*, or Giving and Taking" (Tharchin, p. 5). In equalizing and exchanging self and others, one places oneself in the other person's experience, thereby changing one's primary concern with self to concern for other beings. *Tonglen* practice is an aspect of this.

"Equalizing and Exchanging Self and Others has five main steps" (Tharchin, p. 99) paraphrased as follows:

First step: seeing the sameness of oneself and others

Second step: seeing the error of one's self-clinging mind

Third step: recognizing the benefits of caring for others

Fourth step: giving compassion and empathy to others by seeing their suffering as the same as yours

Fifth step: to practise *tonglen* (*giving and taking*, which is explained later in this chapter).

In the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, Shantideva (2006) describes Exchanging Self and Others as follows:

Strive at first to meditate

Upon the sameness of yourself and others.

In joy and sorrow all are equal;  
Thus be guardian of all, as of yourself. (p. 122)

An important comment needs to be made about Shantideva—one of the major authors of the *lojong* text—regarding his repeated teachings in *Way of the Bodhisattva* of the importance of others over self. My understanding is that he does not devalue the self but considers the aspect of *clinging* to self to be poisonous, and that liberation is the ability to cherish others above one's self.

All the joy the world contains  
Has come through wishing happiness for others.  
All the misery the world contains  
Has come through wanting pleasure for oneself.  
(Shantideva, 2006, p. 127)

Lobsang Tharchin also seems to say that one should focus solely on others, thereby diminishing one's ego and self-clinging.

I feel Shantideva can be understood in different ways. Over my years in the Dharma, I have heard fellow practitioners interpret some of Shantideva's verses as a diminishment of self. This notion of *other* as being of higher importance than oneself can be confusing for Westerners and practitioners who do not authentically feel self-compassion. Until one has a very healthy sense of a compassionate self, striving to put others above oneself may not be realistic and may just create further self-judgement. Among those with low self-esteem, therefore, Shantideva's view might be misconstrued in a negative way. I spoke to Lama Yangsi about this and found his reply helpful. He feels that there are many preliminary steps in this process and that one cannot jump ahead to a particular stage without foundational preparation (personal communication, 2016). My personal view is that these teachings, which seem primarily to say that we should focus our attention on others, are taken out of context. I find that, in other verses of Shantideva, self and others are considered equal—for example, in the primary verse of instruction from Shantideva regarding *tonglen*: "Practice the equality of self and other.

Practice the exchange of self and other" (Shantideva, 2006, p. 99). The basis of focus on the equality of self and other is rooted in the reality of interconnectedness. Because people tend to be so self-focused, this practice has been found helpful in transforming the limited self into a fully opening self of expansiveness and immeasurability.

Many practices are encouraged concurrently while studying these texts—practices such as *shamatha* (calm abiding meditation) and *vipassana* (insight meditation), as well as practices geared towards an understanding of emptiness and impermanence. A focus on others may occur naturally and organically when the foundational preparations have been accomplished by the practitioner. In my curriculum, I will be using a similar method to Gilbert and Chodon's application of *tonglen* to oneself for self-compassion. *Tonglen* is a traditional Buddhist practice and is a fine example of a traditional practice that does not specify self-compassion being adapted to the modern need for compassion for self.

Thupten Jinpa (2015b) states that *tonglen* is best applied gradually and it is helpful to start with oneself. Once a person is comfortable with a practice for *tonglen* for self, then it can be expanded to one's closest circle of intimate relationships, then outward to others. I have found that people who are part of a mental health system are particularly benefitted by this gradual application. My experience is that people can be easily overwhelmed by their own suffering, let alone the suffering of someone else. Also, if someone has an extremely self-destructive tendency, it is especially important that one begin by being grounded in the basis of oneself as benevolent, kind and loving before one draws in the suffering aspects of oneself. Without the positive basis to begin with, it is possible one could amplify the dark and negative feelings. Each person in life has an individual journey. What resonates as a helpful practice for one person, may not resonate for another, and the option not to participate is always given in my self-compassion curriculum. Certain Buddhist practices do require mental stability; however, mental stability cannot be ascertained or always acquired by having accomplished stylized preliminary practices. One of the values of having mentors is that, if skilful, they can see deeply the practice most beneficial for that person's psychology at a given time. By only

using *tonglen* with oneself, the above concerns are lessened. Thus, *tonglen* for some can be effectively practised right away.

The origins of *tonglen* lie in Shantideva's (2006) *Bodhicaryavatara*. Shantideva says that *tonglen* is to be used to break selfishness in oneself, focusing on others as a way of doing this, rather than applying *tonglen* towards one's own suffering. In Buddhist practice, *tonglen* can help a person transform habitual tendencies of self-clinging—especially negative self-clinging—into generosity. It is often said in Buddhism that grasping is the cause of suffering, and Shantideva says that *tonglen* is helpful as a practice to mitigate and free oneself from self-grasping. I relate the value of *tonglen* to lessening self-referential dominance of thinking. By taking on the suffering of others and generating benevolent wishes and light to others, the propensity of mistaken grasping onto self above all others can be lessened.

The *tonglen* practitioners I know share in a beautiful life practice. When they are experiencing a painful emotion, they immediately practise *tonglen*. If one sincerely wishes that the suffering of all people with the same painful emotion could be drawn into that emotion in oneself, one might find that through this generosity of spirit, ironically, one's own suffering of that shared issue lessens. Psychologically, in terms of mental health, the loosening of self-grasping does seem to lessen the suffering itself. Extreme self-grasping and self-referential focus can lead to self-absorption, which can ultimately result in a disconnection from others.

Pema Chödrön includes self-compassion in *tonglen*, whereas Thupten Jinpa and his colleagues use *tonglen* with others, although it is in their Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT), which is presented in chapter seven. Gilbert and Chodon provide a beautiful example of applying *tonglen* to self as a practice involving self-compassion, which will be described shortly. In my self-compassion curriculum, *tonglen* is only applied to self, not as a specific practice of taking and giving with others.

Pema Chödrön (1994) presents the four steps of traditional *tonglen*. The first step is "flashing of absolute Bodhichitta" (p. 38)—a place of quietude that involves an openness, a vastness and an infinite experience of space. The second step is to become in touch with "texture" (p. 38), whereby one breathes in a sense of density. I like to describe this as a night-time tropical typhoon filled with heat and darkness; and then one breathes out light like the beginning of the autumn, filled with warmth, scintillating light and a cool breeze. During the experience of texture, the ego is suspended, allowing for openness versus contraction. When there is a letting go of the tight clinging to the self and a moment when one experiences the essence of openness and spaciousness, this allows for a positive experience of the light texture that Pema Chödrön describes. The third step is to choose an issue that is meaningful to oneself in terms of suffering—an issue that is both real and honest. This is where self-compassion can be applied as one can start with an issue that is causing personal suffering, while also recognizing that many people are suffering with a similar experience. For the fourth and last step in the *tonglen* practice, one generates a wish for those who are suffering similarly—and for all beings—to be free of suffering.

However, Buddhism is open to continual adaptation in achieving the goal of reduced suffering. Gilbert and Choden (2014), as described in the book *Mindful Compassion*, recognize the need to address oneself in a compassionate way, such as using the practice of *tonglen* to withdraw the visualized suffering of oneself and then re-visualize oneself as free of suffering. The wise awareness and compassion of the practitioner in *taking and sending* are essential to *tonglen* and this activity has efficacious effects for the practitioner, as well. Gilbert and Choden apply this valuable method of *taking and sending* to working with one's own psychological concerns, and this approach is used specifically in modern times as a method to relieve suffering.

Gilbert and Choden (2014) wrote an interesting commentary on the two-fold practice of *tonglen*. Firstly, one uses breathing awareness to rest the body. Then one becomes aware of compassion toward self with the associated qualities with compassion. One sees oneself with a heartfelt experience of suffering (taking in through breath the

afflictive emotion that one is working with) that is held in the image of a "dark cloud" (p. 292). One breathes in this dark cloud, dissolving its intensity around the strain on the heart. This softening of the heart allows the person to get in touch with his/her compassionate nature. The part that is suffering is felt from a placing of care and compassion. Secondly, on the outbreath, one lets go of the pain. One sees the ephemeral nature of suffering and that it "transform[s] into light and joy" (p. 292). I often conclude *tonglen* with self practice with encouragement in the deep aspiration of freeing oneself from the affliction of suffering by sending light to self and other.

In my curriculum, I use a simplified technique for *tonglen*, as follows: first, one creates a rootedness in loving-kindness, which protects the mind from self-aversion and self-attack; next, one visualizes an image of oneself, directly in front of the meditating self, with a particular afflictive emotion; then, the heart of loving-kindness takes the affliction into oneself and dissolves it within loving-kindness; then, one sends the merit, love and capacity to cope to the visualized afflicted self, freeing the self from affliction and, finally, one experiences oneself as free.

### **The Instruction and the Practice of the Eleven Categories**

The Eleven Categories are based on the Sevenfold Cause and Effects instruction and Equalizing and Exchanging Self with Others, the instructions and practices which have their foundation in equanimity. One can achieve relative and ultimate *bodhichitta* using the Eleven Categories in meditative practice.

There are eleven steps of actual practice for the Eleven Categories, as described by Tharchin (1999):

**First step:** "Immeasurable equanimity" (p. 100). One contemplates and develops this.

**Second step:** "Develop the certainty that all beings have been your mother" (p. 100).

**Third step:** "Remember that all beings were kind when they were our mother" (p. 100).

**Fourth step:** "Develop the wish to repay that kindness" (p. 100).

After these four steps, which are from the Sevenfold Cause and Effect instruction, one proceeds with points from the second instruction on equalizing self and others.

**Fifth step:** "Meditate on the sameness of oneself and others" (p. 102).

**Sixth step:** "See the negative aspects of self-clinging" (in *Achieving Bodhichitta*, Tharchin seems to see any kind of self-referencing as selfish).

**Seventh step:** "See the benefits of cherishing others."

**Eighth step:** "Take the suffering of others (*tonglen*)."

**Ninth step:** "Give one's joy, accomplishments and realizations to others (*tonglen*)."

**Tenth step:** "Instil 'Extraordinary Intention' to develop bodhichitta in order to liberate all others" (p. 104). One takes the responsibility to stay behind until every sentient being is free.

**Eleventh step:** In "actual bodhichitta," one has "the mind that wishes to attain Buddhahood for the benefit for all sentient beings" (p. 104).

As one can see, steps ten and eleven are the culmination of Eleven Categories with the intention and fruition of Bodhicitta.

This section of the Eleven Categories was inspirational to me in understanding how a profound system can be applied for ultimate realization. Though I do not use the Eleven Categories in my curriculum, I do take from it that through disciplined contemplation and reflection on the equality of self and others and the preciousness of mindful action, the incremental building of capacity to help others can occur. One of the main struggles I have observed in my personal and professional life is that the ability to loosen the tight grip on excessive self-referencing generates open-hearted loving compassion toward others. The practice of *tonglen* for oneself (used in my curriculum) is an effective method in beginning to cultivate more self-compassion, which I feel inevitably results in compassion for others.

## **Buddha Nature**

According to Jinpa, Buddha nature is in the "mental continuum of all sentient beings" (1993, p. 286). Every being has Buddha nature, which is the potential to actualize one's "true nature" using the correct methodology of cultivation. Jinpa inspired me in his presentation of Buddha nature in that he connects it to the "essential nature of mind [which is] pure, knowing and luminous" (p. 287).

Thrangu Rinpoche's book on Buddha nature is a commentary based on *Uttaratantra Shastra*—a *Mahayana* sutra (1993). Thrangu Rinpoche, Tibetan teacher of the Kagyu tradition, says that Buddha nature exists with all beings at all times; however, our emotional and cognitive afflictions block its expression. Buddha nature provides the potential for full realization and is helpful in achieving self-compassion. When one is in a state of self-criticism and self-contempt, one's ability to experience and recognize Buddha nature is compromised. It is only when one is grounded in a deeply loving relationship and presence with oneself that one can experience the true nature of the self. Self-compassion creates the space for the tenderness and gentleness of true nature to radiate. As a therapist, I find it helpful to have the view that people hold this potential. Though it is not the same as the notion that people are basically good, it does tend toward the deep belief that people are capable of realization and transformation. The methods and practices for people to realize their potential are individual ones. In my view, self-compassion rests upon the ground that relationship to self has that transformative potential.

## **Universal Applicability of Traditional Practices**

Traditional Buddhist practices can be universally meaningful and applied to the modern world. Although I am concluding chapter four with Buddhist practices, I do so with the intent of showing compassion as being upheld through a variety of media and expressions. For example, Tantra by Tibetan Buddhism is described as the *resultant path*



because one is practising and experiencing being a Buddha—seeing oneself as one will fully become. According to some schools of thought in Tibetan Buddhism, the benevolent energies that are a potential in one's self are also in the universe as forms of protection, compassion and love. In Tibetan Buddhist tantra, a *yidam* (or deity) that appears either wrathful or gentle can represent compassion. The evocation of the deity is inseparable from one's own Buddha nature. But the energy of a wrathful deity must always be rooted in a compassionate motivation; otherwise, it is not pure. Ladner makes the point that wrathful-deity visualization, for example, can create an efficacious energy to cut through selfishness. The personification of compassion allows for the integration of this aspect in oneself. By visualizing the deity in oneself, compassion can be evoked as a realized state. Skilful means can involve either a courageous and "fierce" approach or a gentle and loving approach, depending on what is necessary and most helpful for the practitioner in the moment (Ladner).

When starting a meditation, some practitioners imagine they are sitting in the presence of wisdom and compassion, either in the form of translucent light beings or of symbolic images. By dissolving the outer visualization into oneself, one gets in touch with the positive energy that already exists within oneself. *Shamatha*—the stabilization of mental concentration while also settling the mind from distraction—allows for the visualization to be more easily attained. One can visualize a compassionate image, such as Quan Yin, who is described as "hearer of cries" (Blofeld, 1977, p. 17), *Avalokiteshvara* (dealt with extensively in chapter eight), Jesus or others, while receiving their loving energy towards oneself. Jesus or Mary might be the image chosen, depending on one's preference. Other images, including those from nature, as well as colours and light might also be used. From some Eastern perspectives, the image is a loving force that comes from the individual's heart and mind (Blofeld, 1977). Ideally, this will evoke the compassionate energy of one's Buddha nature more rapidly or directly. Blofeld felt that using symbolic images of compassionate deities that had meaning for the individual could invoke the natural mind's flow of compassion (1977). It is not only the use of images to evoke compassion that transcends many cultures; axioms can also be used.

Confucius provided the following axiom (often known as a variation of the Golden Rule), which is common to most religions, cultural and historical contexts—Christianity, Islam, Taoism, Buddhism, etc.—and embodies humanistic compassion: Confucius (2003) said "...what you do not wish yourself do not do onto others" (as cited in Gardner & Confucius, p. 54). In my curriculum, the client can explore the meaning of this axiom as it relates to his/her upbringing and spiritual, religious, and/or cultural values.

The original teachings of the Buddha date back twenty-six hundred years. It is profound that these teachings still hold such value in modern life and inform aspects of contemporary psychotherapy. For some, they are the foundation upon which to build and live a life of spiritual value and meaning. Compassion and self-compassion can be cornerstones of living in deep connectedness and harmony with one another and with the earth. Though these teachings are sacred, they have practical implications for many people struggling with daily life. Given the frailty and uncertainty of our existence, we need to find some way to cultivate a strong and more stable mind. I feel Buddhism offers this.

## 5. Emotion Regulation in Mental Well-Being and Compassion

Emotion regulation is a particularly important concept to the development of the field of self-compassion and is an essential component in the theoretical background for my curriculum. Neff (2003b) identified self-compassion as a form of emotion regulation. Given the many intense feelings and emotions that we experience in life, we require self-compassion in order to work with these emotions openly, constructively, and skilfully so that they don't overwhelm us. I find that people often seek therapy because they are tormented by the intensity of their emotions, so it is imperative to look deeply and clearly into the nature of one's emotional life. It is also very important to identify and then focus on any emotions that require care and attention through self-compassion.

Emotion regulation is an expansive field of study. Generally, emotion dysregulation includes a focus on the inability to manage negative emotions; however, in some cases, with intense positive emotions that are not anchored in mindfulness, groundedness, or contextual sensitivity, the positive emotions could also contribute to emotional dysregulation. Being overtly euphoric in a setting where people are processing grief is an example of a person acting incongruently to the social setting.

In Buddhist psychology, the focus is often on the development of positive states of mind where the by-product may include positive emotions. Instead of using the term *positive emotions*, Tibetan Buddhism refers to *positive states of mind*. Berzin states: "meditation means to build up a beneficial state of mind" (1997, p. 65). We can see that positive states of mind are emphatically recognized in Buddhism as not only conducive to Buddhahood but to a healthy mind. In *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, one can see that states of mind include what is referred to as wholesome and unwholesome. These discourses include discussion of right conduct, ethics and morality (Nanamoli, & Bodhi, 1995, *Sutta* 117). Jinpa (2015b) says that Buddhist ethics are based on moral guidelines such as "restraint...virtue... and...altruism" (p. 193).

Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, a Buddhist teacher and scholar, helps to clarify a further interesting point in that the term emotion was understood differently in Buddhism. According to Ponlop Rinpoche, compassion and love for example are "seen as positive mental factors that are aspects of wisdom or qualities of awakened mind" (2011, p. 35). They are considered positive states of mind. He goes on to say that the term emotion is referred to in Buddhism as obscuring and afflictive. In my opinion, the nuances of the term emotion point to difficulties of transitioning from classical Buddhist thought to the West. Other than to briefly introduce this complexity, these nuances are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

In my view, the focus on positive states of mind as transformative may affect healthy emotion regulation. These positive states of mind and associated positive emotions naturally can have a settling effect on emotion regulation.

Gross and Muñoz (1995) point to the educational value of emotional well-being in many areas of our lives, including work, relationships and the inner life. Furthermore, they state that the ability to modulate emotion is of special value to the inner life. It allows the individual to retain internal emotional integrity, undisturbed by external stimuli. This ability is one of the indices of mental health. Viktor Frankl (2006) observed that when a person cultivated a meaningful inner life in the concentration camp, these internal resources strengthened the person's capacity to cope. He found that this inner life provided sustainable solace for people from the grim and diabolical surroundings. Given the importance of emotion regulation, I will explore it under the following headings: definitions of emotion regulation; a brief explanation of specific historical contributions to developing a view of emotion; relevant research in emotion regulation; mindfulness and meditation practices for emotion regulation.

Werner and Gross (2009), in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV), state that 75% of all diagnostic sections involve emotional dysregulation or difficulties related to emotion (p. 13). Identifying practices and skills to help manage emotion dysregulation is therefore very important. Since research into self-

compassion began in roughly 2003, there has been greater focus on the positive effects of self-compassion on emotion regulation. Gilbert and Procter (2006) state that self-compassion can be a positive form of emotion regulation related to nurturing, calming and soothing the nervous system. In their research using Compassionate Mind Training, which is a group therapy model, people who completed this therapy benefited from a reduction in their "high shame and self-criticism" (p. 353), as well as in other afflictive states. Gilbert and Procter also validate the importance of self-compassion not only in decreasing self-criticism but also in reducing the negative consequences of moods related to self-criticism, such as depression and anxiety. In their studies, Diedrich, Grant, Hofmann, Hiller and Berking (2014) employed directions and guidance in self-compassion, and their findings showed that participants who suffered from major depressive disorder experienced less symptoms of depression.

I very much appreciate what Gilbert and Procter state about the importance of Compassionate Mind Training, particularly with regard to groups such as those with a history of trauma. They state that these people may lack the skills to "soothe" themselves with kindness. In addition, Berking and Whitley (2014) state in their book, *Affect Regulation Training*, that there are seven skills for cultivating emotion regulation. Although they do not refer to it as self-compassion, it embodies some of the same ideas—for example, "compassionate self-support" (p. 58) and "self-soothing" (p. 23). From these thinkers, we can see the value of integrating emotion regulation with self-compassion.

### **Definitions of Emotion Regulation**

There are many definitions of emotion regulation, depending on the perspectives of authors from various fields of study. Emotion regulation involves neurobiological, cognitive, psychological and behavioural adaptations and responses. Fox and Calkins (2003) state that a person's emotional responses can be intrinsic (subjective states that include attention, cognitive appraisal and temperament) or extrinsic (affect and interactions with environment). "Intrinsic factors include the infant's temperament, and

cognitive processes such as attention and inhibitory control. Extrinsic factors involve the caregiving environment, sibling and peer relationships, and cultural expectations regarding emotional displays" (p. 7). Daniel Siegel defines "affect" as the "internal state that can be expressed outwardly" (Siegel, 2008) and uses the term "feeling" for the awareness of this subjective emotional experience. Of all the definitions I reviewed, the following is most appropriate to this dissertation on self-compassion: "Emotion regulation refers to a person's ability to understand and accept his or her emotional experience, to engage in healthy strategies to manage uncomfortable emotions when necessary, and to engage in appropriate behaviour ... when distressed" (Salters-Pedneault, 2013). I would expand the definition to include working with positive emotions as well, because they are particularly relevant to self-compassion and have been the focus of some attention, particularly in the last few decades. Peterson and Seligman (2004) argue that "an exclusive focus on what is wrong with people can lead us to overlook what is right and precludes the possibility that one of the best ways to undo someone's weakness is by encouraging his or her strengths" (pp. 55, 58).

The focus on positive emotion was spurred on by the current H. H. the Dalai Lama. In 1992, the Dalai Lama inspired Dr. Richard Davidson (professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin–Madison) to focus his research on positive emotion—particularly compassion and happiness. Since then, that has been Dr. Davidson's task (Davidson, & Begley, 2012). As one of the preeminent research scientist in the field of compassion, Davidson's work has been pioneering and influential.

### **Historical Contributions**

The use of the term "emotion" was the antecedent to the current use of "emotion regulation." Stuart Shanker (2012), Research Professor of Philosophy and Psychology at York University, in his chapter on "Emotion Regulation through the Ages," states that the antecedents of a conceptual framework of emotion regulation can be seen in ancient Greek views—particularly in Plato's writings in *The Republic*. Shanker states that Plato's

conception of reason can be seen as "rational" and excessive emotion as "irrational." Although "emotion regulation" was not a term used by Plato, *The Republic* emphasizes the use of reason to control emotion and desires (Shanker, 2012). In his dialogue *Phaedrus* (sections 246a–254e), Plato used the image of the charioteer controlling two horses, wherein the horses represent emotional processes—one being "wild" and the other "easily tamed" (Leahy, Tirsch, & Napolitano, 2011, p. 2). In *The Republic*, virtue and happiness, Plato believed, could be achieved through the control of passions, emotions and desires (2000).

Plato was, of course, a seminal thinker for Western Civilization. Robert Solomon, Professor of Philosophy, feels that the age-old conflict throughout philosophy in the West has been between "reason" and the emotion of "passion" (as cited in Gross, 1999, p. 552). Plato was a rationalist (Shanker, 2012, p. 115). However, "the majority of contemporary research on the emotions, whether philosophical or empirical, is broadly pro-emotion, arguing against the old dogma that emotions are antithetical to reason" (Jones, 2004, p. 107). I, too, hold the same view. In my opinion, emotions can facilitate wisdom and reason. Emotions are felt on many levels of one's being, both viscerally and on a feeling level. They can act as guiding information to form healthy decision-making if they are anchored with awareness and insight.

In the 8th century, Shantideva (2006) discusses the importance of achieving morality by training your mind with discipline—which I see as having important relevance to emotion regulation. He states that training the mind requires disciplining the mind so that we do not yield to the whims of our emotions. Discipline enables us to avoid grasping or repelling emotions and cognitions as they arise. By training the mind, the deeper states of consciousness are given the space to be experienced.

Freud's conceptual framework for treating anxiety was one of the antecedents to the area of emotion regulation (Gross, 1999). James Gross, Professor at Stanford University at Stanford University, states it was not until the early 1980s that developmental psychology shifted in its study of the regulation of emotion. Up until then,

the field was relegated to conceptual analysis around such areas as "perception, memory or sensorimotor intelligence" (Campos, Barrett, Lamb, Goldsmith & Stenberg, 1983, p. 787). Shortly thereafter, the term *emotion regulation* was used in psychotherapeutic treatment modalities with adult populations (Gross, 1999).

### **Current Contributors on Emotion Regulation**

For the purposes of this dissertation on self-compassion, I would like to further highlight some thinkers on the topic of emotion. From an anthropological perspective, Daniel Siegel states that emotion is what links the meaning of stories that go from generation to generation within a culture (Siegel, 2008). In group therapy, participants share stories and their emotional impact, which can be very therapeutic in normalizing their experience. I have observed that this normalization can be a form of emotion regulation in that it reduces some of the afflictive states of isolation and feelings of separation and aloneness. For this reason, people often comment about feeling better when they leave group. Paul Gilbert's work emphasizes the self-attacking qualities of shame and self-criticism, which I feel are heightened by isolation and feeling alone. The story sharing normalizes the shared humanness of tragedy and suffering. Gilbert's emotion regulation system of "affiliative-soothing" response and activation can be cultivated in the safety of group.

In the documentary film by Sigrid Dyekjaer (Producer) & Phie Ambo (Director), *Free the Mind* (2012), Dr. Richard Davidson's work is mostly shown in two settings: a school for children and a training in meditation for veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), some of whom reported finding the meditations helpful. In the school setting, the important point is that empathy can be learned. The film depicts this process with one particular child (whom I call Sam) who exhibits acting out behaviour and has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The professional team in the school employs methods to help the child in his expression and development of empathy. In the film, when the team aligned with University of Wisconsin–Madison to work with Sam,



subtle changes occurred, with incremental demonstrations of empathy that accrued over time in Sam. Dr. Davidson's approach created a safe and nurturing environment for this young child to learn how to relate to others in a more compassionate way. The teaching to Sam came out of a conflict with another child. With adult intervention and guidance, Sam listened to the child verbalize his feelings about how Sam's behaviour affected him, and Sam was able to integrate the sadness and grief that the boy had experienced. This was instrumental in Sam's development of empathy. The example of Sam's empathy aligns with Daniel Siegel's (2008) concept of "emotional resonance," which covers a mutually felt emotional and visceral experience between people. In my curriculum, a lack of self-compassion can be partly due to emotional wounding from others. Although it is natural for the client to feel that the wounding by the other is personal, when the client has a broader understanding of the struggles of the other person, this wounding can sometimes feel less personal. Feeling the context of other people's pain can be a way to cultivate empathy and healing.

From a Buddhist perspective, the confluence of events gives rise to the moment of emotion that arises in the person. Therefore, emotion regulation cannot simply be reduced to definitive factors. Cause and effect is an extremely complicated phenomenon that cannot be deduced to simple causal factors, since it involves several interplays between intra-psycho and interpersonal events. No single causative factor can be found. The example of Sam is in contrast to a modality of learning through punishment. Dr. Linda Dimeff and Dr. Kelly Koerner (2007) state that selectively focusing on negative behaviour with punishment may lead to a pattern involving extremes of inhibition and withdrawal of emotional expression or extreme emotional reactivity (p. 3). Generally, these extremes do not lead to healthy adaptation behaviour, although they may be called upon with a degree of usefulness to the individual if safety is an issue. This may be of relevance to a curriculum in self-compassion. People who have had a history of trauma may, at first, find it very painful to experience compassion towards self. External punishment in early childhood can be internalized as an unforgiving, harsh, relentless and chronic self-critic that torments the individual's psyche and can stymie later capacity to

integrate a positive sense of self. In my curriculum, working with the inner critic is an important component of one of the modules.

### **Nature Versus Nurture**

Biosocial Theory hypothesizes that emotion regulation is a combination of nature and nurture factors (Dimeff & Koerner, 2007, p. 3). John Locke was a pioneer in this area because he presented, through his views of *tabula rasa* (blank slate), an extreme position that formed the basis for the nature-versus-nurture debate—a debate that continues to this day. Locke (1996) believed that we are born without any pre-existing qualities of inherent goodness or its opposite—negative qualities. As a result, he naturally focused on the nurture side of a child's upbringing. Today, the nature-versus-nurture debate incorporates a greater synthesis of the two themes. According to Gottlieb, a psychologist who made major contributions to the field of epigenesis, as cited in Fox and Calkins (2003), "we recognize [that] no differences in physical, physiological, or biological characteristics are ever solely the result of genes without important environmental input" (p. 8).

### **Nature and nurture is an important debate as it relates to compassion**

There is an ongoing discussion and debate as to whether compassion is learned or innate. The Dalai Lama and other Buddhists hold the conviction that each of us has Buddha nature, which is the intrinsic potential for basic goodness and compassion. I was inspired by the Dalai Lama's statement that compassion as one's basic nature "gives hope" (Dalai Lama, 2016a). He stated that Buddha nature does not have to be the term used; Christians, for example, could say "Christ nature."

In my curriculum, it is not my place to philosophically convince clients that their basic nature is inherently good. However, my curriculum encourages open discussion and dialogue about whether or not clients believe we are born a blank slate, inherently good or inherently bad. This is an important discussion for those who feel they are inherently

bad, as they can contemplate whether that is really true for them. The discussion may reveal certain unconscious concepts that clients have about themselves. If a client feels that she/he is very bad, we might explore in detail what, exactly, is so bad about them. When she/he really thinks about it, she/he often can't find anything that warrants that kind of self-hatred or sense of "badness." Energized motivation can be released through this experience, creating hope. This kind of dialogue is presented (with exercises) in the context of the fact that we are always changing.

Whereas Buddha nature is at the philosophic heart of many *Mahayana* teachings, Western notions of human nature are not always so positive. I personally believe, based on experience, that compassion is in our nature. The capacity for self-compassion can be cultivated by the individual and augmented by life's experiences, but it is not created solely from culture and learning. Within the nature of mind, *Mahayana* Buddhists believe, the potential for compassion is always there. Harrington (2002) says that, historically and today, there is a generally held belief in the scientific community that people are not naturally compassionate. "They tend to tell us that altruism and self-sacrifice are fragile [that we have] selfishness and a ready penchant toward violence ... against which we must perpetually struggle" (pp. 21–22).

As more research is carried out in the field of compassion, the view of human beings as being primarily genetically and biologically set up with primitive survival modes (primed for flight-or-fight) has expanded with the research into the "tend and befriend" view of human nature. For the previous five decades, the focus was primarily on the fight-or-flight responses to stress in humans (Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenewald, Gurung, et al., 2000). These responses have a connection with the amygdala—the part of the brain that reacts to a stimulus perceived as threatening to self or others, releasing a set of neurochemical signals in the brain and other parts of the body. This seems well proven. However, I agree with Taylor et al. (2000) that to *tend and befriend* is also a "biobehavioral mechanism" in people (p. 411). Taylor et al. state that until 1995, only 17% of the laboratory studies on stress and its relation to physiology involved female participants. *Tending* is the natural inclination and biological drive that women

experience towards caring for their children—tending to them. *Befriending* is the natural inclination and biological drive that women have towards connecting with others in a heartfelt way. Their findings do not deny that men also have this capacity. "Tending involves nurturant activities designed to protect the self and offspring that promote safety and reduce distress; befriending is the creation and maintenance of social networks that may aid in this process" (p. 411). Their research is important because it indicates that people are genetically predisposed to care (Neff, 2011). Furthermore, Taylor, et. al. propose mothers are more physiologically predisposed to *tend and befriend* than to having a flight or fight response. They also say that socio-cultural factors play a significant role in the female *tend and befriend* behaviour.

Gilbert and Procter's research indicates that compassion calms the amygdala (involved in flight, fight and freeze responses). The experience of "affiliation and care" can activate the part of the brain involved in releasing oxytocin (p. 355). Oxytocin release can be activated when people experience intimacy, social connection and belonging, and love as in *tending and befriending* (Neff, 2011). Parents, for example, can experience a surge of oxytocin while playing or spending time with their children (Neff, 2011). Oxytocin is released during intimate connection, not relegated to the merely romantic. This research is relevant to the study of self-compassion because in the connections formed in group therapy, a foundation can be formed for trust and belonging. Finding positive connection with others naturally increases a sense of well-being and levels of oxytocin.

### **Other Relevant Research on Emotion Regulation**

In *Positive Psychology*, Peterson and Seligman (2004) discuss altruism. They say that altruism is the opposite of the selfish mind, and they go far as to say that for the altruist, altruism is done for its own sake. The giver of altruism experiences better mental health, according to Stephen Post (2005), researcher and author. Interestingly, in his study, he mentions that a person's well-being is benefited from compassionate acts unless

they are overwhelmed by the activities themselves. He describes altruism as "other-regarding" (p. 66). My observations accord with his research. I feel people who are altruistic can let go of self-grasping and inordinate self-referencing, known causes in Buddhism for suffering. This brings to mind a frequent saying by the current Dalai Lama: "If you want to be happy, serve others."

*Positive Psychology* directly relates to some current research on emotion regulation, in that it primarily focuses on strengths and virtues as a potentially efficacious way to curtail negative emotions and increase positive behaviour. When one's mind is directed and orientated towards positive states of mind, the focus of attention is directed away from negative states of mind; thus, where one focuses the mind is where one experiences his/her level of emotional well-being. Part of Buddhist practice involves cultivating high-level intentional and long-lasting positive states of mind. This is said to have a transformative effect on one's experience of self and the reduction of suffering caused by afflictive states of mind. Matthieu Ricard, Robert Thurman, Joe Loizzo and the present Dalai Lama currently speak frequently about altruism and give it a central place in the development of a fulfilled human being.

It would be remiss of me not to introduce one of the pivotal methodologies of emotion regulation—the Process Model of Emotion—which is comprised of two forms of emotion regulation: "antecedent focused" and "response focused" (Gross & Muñoz, 1995). In the case of the former, the person employs methods to deal with the anticipated event, such as cognitive appraisal of situations so as to avoid the activation of an emotion. In the case of the latter, the person has already experienced an emotion in relation to an event, and then relates to the emotion by, for example, suppressing it (Gross & Muñoz). One example of an antecedent-focused response would be that of a person suffering from excessive alcohol use declining an invitation to go drinking with his friends. A response-focused example could involve that same individual relapsing on a separate occasion and the next morning after the relapse strategizing ways to get back on track with his or her sobriety. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to further elaborate on the Process Model of Emotion; however, it is relevant to my group therapy curriculum, which helps

participants apply this model to gain deeper awareness into the causes and habitual responses to certain stimulus so as to change their responses, as needed.

I would also like to refer to some research that was helpful to me in corroborating the idea that emotion regulation facilitates learning. Davis and Levine (2013) point out that emotion regulation is positively correlated with high performance in academics, but less is known about precise methods of emotion regulation to achieve learning. In a research study by Davis and Levine to evaluate learning through specific strategies involving emotion regulation, children aged six to thirteen were asked to watch a sad film. Davis and Levine theorized that using positive cognitive reappraisal of an upsetting event, due to the child thinking of the event as "unimportant" or imagining the outcome with a better ending, would affect the child's emotional state. That alteration of the emotional state, they claimed, would render the student more conducive to learning. The researchers stated that effective use of cognitive reappraisal approaches allowed children to be more available to subsequent learning and memory enhancement. One of the goals of emotion regulation is to decrease rumination or dwelling on negative emotions. Emotion regulation allows one to be more present to the learning content (Davis & Levine). Odou and Brinker (2013), in reflecting on their study that employed the method of adult participants writing compassionately to themselves, stated that cultivating self-compassion can decrease one's propensity towards a "ruminative cognitive style" (p. 449). Through the writing, I also would imagine that participants not only become more self-compassionate, but that this cognitive, learning enhancement might generally aid in their ability to learn to be compassionate (and other cognitive-affective skills).

Other relevant research focusing on the development of emotion regulation has involved adolescents. In one study, within a family, researchers identified three primary factors that can increase an adolescent's emotion regulation: "observation/modeling, parenting practices and the emotional climate of the family" (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007, p. 364). The adolescent learns emotion regulation by observing the way a parent shows and copes with emotions and also the parent's acceptance of emotions. A second primary factor is the way in which a parent instructs

the child to cope with emotions and the appropriateness of the expression of emotion both in the home and in the wider environment. The third primary factor is that the adolescent learns emotion regulation through the atmosphere in the home. This atmosphere includes the attachment of the adolescent to the parent, the stability of the parents' marriage, and the style and display of emotion by the parents (Morris et al., 2007).

In the early 1900s, Carl Jung (1963) considered all of his work to be research, including, and most importantly, introspection of a profound psychological enquiry into himself. In my group curriculum, participants can briefly explore some of the early factors and attachment patterns in their upbringing that may have led to emotion regulation or dysregulation. When participants explore early conditioning and start to disentangle their own true values from those merely taught to them, "individuation" is possible. *Individuation* is a Jungian term that means to come into one's core values and live out one's life according to one's true self. Jung said that, in the individuation process, "he must first return to the fundamental facts of his own being, irrespective of all authority and tradition, and allow himself to become conscious of his distinctiveness" (1969, p. 59). Individuation can also be expressed as follows: "... every life is the realization of a whole, that is, of a self .... [The individual] is charged with an individual destiny and destination, and the realization of these alone make sense of life" (Jung, 1953, p. 212). Ideally, my curriculum will provide the opportunity for participants to break free from restricting familial views, beliefs, and conditionings so that they can gain meaning that is more aligned with their true self.

### **Mindfulness and Meditation Practices for Emotion Regulation**

Emotion dysregulation, according to Leahy, Tirsch and Napolitano (2011) has two components: heightened emotion and dampened or numbed emotion. With these two extremes of emotion dysregulation, one either gets flooded by, or defensively restricts, the experience of the emotion. There are several intense emotions (such as fear, anger, terror and shame) that people find overwhelming. If one overidentifies with the emotion,

say the authors, it only amplifies the emotion, leading to an inability to cope. Restricting the experience of emotion in extreme states is also a defensive response to being overwhelmed. Restricting can lead to a splitting off from awareness, which can lead to a person feeling uncentred and even dissociative. Leahy et al. use the term "deactivation" (p. 2), which is the experience of anaesthetising the feelings, emotions and sensations. Mental health involves the ability to modulate, manage and skilfully work with emotions, which can avoid the two extremes. Mindfulness is one of many skills that can be conducive to modulation. In my curriculum, I use several methods, such as grounding, meditation, mindfulness, journalling and movement, to shift people out of these two extreme states.

Daniel Siegel (2010) discusses "window of tolerance" wherein emotions, thoughts, and sensations do not overwhelm the person's capacity to integrate new information and relate with inner resources whilst remaining in the present moment with awareness so that psychological change can ensue (p. 137). Mindfulness plays a significant role in the achievement of "window of tolerance," which is that range between Siegel's extremes of "rigidity...stuck and dull..." and that of behaviour that is "chaotic...explosive and unpredictable..." (p. xiii).

Mindfulness enables one to see the emotion for what it is, with clarity and precision. It not only reduces emotional extremes but also provides the ground for staying with the sensations in the body in the present moment. Mindfulness of the body is one of the four kinds of mindfulness previously discussed in chapter three under the four applications of mindfulness. Over time, this form of mindfulness practice can lessen the heightening and deactivation of emotions, enabling one to emotionally self-regulate in accordance with one's values. Although there are several approaches to teaching and training emotion regulation, I will focus on mindfulness practice.

The primary goal of mindfulness practice is to increase awareness, which is facilitated by observing oneself. Mindfulness training enables a person to rest in his/her feelings—whether pleasant or unpleasant—and to allow negative or positive emotions to



move through the body (Gunaratana, 2011). Instead of trying to fix or correct an emotion, one allows it to pass through; by not identifying with a particular storyline, one avoids prolonging the emotion (Baraz, 2010).

An important mindfulness technique involves combining awareness of the emotion with insight into the nature of mentation around the emotion. As mentioned earlier, emotion regulation can include the cognitive appraisal of emotion. "An essential aspect of cognitive treatment is to focus not only on the primary emotional expressions, but the mental models that are built around such expressions, give extra meaning to them, and so maintain the disorder" (Williams, 2010, p. 2). The cognitive appraisal of a situation deemed to be emotional has an impact on the intensity, frequency and duration of the emotional experience.

Emotions are activated as part of our evolutionary make-up, and we are wired to respond to experiences—particularly stimuli we perceive as threatening to our sense of well-being or safety (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Dr. Joe Loizzo (2012) calls mindfulness an "inward movement" (p. 41) and says that this movement consists of going from reactivity to a mind of clarity and peace. Emotions can be temporary and ephemeral, but they can become problematic if one tends to habitually relive and ruminate on the past or dread/fantasize about the future. The ability to curtail, limit or modulate an emotion after it has been elicited or originated is called "response modulation" (Gross, 1999). Mindfulness is not about having no thoughts, emotions or sensations, nor is it about changing the mind-stream as it arises; rather, it is about developing an accepting and compassionate stance with regard to the mind. "Mindfulness is... seeing something as it is, without further elaboration: for example, seeing thoughts as mental events, or seeing physical sensations as physical sensations, rather than seeing them as having meaning for the integrity of self" (Williams, 2010, p. 4).

In terms of its relevance to emotion regulation, one of the focuses of mindfulness training is being aware of associated cognitions and of physical sensations related to the emotions, as opposed to focusing solely on the emotion itself. This very process can reduce or end the emotional reaction. College students participated in a study by Arch

and Craske (2006), in which one group was asked to practise fifteen minutes of breathing meditation before viewing some slides showing neutral images. The other group was asked to engage in worry and unfocused thinking. The first group responded positively to the neutral pictures, whereas the other group experienced a strong degree of emotional reactivity that continued for some time afterwards.

James Baraz (2010) provides a helpful synopsis of a study at the UCLA School of Medicine, whereby some participants were asked to label disturbing facial expressions on faces (looking fearful or angry) that they were shown while being hooked up to electrodes that measured brain activity, while other participants were required simply to watch without labelling. There was an increase of blood flow in the amygdala (responsible for the fight or flight response) in those who simply watched the disturbing facial expressions, whereas there was a decrease of blood flow in the participants who labelled the expressions. "The researchers conclude that the activity of labelling [recognizing and labelling can be a part of mindfulness practice], which takes place in the higher regions of the brain, can regulate emotional responses, helping you to feel calmer" (Baraz, p. 108).

Researchers such as Loizzo (2013) recently shared with the scientific community the work of researcher Dr. Richard Davidson who has demonstrated greater control in emotion regulation in his subjects and relates this to the pre-frontal cortex plasticity of the brain as utilized through mindfulness practice. Davidson, Kabat-Zinn, Schumacher, Rosenkranz, Muller, et al. (2003) conducted an eight-week mindfulness meditation group that yielded the following scientific observations and findings. There was an increase in "measured brain electrical activity [on the] left sided anterior activation" (p. 564). This patterning of activation in this part of the brain is indicative of an increase in the expression of positive emotion. In their research, Davidson et al. also observed the following results: 1) the mindfulness meditation participants showed greater resiliency after being subjected to an upsetting event; 2) they indicated healthier coping mechanisms for dealing with upsetting events; and 3) these two functions were reflected in greater activation of the left anterior brain (p. 564).

Mindfulness practices in self-compassion can involve developing one's ability to remain attentive. Sustaining one's attention on a healthy activity so as to gain distance from an emotion is one of the techniques used to develop emotion regulation (Wadlinger & Isaacowitz, 2010). Current research validates the hypothesis that sustaining attention enhances emotion regulation. "Children with a higher capacity for attentional control display behaviors suggesting greater self-control of emotion" (Fox & Calkins, 2003, p. 15).

Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, and Davidson (2008b) found in their research that attention is a skill that can be developed through instruction and training. Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, and Davidson (2008a) conducted research using loving-kindness meditation related to compassion cultivation. Loving-kindness meditation involves attention, which is a skill that can be developed through instruction and training, as demonstrated in other research by Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis et al. (2008a). The attention is focused on the benevolent energy of loving-kindness. By focusing on positive emotion with attention, positive emotion regulation ensues.

I have seen the value of the many contemplative therapies that have appreciation of positive states of mind that do not distort or deny negative external experiences and the resultant suffering for the individual. The focus is on mindful attention and acknowledgement with tender heartedness the pain that has been caused in one's body and mind. Terrible and tragic traumatic events happen in people's lives that involve intense struggles with grief. The focus in Buddhism is to create a space where one can work and cope with events in a meaningful way. To me, this is self-compassion. It is not within the role of therapist to pass judgment on whether or not the client is able to process certain traumas. Trauma can be deeply wounding. The struggle to transform or meaningfully accept the impact of adversities may be life-long. The inner work and struggle is ultimately lived and known best by the individual traversing that path.

I remember once going to a teaching by a lama at the Centre in Richmond, BC, and a person asked about how to cope with someone who is excessively critical. The

lama responded quite directly by saying that utter negativity can create a further negative mental focus; thus, when one focuses on positive states of mind, one has a greater capacity to experience well-being and happiness. In my curriculum, the ability to pause and reflect so as to create this space to make a positive and healthy choice is taught in several different experience-based mindfulness trainings. Davidson (2010a) further hypothesizes the therapeutic value of mindfulness training, saying that mindfulness can provide the opportunity to see the transient nature of emotions.

There are other therapeutic values of mindfulness training. Mindfulness facilitates an experience of the quality of mind so as to deny the reification of the self by not identifying with thoughts and feelings. This experience may engender greater confidence in emotion regulation. Mindfulness gives power to the present moment as an avenue for change. Meditating on the breath may enhance concentrative and attentional skills. Mindfulness is involved in "affective contemplative practices" such as loving-kindness and compassion training, as well as benevolent visualization meditation. All of these practices can enable a person to cultivate heartfelt mindfulness in his/her life, which may lead to more adaptive functioning in daily life. Because rumination can cause an individual to re-experience a negative emotion, usually with a set of storylines that increase the negative emotion, mindfulness (the ability to refrain from elaborating or indulging in negative emotional experiences) can be part of what is considered emotion regulation.

Mindfulness combined with self-compassion can be a practice that constructively works with afflictive states. Buddhist writers comment on afflictive emotions and states of mind or *klesha* (in Sanskrit), which Wallace (2001) translates as "mental affliction" (p. 76). Thurman (2016) translates *klesha* as "addiction," which he defines as a mistaken belief that the satiation of the impulse of the addiction will help one, although it will, instead, produce further cravings—i.e., wanting more. Emotion regulation, mindfulness and self-compassion are all helpful in working with *kleshas* in both their afflictive and grasping (addictive) components. In my opinion, emotion regulation through self-compassion reduces the impulse to seek another alternative. Self-compassion provides

the ability to rest and also stay present with afflictive emotions so they can be healed through the process of moving through and letting go. It is a form of emotion regulation and self-regulation to be able to be with one's own inner experience with awareness.

I feel in terms of current psychoeducation with individuals and/or groups, that Dimeff and Koerner (2007) validation (sympathetically acknowledging and honouring how someone feels) is central and relevant to the process of transformation in emotion regulation (p. 10). Much of my focus in my self-compassion curriculum involves experiential exercises and contemplative practices to help relax the body and quiet the mind in ways that help regulate the nervous system and emotion-regulation systems. In my curriculum, validation is experienced by being in a supportive environment with other group members, as well as with the facilitator.

I think the future holds many possibilities for the meaningful expansion of education methodologies in the development of emotion regulation using self-compassion. Emotion regulation is vital in education and clinical practice today for the well-being of the individual and for cohesive and harmonious group activity.

## **6. Additional Scientific Research Studies on the Efficacy of Compassion and Self-Compassion**

This chapter further elaborates on research in self-compassion. Germer and Neff (2013) pointed out that, since 2003, over 200 publications have been published on the subject. I present several studies related to self-compassion, together with a brief exploration of the implications for future research.

Neff was one of the first to identify self-compassion as a specific topic in science for research in the West. In 2003, she published her *Self-Compassion Scale*, and she developed a questionnaire through which an individual might assess his/her degree of self-compassion (Neff, 2003). The questionnaire uses a five-point scale to rate one's level of self-compassion and has 26 questions, which include questions on self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness, and their three contrasting constructs. Her questionnaire has been positively regarded and has been frequently used in subsequent research on self-compassion.

Neff (2009) states that a number of studies corroborate a positive link and connection between self-compassion and psychological health. Neff and Dahm's (2014) research indicated a decrease in symptoms of depression and anxiety with the application of self-compassion. As mentioned earlier, a key component of depression and anxiety is anchored in self-criticism, which decreased with self-compassion (Neff, 2003a). Her research indicates that self-compassion decreases the propensity and engagement in self-critical thought and also may increase the psychological capacity for resiliency. Neff (2012) states that various studies that she and colleagues have conducted indicated that enhanced self-compassion reduces anxiety and depression.

The ability to cope meaningfully with suffering is an important facet of mental health. And the following study conducted by Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis et al. (2008a) yielded interesting results regarding the development of compassion using loving-kindness practice, showing that the amygdalae of long-term meditation practitioners were

more activated when observing suffering and coping with suffering than were the amygdalae of novice meditators. The medium used to evoke compassion was loving-kindness meditation. The researchers interpreted the results of the study to mean that these long-term meditators could open themselves to the experience of others' suffering to a greater degree than could novice meditators, and that they could do this while concurrently sustaining a greater ability to cope with the suffering. The study also indicated that long-term practitioners had greater sensitivity and heightened mental acuity for others' suffering than did novice practitioners.

Klimecki, Leiger, Ricard, and Singer (2013) conducted an interesting study using two groups, which I have included in this dissertation—partially because it not only has implications for helping professionals but also shows the importance of compassion joined with empathy. In the first group called the "affect group" of twenty-five participants, they were asked to first engage in empathy training by watching distressing videos of great suffering (elicitation of empathy) and then compassion training. The compassion training involved loving-kindness meditation and practice conjoined with a quiet mind. The second group of participants were only exposed to two segments of memory tasks without either the empathy or the compassion training. Both groups were exposed to videos of generalized suffering of people and then monitored with fMRIs. In their article entitled "Differential Pattern of Functional Brain Plasticity After Compassion Training," an important summarization of the research is made:

... compassion training increased activations in a non-overlapping brain network spanning ventral striatum, pregenual anterior cingulate cortex and medial orbitofrontal cortex [but not in the group given only memory tasks]. We conclude that training in compassion may reflect a new coping strategy to overcome empathic distress and strengthen resilience. (p. 1)

In the Klimecki et al. (2013) study, empathy training deepened participants' experience of negative emotion, whereas compassion training diminished negative emotion by supplanting it with positive feeling while also activating parts of the brain involved in "affiliation and reward" (p. 6). These results were gleaned from the

implementation of fMRIs throughout the research. Klimecki et al. stated that "social connectedness" is shown in the areas of the brain called "ventromedial prefrontal cortex and ventral striatum" (p. 5). The second group—the group given only memory tasks—only showed increased word memorization after the videos.

This study may be important in terms of its implications for burnout, which has a profound effect on the health of professionals in the healthcare setting. It would seem to suggest that people who have a greater propensity for mere empathy are more vulnerable to burnout. The authors of the study state that compassion training seems to activate areas in the brain associated with positive emotions and resilience, thereby decreasing the propensity for burnout. This study would seem to indicate that the possible healing effects of compassion training rectify the negative effects of mere emotional resonance or empathy.

At Stanford School of Medicine's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE), Jazaieri, Jinpa, McGonigal, Rosenberg, Finkelstein, et al. (2012) conducted a study using the Compassion Cultivation Training (see chapter seven for training structure). The study, made up of 100 participants (40 of whom were in a control group), looked at the three dimensions of compassion: developing compassion for self, developing compassion for others, and developing the ability to accept others' compassion (Jazaieri et al., p. 1113). Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT) was used with a group of participants and research results revealed significant improvement for the CCT group in all three areas. However, one of the critiques the authors make of their study is that it is based on self-reporting by the participants, and they suggested other research measures for compassion evaluation: "Behavioral assessments, EEG, and fMRI may be utilized to examine objective changes in compassion" (Jazaieri et al., p. 1124). These instruments are being used in other studies, but their point is that more reliance should be placed on objective or scientific measurements. Although I agree with this to a certain extent, I also feel that there can be too much emphasis on neuroscience of the brain and behavioural assessments in validating research. I feel that self-reporting and other anecdotal means are important additional data and provide a more complete result.



Thus, akin to the view expressed in the study, many different methods of evaluation still need to be developed. Both the neuroscientific and behavioural with the phenomenological and subjective reports are valuable. In my view, compassion is not something that can be measured in any definitive way. In fact, I would argue that compassion is not measurable without reducing it or turning into an object. My view here is consistent with the Buddhist teachings of the Four Immeasurables.

I see that a summary of a number of talks that Richard Davidson has given around the world is relevant to self-compassion. He states that neuroscientific research has corroborated the concept that well-being can be acquired through learning and practising skills. "As a neuroscientist applying the insights of my center's research [I consider well-being to be] a notion supported by a growing body of scientific evidence" (Davidson, 2015a). I have taken what he calls the "four constituents"—"sustaining positive emotion, rebounding from negative emotion, mindfulness, and caring for others" (Davidson, 2015a)—and related them to self-compassion in my curriculum. Davidson (2016) reports that there are two other constituents that have been scientifically investigated: "sensitivity to context and ... non-stickiness or ... [capacity] to make transitions." He refers to "rebounding" as an aspect of "resilience," to "mindfulness" as an aspect of "attention," and to "caring for others" as an aspect of "generosity." These skills are integral to my curriculum, just as self-compassion is integral to well-being. All of Davidson's constituents directly relate to cultivating self-compassion. Sustaining positive emotion, he says, means that one sees "basic goodness" in self and others and that one has the "wish to be happy." It can be seen as having a more balanced perspective of self and others. Resilience is part of self-compassion because the very act of having compassion for self creates a quicker recovery from internal and external events. Attention is one of the components of mindfulness that is an integral part of self-compassion. Generosity is the essence of self-compassion as it involves self-kindness and empathetic giving to oneself. Sensitivity to context is being aware and able to modulate one's emotions in the environment in which one is situated. Non-stickiness is the ability to let go of thoughts

and feelings that are no longer serving oneself (Davidson, 2016). The RAIN process (mentioned earlier) is another example of an exercise that facilitates letting go.

In *Neuroscience of Compassion* (2015b), Davidson says that, when people are not engaged in an activity, their minds are involved in what he calls "mind-wandering" and "self-referential processing." He states that mind-wandering is related to "dysphoric emotion," wherein mind-wandering is a form of suffering because it is often focused on the self, which can involve what he calls self-referential thinking. When people engage in self-referential thinking, it is usually negative in nature. When the mind is aware and present—as when practising mindfulness—this self-referential thinking lessens. Research indicates that long-term practitioners tend to engage less in self-referential thinking, even when not engaged in an activity (Davidson, 2015b)—and, by extension, probably also experience less time in an afflictive state of mind. An interesting neuroscientific finding cited by Ricard, Lutz, and Davidson (2014) was that meditation increased "brain tissue in the prefrontal cortex" (p. 44). This result was based on a study of twenty long-term meditators (with a control group made up of non-meditators and beginners).

Joe Loizzo (2012) carried out research that combined mindfulness with compassion meditation. He describes how mindfulness can contribute to "neurointegration," which is the "internal attunement ... and interpersonal attunement" (p. xv). Loizzo (2014) states that compassion and mindfulness are important constructs, especially when kept together.

Unlike simple mindfulness models of resilience based on a shift to left PFC [pre-frontal cortex] activation and downregulation of prefrontal–amygdala circuitry, the neurobiology of compassion involves increased activation of and connectivity with limbic regions including the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), the insula, and the nucleus accumbens of the ventral striatum [...] limbic regions involved in social responsiveness, empathy, positive affect, and internal reward. (p. 45)

It is important that mindfulness be joined with compassion, as people sometimes perceive mindfulness to be devoid of affect and emotion. They may therefore struggle to observe

moment-to-moment experience, thinking that they must disengage from any emotional response. Combining mindfulness with compassion enables them to have the experience at a deeper and more heartfelt emotional level.

The sociocultural dimension plays a significant role in the next piece of research I discuss. Socioculturally, people often struggle to improve themselves and to attain financial success, where there is often an emphasis on individuality and striving. Although individual striving can be helpful in terms of securing autonomy and financial stability, this way of being, if carried to an extreme, can lead a person to feel alienated, isolated and disconnected from a sense of community. Research by Neff, Hsieh, and Dejitterat (2005) indicates that there is a difference between self-esteem and self-compassion in college students in "academic achievement goals ... coping with academic failure" (p. 263). The researchers differentiate between self-esteem, which is healthy and primarily based on internal motivation, and self-esteem that is based on external motivation. Externally focused self-esteem is primarily based upon successful competition with others, and validation through test scores or feedback from others; whereas, healthy self-esteem, which is primarily based on an internal motivation and on learning for the interest and joy of learning, will help one "develop skills, master tasks, and understand material" (p. 266). They go on to say that having an internally based motivation to do well is referred to as having a mastery goal. Self-esteem, primarily contingent on external reinforcement that assesses and evaluates one's sense of self-worth based on how one performs in relation to others, is referred to as a performance goal. There are two subsets of performance goals that entail different motivations: "achieving success or avoiding failure" (p. 266). In "achieving success," the person perceives himself or herself as able to do well and, in "avoiding failure," the person does not feel that he/she is able to do well and tends to avoid situations wherein this may become apparent.

In the same study, Neff et al. found that self-compassion was higher in students who had mastery goals and lower in students who had avoidance-based performance goals. According to this research, students with greater self-compassion were less

affected by a fear of failure and experienced themselves as having a greater sense of competence. Self-compassionate students also tended to cope better emotionally and used fewer avoidance-based strategies usually associated with anxiety—which makes sense, since self-compassion generates and enhances self-acceptance.

Neff et al. state that traditional Western education emphasizes evaluation based on performance and that externally based self-esteem can lead to narcissistic tendencies because of the need to be better than others in order to validate one's sense of self-worth. In contrast, self-compassion precludes the need to overcompensate to protect a fragile ego or wounded self, and it leaves no room for narcissistic tendencies. Neff et al. concur, saying that self-compassion generally does not lead to an over-aggrandized sense of self. Self-compassion is not based on evaluations resulting from academic performance, but rather on kindness, leading to a balanced view of the struggles of self and others.

According to Neff et al., self-compassionate people tend to strive to do well in their performance goals in order to increase their overall sense of well-being, as opposed to doing well in order to boost their egos. Their study concludes that 1) self-compassion is linked with mastery goals but not performance goals—especially performance-avoidance goals; and 2) "Self-compassion was negatively correlated with fear of failure but positively correlated with perceived competence [and] positively correlated with intrinsic motivation but negatively correlated with anxiety" (p. 270).

I would like to comment on the pervasive focus in education of performance-based evaluations. This can often lead to a focus on striving and competing with others. In relation to this can be fear and anxiety regarding failure. For individuals who are not able to do well with performance based evaluations, and if other means of support are not provided, this can often lead to a reduction of self-compassion. Predominant sociocultural influences, whereby performance based evaluations are employed, also have significant impact on one's sense of self. The sense of self and self-compassion are intertwined.

A 2013 study by Edward Johnson and Karen O'Brien (professors in the Department of Psychology, University of Manitoba) confirmed the benefits of self-compassion for mental well-being and health—particularly with regard to shame, which is often a poignant experience in people who suffer from mental health concerns. The researchers used Neff's three constructs—common humanity, self-kindness and mindfulness as the working description for self-compassion. In the study, "shame-prone" students were divided into three randomly selected groups (p. 955). The first group of students were asked to write to themselves in a compassionate way during the study—and the researchers encouraged them to write as if speaking compassionately to a friend. The second group of students were asked just to write about their feelings. The third group did not write during the study at all. The results of the study demonstrated a salient difference in mental well-being between the first group and the other two groups.

In the first group, after the first week, there was a reported reduction of expressions of negativity and shame. Two weeks later, the first group again showed a decrease in the proclivity towards shame and also a reduction in symptoms of depression. Shame and negativity are related to the stimulation of the "threat and protection system" termed by Gilbert (as described earlier), which obscures self-compassion. In Johnson and O'Brien's study, the skill of self-compassion had a calming effect on this threat-and-protection system.

Neff (2009) states there is a strong relationship between self-compassion and compassion for others. In her research, participants who stated they were compassionate towards self, also stated they were compassionate towards others. There was generally an overlying reciprocal relationship between the two. The Dalai Lama, who is known for his practicality, elaborates that in order to have compassion for others, we must first be able to attune to our own feelings and develop concern that is anchored in wisdom for our well-being (Dalai Lama, 2000).

## **Implications and Issues for Future Research**

Many Western therapists have had the best of intentions in bringing Buddhist philosophy and psychology to the West. Such intention notwithstanding, careful consideration is always needed when bringing the sacred texts to the secular. As already discussed, mindfulness training is fundamental to Buddhist development and to self-compassion training, but original Buddhist texts often emphasize many years of practice and the cultivation of certain states of mind before compassion and mindfulness can be achieved. In a study by Davidson (2010b), neurological changes and superlative evidence of the efficacy of certain practices such as compassion training were seen in practitioners who had over 30,000 hours of meditation. However, the same research revealed that, even in two weeks of loving-kindness meditation, *some* positive changes could occur (Davidson, 2010b).

Unfortunately, popular psychology about mindfulness sometimes indicates and even exaggerates that significant changes can occur in a few weeks for anyone and everyone, without any research substantiation. For people with a lot of trauma or mental health concerns of a chronic nature, these claims can be counter-therapeutic because when people do not rapidly make good progress, they might even feel badly about themselves. They might even give up. A self-compassion curriculum should emphasize the need for patience, combined with training, support and practice on a consistent and ongoing basis. For some people, it may take a very long time to achieve any degree of warmth, regard or kindness for themselves

Self-compassion continues to be an expanding area of research. Speaking of my own research on self-compassion, with more application of self-compassion in group therapy, new areas for further exploration will be ascertained. I will continue to build and refine my self-compassion curriculum based on feedback from participants, along with integration of new research findings. Self-compassion has been a field of scientific research only since around 2000, and longitudinal studies are yet to be conducted.

## **7. Major Self-Compassion Group Curricula Being Used Today**

In my review, the individual and group therapy models most influential today in the development of self-compassion are: Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT), Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT), and the Mindful Self-Compassion program (MCP). I honour all three of these curricula, although I am not trained in any of them and therefore cannot compare them to my curriculum. Nonetheless, we all share mindfulness practices, breath awareness, loving-kindness practices, compassion practices, other experientially based exercises, and indebtedness to contemplative modalities. The sessional themes in their modules are highlighted below, where I elaborate on the methodology and design used by these contributors. The themes differ somewhat from those in my curriculum, which I present in chapter nine.

### **Compassion-Focused Therapy**

Gilbert (2009b) states that Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) is based on neuroscience, attachment theory, evolutionary psychology, Western psychology (particularly developmental therapy and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) and aspects of Buddhism. Gilbert (2010) says his work is based on "evolutionary neuroscience and [a] social psychology approach" (p. 4). In this therapy, participants learn skills to cultivate self-compassion in themselves and others, and thus to calm the threat-and-protection systems that arise (2009b, p. 200). The system is taught in the context of a person being over-stimulated by early negative life conditioning.

Compassionate Mind Training is the name for the application of a variety of skills learned in Compassion-Focused Therapy. Through self-compassion training, the participants learn to mitigate negative self-talk and self-criticism by learning to speak to themselves in a more compassionate way. Participants learn to address themselves with kindness and compassion through writing letters and discussion. Visualization is used to evoke compassionate images so that one can become more in touch with oneself in a self-

compassionate way. Visualization is used by Gilbert and Choden (2014) in two primary ways: first, the projection of a compassionate form or image that can then be re-integrated into oneself, and, second, to visualize oneself in a resultant state of being compassionate, or in one's highest state of being. For example, an image can be used to strengthen or generate positive energy when one feels unworthy. This is in alignment with some of the visualization techniques in my curriculum; however, I have created my own visualization exercises for developing a compassionate self. Like Gilbert and Choden, I encourage the participants to use whatever works for them in terms of an image of a benevolent other.

Gilbert's (2009c) Compassion-Focused Therapy initially was primarily orientated and geared towards people who engaged in self-recrimination and suffered from inordinate shame. His therapy is now used for a variety of mental health concerns, with the aim of activating and enhancing the affiliative system for self-comfort, serenity, stillness within, and quietude. Techniques include exercises in mindfulness, breath work and visualizing the integration of focused benevolent energy. Other exercises include journalling and education on the survival strategies of the three emotion regulation systems discussed in chapter two. The focus is on training participants to become aware of the self-recriminating voice. The self-compassionate voice is developed through a wide range of exercises that engender positive thinking, healthy emotion and relationship skills.

I appreciate Gilbert's approach to formulating his therapy. He does not pathologize habitual patterning that has occurred within the individual during early upbringing (2009c). He sees the pattern sympathetically as resulting from survival tactics and other ways to try to achieve safety, and recognizes that the individual may have forgotten that the patterns were employed for his/her own benefit. He also de-pathologizes the individual's mind in the present, as it is working with these patterns, by encouraging the individual to develop appreciation for his/her natural adaptive functions (p. 279).



Having worked with a lot with people who have trauma, I very much appreciate Gilbert's comments about cognitive therapy not always being, in and of itself, sufficiently efficacious. I have found that generally cognitive therapy encourages clients to replace, change or modify a distorted thought with one that is more accurate, positive, and/or aligned with a healthy perception of self. He points out that there may be a dissonance between thought and feeling. Sometimes the person receiving therapy might not feel that the thought is genuine because it does not feel emotionally true or sound. Thus, the alternative thought is not integrated. The newly created cognitive thought that the individual uses as an alternative to negative thought about oneself may be quite separate from, and ineffective for, the visceral emotional belief and feelings. The feelings may remain impervious to the thought. Moreover, he says, the emotion regulation system of "affiliative focused soothing" (2009c, p. 276) is not easily activated in people with trauma who cannot believe or experience the alternative thought as part of the cognitive therapy approach. Gilbert's therapy therefore strongly focuses on activating this "affiliative focused soothing" (p. 277) discussed in chapter two.

### **Compassion Cultivation Training Curriculum**

On the website of the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (2014) at the Stanford School of Medicine, Thupten Jinpa is identified as the senior author for both the curriculum for group therapy and the manual for teachers of Compassion Cultivation Training. CCT is a nine-week training. A brief introduction to the structure of the curriculum was written up in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* (2013). I concur with this study's exclusionary criteria for participants: those with a psychotic disorder and those actively suicidal. Major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder were also in their exclusionary criteria; however, with the latter two, I personally would assess case by case. I will screen for my psychotherapy group on self-compassion in a similar way.

Extensive training is required for CCT instructors. Those applying to be trainers or instructors should have advanced psychological training. The CCT program includes learning compassion practices such as loving-kindness and *tonglen*, and instructors are trained in how to skilfully impart and facilitate these. Jinpa gave personal instruction in how to meditate for the study of implementation of CCT (Jazaieri, Jinpa, McGonigal, Rosenberg, Finkelstein, et al., 2012, p. 1119). As mentioned in chapter six, the CCT involves three orientations of compassion: giving compassion, receiving compassion, and self-compassion.

An important factor to keep in mind is that the CCT curriculum is a secular gleaned from both Western psychotherapy and Buddhist contemplative practices. The actual full curriculum is not available to the public unless participating in the program as teacher training or as a participant; however, in the January 2015 *Shambhala Sun*, Jinpa (2015c) is interviewed regarding the project and he comments in a general way on the curriculum being used at the time of the article. It comprises eight two-hour sessions as opposed to the nine weeks mentioned earlier.

The first week is primarily orientated towards teaching skills to settle the mind and to set the altruistic intention for the course; the second week is focused on *Metta Bhavana*, starting with loving-kindness meditation for those whom we hold dear. Jinpa states that he does not follow the traditional text's loving-kindness sequence with the self as the starting place. In general, Jinpa found it easier for Westerners to start loving-kindness practice towards others first, rather than themselves. This particular difficulty is elaborated by Jinpa et al. (2012) when they cite Germer (2009) as substantiating the difficulty Westerners have in loving themselves. As I see it, the pervasive and embedded values in society of material gain and competition contribute to lack of self-love. From this value perspective, attention, exploration, and cultivation of one's inner life may not be as important. The need to conform to these values is understandable. Non-conformity may lead to marginalization and possible associated psychological consequences. The opportunity to cultivate self-compassion in a setting that encourages mutual support and

compassion to those attending can often be the starting point for people to recognize an individuation of values.

In the third and fourth weeks of the training, Jinpa implemented self-compassion, with a particular focus on learning to be at ease in the wish for one's own happiness. In my view, although everyone may wish for happiness, the ways they go about achieving it are often unskilful and unfruitful; and the methods people use often create only fleeting pleasures rather than sustainable happiness, and empty values rather than those that lead to transformation of mind. Jinpa (2015c) states that people have a difficult time, especially in the West, with understanding the wish for happiness for self—partly due to the difficulty of differentiating sincere care for oneself from aggrandizing self-preoccupation (which is typically through the acquisition of power, material gain and/or status).

In the fifth, sixth and seventh weeks of the training, compassion is focused outwards on others. Week eight—the last week—is focused on *tonglen* (Jinpa, 2015c) that Jinpa generally describes as taking/receiving the suffering of others and giving/generating toward them one's heartfelt happiness. Tharchin (1999) translates *tonglen* literally as *giving and taking*—which, in the practice advocated by Jinpa, involves taking, first, then giving.

### **Mindful Self-Compassion Program**

The following is an outline of the model developed by Germer and Neff (2013, pp. 861–865):

- ❖ "Discovering Mindful Self-Compassion"
- ❖ "Practicing Mindfulness"
- ❖ "Practicing Loving-Kindness Meditation"
- ❖ "Finding Your Compassionate Voice"
- ❖ "Living Deeply"

- ❖ "Managing Difficult Emotions"
- ❖ "Transforming Relationships"
- ❖ "Embracing Your Life"

Neff and Germer (2013) state that their Mindful Self-Compassion program follows some of the structure of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, originated by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Neff and Germer's structure of the model is comprised of two to two-and-a-half hours weekly for eight weeks. They also include a half-day of meditation in the middle of the eight weeks. Their model includes meditation throughout the eight weeks and experiential exercises and practices on self-compassion. Their therapy also includes letter writing and "affectionate breathing" (Neff & Germer, p. 33). Outside of the sessions, participants must engage in self-compassion practices for forty minutes a day. The program is facilitated by a therapist who is trained in the program, together with another facilitator. Neff and Germer conducted research on 23 people. Out of these participants, twenty-one completed the Self-Compassion Scale, which is a questionnaire of 26 items developed by Neff in 2003. The results indicated a "significant increase in self-compassion, mindfulness, life satisfaction, as well as decreased depression, anxiety, stress, and avoidance" (p. 39).

I feel the three programs are meritorious. Each offers a different angle from which to cultivate self-compassion. Their different approaches were inspiring to me and contributed to this dissertation and to my curriculum.

## **8. Self-Compassion Curriculum for Buddhist Practitioners through the Practice of *Avalokiteshvara***

This chapter presents a *Vajrayana* or tantric practice of *Avalokiteshvara* (or *Chenrezig* in Tibetan) for Buddhist practitioners to engage the cultivation of self-compassion. It is not appropriate for secular groups whose members have not declared an interest in Buddhism or Buddhist practice. I feel it is a unique contribution in that I have taken a tantric practice and adapted it for the purpose of self-compassion.

I have composed two curricula for this dissertation: one Buddhist and one secular (see chapter nine). The major focus of the dissertation is for settings employing a secular curriculum. Most of my life, I have been a Buddhist. In a Buddhist setting, a teaching of self-compassion development can be integrated with Buddhist practice. In this chapter, I am adapting a present-day Buddhist commentary on a Buddhist practice that is centuries old. The relevance to present time Buddhist practitioners is that this practice provides a particularly important example of the cultivation of compassion through visualization in both *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* practices.

Because of its current popularity in all Tibetan Buddhist traditions, I have chosen the practice of *Avalokiteshvara*. This chapter highlights its essential points and unique qualities, while integrating its application to self-compassion. The *sadhana* (formal spiritual text as a spiritual practice) is in Appendix A. (*Sadhana* is a Sanskrit term for "a method for actualization ... a combination of method and wisdom" (Berzin, 2003–2016).) In terms of usage as a curriculum, one could integrate content from this chapter into the *sadhana* to enhance individual practice or a Buddhist group facilitator could intersperse comments from the dissertation throughout group practice. Aspects found in the practice of *Avalokiteshvara* include using the senses of inner seeing and hearing, using thinking and feeling, experiencing energy as a body of light, correct motivation and active visualization, and a wish to help others. All these aspects help to cultivate a compassionate image to invoke in oneself.

*Vajrayana* and the use of visualization within that vehicle of Buddhism have their roots in ancient India. Reginald Ray (2002) talks about the main *yanas* (vehicles) of Buddhism: *Hinayana*, *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana*. He states that *Hinayana* is a vehicle that focuses on not causing suffering as well as the perfection of the Four Noble Truths for individual liberation. *Mahayana* vehicle focuses on the *Prajna-Paramitas Sutras* (teachings on emptiness), as well as the dedication to help others free themselves from cyclic existence (bodhisattva vow) (Ray). The wish and actions leading to "universal salvation," known as the "Bodhisattva vow," is what distinguishes *Mahayana* from *Hinayana* (p. 74). Ray also states that some *Mahayanists* emphasize Buddha nature.

*Vajrayana* is a primary vehicle in Tibetan Buddhism. It uses tantric practices whereby certain deities, also called *yidams* and, in some cases, Buddhas, are visualized so that their qualities can be invoked within oneself, the practitioner. I prefer to use the term *yidam*, to avoid any misunderstanding with the term *deity*. "The Sanskrit word Tantra [...] literally means a continuum or unbroken stream flowing from ignorance to enlightenment" (Jinpa, 1993, p. 391). Tantra is a very different practice from *lojong* and the Sevenfold Cause and Effect: the latter two are not specifically *Vajrayana* practices. *Vajrayana* is defined as *vajra*, meaning "indestructible," and *yana*, means "vehicle"; thus, "indestructible vehicle" to enlightenment (Ray, 2002, p. 237). Most tantric practices involve the use of the seven limbs (also known as the Seven-Branch Offering), which are the following: refuge and setting motivation; giving in the form of offerings both visualized and actual; regret for causing suffering; rejoicing and acknowledging the benefits others have created in one's life, as well as rejoicing in their benevolent virtues and kindness; asking for teachings; asking for the teacher to remain; and dedication (Gawang, 2013, p. 47). There are variations of this depending on the teacher and school in Buddhism.

Lama Yeshe was a famous Tibetan teacher who was instrumental in bringing Dharma to the West in the early sixties. Lama Yeshe was well known for presenting essential tantric views in a profound manner. The commentary I use from Lama Yeshe is on Gyalwa Gyatso (another name for *Chenrezig* or *Avalokiteshvara*) (1983). Although his

commentary is on a high practice (which is more elaborate) for the same Buddha of compassion as *Avalokiteshvara*, it also applies to the practice I use.

Lama Yeshe discusses the non-dual heart of tantric practice. "Just be the awareness of your consciousness, and you thereby [are] led to non-duality automatically" (Yeshe, 1983, pp. 13-14). One's non-dual nature is only accessible when one drops the discursive self-preoccupation. He states that it is unhelpful, if not destructive, to listen to a voice that is telling us we cannot do this, that we are impure, or making other disparaging comments while we practise tantra. In tantra, one practices being a Buddha and engendering confidence and dignity toward that experience. He states the pure energy is reality, and any afflictive energy is considered deluded. This quality of being one with the bliss of Buddha nature in the here and now makes it a practice of what Lama Yeshe calls "nuclear energy" (Yeshe, 1983, p. 43).

All forms or symbols are, in essence, pure energy. This pure energy can be recognized and integrated only when our awareness identifies with it. Lama Yeshe says that the use of symbols allows us to get in touch with this pure energy, which is so powerful that it is like "nuclear energy." Also, our deepest subtle consciousness is pure, clear and "unpolluted" (a term often used to describe the subtle consciousness in Buddhist texts). The deepest subtle consciousness is what goes from life to life.

Lama Yeshe often used the term loving-kindness as the primary energy of *Avalokiteshvara*—a term he used interchangeably with compassion. The "loving-kindness wisdom energy" of ourselves as Buddha is what minds radiate in the practice (Yeshe, 1983, p. 11). And *loving-kindness wisdom energy* is loving-kindness with the understanding of emptiness (lack of inherent existence) (Yeshe, 1983). Wisdom and method (method is what is described in Buddhism as skilful means or compassion) have to be conjoined. In Buddhism, wisdom and method are sometimes separated, but not so in tantra. I feel in integrating self-compassion into a Buddhist practice, a comment might be made that one needs to have wisdom in self-compassion, which is, at a very simple level, letting go of the moment-to-moment experience of pain. It involves holding the view of

our transitory thoughts without clinging to them. Wisdom is also knowing how to act compassionately with skilful means. For example, without wisdom, caring for oneself, if taken to an extreme, can become self-indulgence, distorted in that one may have a grandiose view of one's own needs in comparison to others, or harmful in terms of self-entitlement.

The following is my personal contribution of application of self-compassion specifically for a particular Buddhist practice. I felt it was particularly relevant to weave this application into *A Meditation upon the Four-Armed Avalokiteshvara* (also called *Chenrezig*) by the Second Dalai Lama (1475–1542). Lowenthal and Short (1993) provide a beautiful narration of *Avalokiteshvara*'s coming into being. They say that in this myth, *Chenrezig* was born from the Buddha Amitabha's rays of infinite light. *Avalokiteshvara* made a vow that he would help sentient beings until all were free of suffering. At one point, he was overwhelmed by the immensity of the task. *Avalokiteshvara* split into eleven heads and a thousand arms (the same Buddha but with a different image than the four-armed *Chenrezig*). These heads and arms multiplied so that he could be of greater benefit. *Chenrezig* and *Avalokiteshvara* are different images of the same Buddha of compassion that a practitioner can use in meditation. In other commentaries, when overwhelmed, *Avalokiteshvara* cries and, from his tears, Tara—a female Buddha—was formed. Rob Preece (2009) says this story helps us with our own doubts and feelings of being overwhelmed with our suffering and the suffering of others—and that even *Avalokiteshvara*, the Buddha of compassion, had such feelings. He says to recognize compassion involves self-forgiveness in those moments of fragility, doubt, and limitation.

### **The Practice of *Avalokiteshvara* Integrated with Self-Compassion**

I would like to focus on a tantric practice through a simple visualization of one face and four-armed *Avalokiteshvara*. The second Dalai Lama put together this particular *sadhana*, even though it had been practised in other *sadhanas* and forms long before him. The structure of this practice, with commentary, consists of the following:



1. refuge
2. setting the motivation
3. Four Immeasurables
4. mantra on emptiness
5. transformation of all sentient being into *Avalokiteshvara*
6. visualizing oneself as *Avalokiteshvara*
7. power of mantra
8. dedication

(Second Dalai Lama).

Before the visualization and mantra, there are preliminary steps: refuge, setting one's motivation, the Four Immeasurables and contemplation of emptiness (Second Dalai Lama). For self-compassion, emphasis can be placed on the refuge of a field of benevolence and love that provides solace and trust for further development. What form does that refuge take when one is meditating to develop compassion or, more specifically, to develop self-compassion? Traditionally, one takes refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and in highest tantra, in the guru or lama. For self-compassion, emphasis can be rendered to the object of inner refuge as innate goodness and a capacity for compassion that is pure and free of one's own *kleshas*, which Gawang (2013) defines as negative emotions and thoughts. He says that self-worth enables us to work with, rather than be overwhelmed by, our *kleshas*.

Setting one's motivation is very important and it ideally includes one's own wish for liberation from suffering. Self-compassion energizes the motivation to engage in the path of transformation. It means acknowledging that we have worth and, in tantra, this worth is empowered not in any egotistic sense but in seeing oneself as a Buddha—a great antidote to self-aversion. The motivation may be set in an altruistic intention for others; however, it may be interpreted that one's self as practitioner is included: "I attain Buddhahood in order to benefit all beings" (Second Dalai Lama). In his lectures, Yangsi Rinpoche stresses that it is helpful to be very specific about what one is trying to develop

in the practice. For example, if one has a personal obstacle, such as negative self-talk, one brings mindfulness and clarity to this obstacle so that the practice works specifically to alleviate or transform it.

Following refuge and setting the motivation is the recitation of the wish for Four Immeasurables (also known as the Four Divine Abodes) for all beings: loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy or gladness and equanimity. The *sadhana* uses a different presentation of the Four Immeasurables previously discussed, whereby the practitioner puts the four items into statements of aspirational contemplation. The Four Immeasurables has been and still is one of the main practices for Tibetan Buddhists in their development of compassion in *sadhanas*:

May all beings be endowed with happiness.

May all beings be free of suffering.

May all beings never be separated from happiness.

May all beings abide in equanimity undisturbed by the eight worldly attitudes or preconceptions. (Second Dalai Lama)

In my personal experience, these four aspirational contemplations contain many reflections for working with oneself. The first contemplation may be visualized as qualities within oneself of well-being and contentment with an attitudinal basis of love toward and radiating within oneself. This involves a genuine heartfelt experience of self-love. The second contemplation involves evoking an experience of one's suffering in life and in one's mind, which involves holding one's suffering with tenderhearted care. The third contemplation is the wish for a state of mind that is a source of sustainable happiness, joy or well-being, not just a momentary one. This *sadhana* may also be a wish to be united with one's full potential, one's Buddha nature. The last contemplation is a wish for a mind that is non-reactive to extreme states, thereby creating a centre and peace beyond circumstance. People are equal in that all wish for happiness and want to avoid suffering. Lama Yeshe says that, when one deeply self-reflects on this, one can see that love is not conditional upon one receiving something in return from another. Without

reflection, one can place oneself as more important than the other by requiring recompense for the love one transmits. In developing equanimity, we have to start by loving ourselves first. According to Lama Yeshe: "True love starts with yourself" (Yeshe, 2003, p. 68).

Following the Four Immeasurables, another essential aspect of tantric practices is the mantra of emptiness: "*Om Svabhava Shuddhah Sarva Dharmah Svabhava Shuddho Ham*" from the *sadhana*. For this mantra, many translations and interpretations are available. I have chosen an interpretation provided by a respected student of Lama Yeshe, the well-known teacher, Thubten Chodon (2006): "... by essential nature all phenomena are pure; by essential nature I am pure. The nature of myself, of the meditational deity, and of all phenomena is pure in the one taste of emptiness" (p. 24). Having had oral instruction from many lamas ng initiations, I base my comments on emptiness on these teachings. As mentioned previously, *emptiness of self* refers to the self seen as not solid, fixed, self-substantial or permanent; it does not deny the conventional or functioning self altogether (Dalai Lama, 2006).

Out of emptiness, arises a Sanskrit primal sound, vibration or seed syllable of the Sanskrit alphabet. Sound arises as the form *PAM*, and this syllable is visualized within oneself while one is in a meditative posture. Then in the *sadhana* *PAM* transforms into a white lotus—an image commonly used in Buddhism, wherein lotuses are visualized arising from the mud. One becomes that white lotus (Second Dalai Lama), which represents purity from afflictive emotions. On the tantric path, one uses "poisons" as energy, fuel and grist for the mill on the path to purity. When one self-aggresses and starts the wounding process psychically, one takes that energy against self and, through mindfulness and visualization, one can let go, channelling the energy into self-compassion. This is the essence of tantra. It is not about suppressing, disregarding or denying negative energy; it is about meeting the energy with gentle warmth and kindness towards oneself.

*Ah* is the Sanskrit syllable representing bliss in the *sadhana*. Self-compassion includes a sense of deep joy. *Ah* transforms into or becomes a moon disc, which represents *bodhichitta* (*awakened heart*) (Second Dalai Lama). Pema Chödrön (1995) says that Bodhichitta is "compassion (warmth, gentleness, and softness), *prajna* (intelligence, a real, clear, direct look at our experience) and *shunyata* (emptiness, a mind that does not grasp onto things, an unbiased, fresh look)."

From the seed syllable (which for Tibetans is in the mind which is located in the heart, and heart here is in the centre of the chest, just in front of the spine), light is emitted outward. The mind of the practitioner becomes the mind of the Buddha of compassion. The benevolent energy of one's mind enhances self-love and self-compassion. We can see the relationship to self-compassion in that compassion and love are forms of this benevolent light energy. This is why *tantrayana* is called the resultant path. One becomes all of the qualities of a Buddha. It is not just a thought process; it involves a deep trust in the power of the universe and in one's Buddha nature. Incidentally, repetition of image, sound and process of the practice occurs at different stages of the practice.

Lama Yeshe emphasizes the importance of becoming a light being, which is translucent and not solid. This practice of visualization involves many stages, culminating in our seeing ourselves as light, with no internal organs, sending light to the entire universe. The light transforms all sentient minds into a vast, limitless expansion through the universes into realized *Chenrezig* Buddhas. The light goes back and forth several times and in different ways, having an impact, and this is a major component of the practice. One of the misconceptions of modern times is that, if we open ourselves up to our own mind and our interdependence with others, it can be exhausting and overwhelming. However, Lama Yeshe says that, if we embrace the true reality, it will lead us to infinite energy. This is why *bodhisattvas* can be of infinite help to sentient beings: "Embracing infinite life means embracing infinite interconnection with all other beings" (Thurman, 2004, p. 26).

All the senses are brought onto the tantric path. Buddhas "initiate me with their nectars, which fill my body and purify all my defilements" (Second Dalai Lama). The body is filled and the defilements flow out. The nectar flows into one and fills the space of one's body. Thus, this nectar provides a method for feeling and sensing that *kleshas* and defilements are removed. I would add to the removal of self-hatred, destructive inner critic, or any other tendency towards self-attack.

"To *Avalokiteshvara*, I humbly bow down" (Second Dalai Lama). In the *sadhana*, one visualizes oneself as *Chenrezig* deeply loving and showering compassion to all beings. It is generally thought by lamas and practitioners that there are benevolent Buddhas and that we also have the potential within ourselves to be a Buddha. By visualizing, trusting and invoking *Chenrezig*, Buddha qualities can naturally unfold and develop in oneself, whether one stresses the external *Chenrezig* or the next line of the *sadhana*, "visualizing myself as *Avalokiteshvara*" (Second Dalai Lama). In the early 1980s, when asked by a female practitioner whether there was an external *Chenrezig*, Luding Khen (Tibetan Buddhist Lama) gave a positive answer with a qualification: "in a panoramic consciousness sort of way." In any case, says Gawang (2013), "[t]his practice will help to concentrate our energy and inspire us by making us feel that we are in the presence of the enlightened qualities that we aspire to" (p. 41).

The heart of this practice is the visualization of oneself as *Avalokiteshvara*, seeing oneself as the translucent light being. This resting and being is essential. Often people do not have a sense of refuge in their own body. In daily life in difficult situations, this recollection can reconnect oneself with his/her nature as a realized light being whose very nature is compassion and love towards self and others. Some lamas say that, when one can no longer rest in oneself as *Avalokiteshvara*, then the power of mantra is to be employed.

Consider the syllables in tantra, for example, in the *sadhana* the seed syllable, *HRIH* that, in the compassionate Buddha practice of *Avalokiteshvara*, is at the centre of the encircling well-known mantra *om mani padme hung*. Lowenthal and Short (1993)

translate it as follows: "*Om* [...] the individual expanding to the universal ... *mani* means jewel ... *padme* means lotus ... and *hung* means the universal manifesting in the individual" (p. 35). And they sum it up beautifully: "It conveys the sense of surrender by the individual to the flow of the universal" (p. 35).

In tantra, lamas often give the commentary that the seed syllables are thought to arise out of the void as primordial sound, the vibration arising out of emptiness. In terms of self-compassion, *om mani padme hung* has the potential to be effective in clearing energy blockages in the body through the vibration of healing sounds. Lama Yeshe (1983) states that when one is locked into or obsessed with negativity, the mantra, conjoined with one's mind, can disrupt one's clinging to the sequence of thought and emotion. The mantra is either audibly or silently vibrated. Interestingly, Charles Luk (1960), eminent Chinese scholar, says that *Avalokitesvara* is meaningful to the powerful practice of hearing. Luk states that *Avalokitesvara* teaches us we can get in touch with our inner nature through hearing. Luk mentions but does not elaborate the profoundly esoteric and subtle practice of sound which transcends from an auditory to a non-auditory experience of the deepest self, which can cultivate self-development. This can be a profound meditation.

"One recites the mantra while dwelling on contemplations such as of the fusion of the Mighty Superior *Avalokitesvara*'s qualities within me" (Second Dalai Lama). The mantra can be applied contextually in daily life with difficult situations and afflictive emotions.

In the conclusion of this *sadhana*, there is dissolution through many stages. After dissolution, all beings, one's self included, are seen as the body, speech, and mind of *Avalokitesvara*. One hears everything as imbued with sacred sound. All phenomena are seen, heard and known with wisdom and compassion. One carries into daily life the aspiration to engage in virtuous activities and deeds. A *sadhana* is always concluded with a dedication. The words from the practice itself are a beautiful expression of self-compassion: "May I develop the peerless awakening mind which is latent within me and may that which I have attained go from strength to strength" (Second Dalai Lama). It is

my hope that the cultivation of self-compassion with the practice of *Avalokiteshvara* adds to one's confidence, dignity, and compassionate energy.

To *Avalokiteshvara*:

Crystal flickering, translucent white light

reflecting on the vast ocean,

In the space between the waves lies

non-dual awareness whereupon

love, compassion, and wisdom exist,

Rising and falling of the waters

Karmic imprints dissolve,

Resting in this source of all knowing,

raindrops manifest rainbow light.

—Amy Roomy

## **9. My Curriculum: Self-Compassion Training in Group Psychotherapy with Experiential and Contemplative Practices**

I became interested in developing a skill-based self-compassion curriculum for its crucial role in helping people to help themselves in their personal lives. My curriculum is called: *Self-Compassion Training in Group Psychotherapy with Experiential and Contemplative Practices*. The skilful cultivation and integration of self-compassion is critical for participants because, when they are away from the support of the therapist and/or group members, they are left with only their own minds in which to find solace. Germer and Neff (2013) emphasize that unless clients learn the skill of cultivating self-compassion, the sense of help and compassion in the therapeutic setting may not be sustained in their daily lives; this can be cultivated through self-compassion training.

It is my deep belief that many people are attracted to compassion curricula because these curricula resonate with their deepest values. Moreover, the Dalai Lama (2006) states that the cultivation of compassion engenders a feeling of calm in people (p. 8), which is what I feel so many people are yearning for. As self-compassion curricula are just being introduced into BC, I feel there is a strong need to offer a curriculum on self-compassion for mental health and substance use. This is my rationale for pursuing this field of study in the Faculty of Education. The mores of consumerism, competition, and the endless striving to always get ahead can generate feelings of being overwhelmed and not being good enough. In order to avoid yielding to social conditioning or settling into a negative self-image, self-compassion training empowers the individuation of values so as to keep things in perspective and achieve a balanced life.

I would like to briefly discuss group therapy, its value and benefits, as a modality for the development of self-compassion. In the many years in which I have been facilitating group therapy, I have observed that people are able to work through some of their issues in a direct and sustainable way. I feel that if the right culture is created of deep safety, containment and respect, participants can operate and extend themselves



with more consciousness. It is my experience that, when these conditions are present, ground is provided upon which self-compassion can be developed.

It is important not to be too loose or too rigid in group therapy. When the structure is too rigid, participants cannot be spontaneous and free with their thoughts and feelings. When the structure is too loose, there is the potential for the group dynamic to become disruptive and dysregulated. I have observed that the feeling of safety in the group is one of the most important factors in avoiding attrition.

Paul Gilbert (2009a) discusses three "directions" of compassion between people: expression of compassion from oneself to oneself, expression of compassion toward others and the ability to receive the compassion from others toward oneself (p. 418). These different forms of engagement are very powerful in compassion training; however, I would like to add a fourth direction, which is the *observation* of compassion directed from someone in the group to another member. This observation can be integrated into the witness's own development of compassion in him/herself. The ability to learn from social interactions can be a very powerful tool.

Group psychotherapy provides several ways that consciousness can be elevated and expanded: there is sometimes a tendency for individuals to achieve heightened consciousness when being observed and when engaging with others; the collective can provide a group consciousness that upholds a higher level of expression toward others and self than the individual can maintain; a skilled facilitator can ensure that helpful expressions of self-awareness are supported and encouraged. "Social microcosm" is a description of the group psychotherapy process by psychiatrists Irvin Yalom and Molyn Leszcz (2005 p. 19). This has important implications as groups offer a way to work out issues that are part of the individual's personal life in a contained and safe environment. Therapy is about being in relationship. It provides a sense of connection and validation that may have been disrupted at various points in a person's life. People with a history of trauma may particularly benefit from this and may begin to reconstruct and recondition themselves to healthier ways of relationship with self and others. The ways that

participants discuss how they have dealt with adversity can provide other individuals in the group with greater understanding and options to cope with their own lives. Group psychotherapy has the ability to empower the individual. Another benefit of group psychotherapy is that it provides a human structure to work with issues over a number of sessions. Participants dedicate their attention not only during group but also outside the group; therefore greater mindfulness can be brought to their daily lives. In my curriculum, by encouraging participants to make a commitment to the particular theme of that session, a focus is created for the intervening week between sessions.

As mentioned in chapter two of this dissertation, deeply ingrained habitual patterns exert very powerful influences over people's lives. If people are not aware of these deeply engrained patterns, they are often at the mercy of their influence. Patterns can seem intractable when a person is deeply unconscious about them. Habitual negative patterns need to be given attention and may be addressed through the development of self-compassion. I find it interesting that one of the translations given by Dr. Thupten Jinpa (2011) of *Jong*, which is part of *lo jong* (*mind training*) is "habituation" (p. 4). In Buddhist *mind training*, this has significance in terms of the mind's capacity to habituate to the positive. I have observed to participants in group therapy the value of knowing that just as there are habituations to negative patterning, one can habituate the mind to positive patterning. The psychoeducation in group therapy about patterns, some of which can develop from early childhood, can be integral for many clients in starting to develop awareness about these patterns. I feel that a structured and cohesive psychoeducation on some of the factors involved in developing these patterns can have enormous benefit for some clients.

Becoming aware of the deep inner critic that erodes self-worth is an important step in beginning to change. Learning healthier ways to respond to one's inner critic in the face of negative external influences can also begin to undo some of these patterns. Though it takes a lot of patience to undo patterns, the experiential exercises in group psychotherapy can provide opportunities for the participant to befriend the pattern with

compassionate awareness. Thereby space is created to step out of a limited view of self and reaction.

Self-compassion has become a popular topic for workshops, therapeutic group training and self-help articles. I hope that my curriculum will provide a clear and helpful resource for facilitators who choose to use it. I have implemented a curriculum to help develop self-compassion in people who receive support through the mental-health services and, potentially, as an educational tool for a variety of settings. It is my sincere wish that this curriculum serves as an important contribution to education, in general, and to the mental-health profession, in particular. One of my main attractions to Buddhism is that the Buddha believed in not having as one's aim and teaching, proselytizing or converting; rather, it was the alleviation of suffering, and this accords with my motivation as a therapist.

There is a general concern regarding curricula for group psychotherapy that has to do with screening participants and assessing the group process. Judging from my experience, these programs need to be facilitated by qualified mental-health professionals. Ideally, the mental-health professionals should have a minimum of five years' experience in the mental health professions. They should also have mindfulness training by a recognized source and be a consistent practitioner for at least a year. In addition, they should be trained in group psychotherapy so as to be able to pre-screen potential participants for appropriateness. During the initial assessment of group appropriateness for participants, it is important to identify those who suffer from mental-health concerns such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression, as they might be triggered by some of the content and/or a particular process in the group. It might still be appropriate for such individuals to participate, if they have individual counselling support in their community and/or the resources to help them cope with the negative or painful feelings that might arise during the group therapy, if necessary. Although the facilitator of these groups must have the necessary skills and training for group dynamics, the nature of the groups would be psychoeducational and experiential in terms of the implementation of skills for participants; they would not focus on deep processing of

individual histories. It is important to establish these guidelines during the intake screening process. Group guidelines and safety issues, such as self-containment around disclosing information that may be distressing or disturbing to other group members, would be clarified at the outset, especially with regard to mental health and substance use. Further safety issues discussed during intake are confidentiality, privacy, respectful language and group contract regarding disclosure by individuals. During this time, it should be clearly explained that the group is not focused on in-depth processing of history of trauma, past suicide attempts, violence or abuse; therefore, individuals are encouraged to pursue this kind of disclosure in individual therapy.

During the intake screening process, it is valuable to introduce the potential effectiveness of training in self-compassion, so that participants are encouraged by the possibilities for change. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) discuss the "instillation of hope" (p. 4), saying that knowing about the efficacy of a treatment gives participants hope, which, in turn, strengthens the efficacy of the treatment modality (p. 4). Also, during the intake screening process, I have found it important for the facilitator to mention the need for patience, since achieving self-compassion is a gradual process that takes time and dedication.

In my curriculum, I provide the opportunity for participants to explore how they define compassion, so that the process respects his/her religious, cultural, ethnic and personal views. I encourage personal exploration within the context of that individual's experience. This exploration enhances participants to get more deeply in touch with what compassion is to them. Consistent with this attitude of exploration, the Dalai Lama encourages contemplative practices to be applied to afflictive emotions in creative ways in contemporary settings. He encourages that this be done in secular settings as well as in strictly Buddhist ones (as cited in Kabat-Zinn, 2012). The curriculum I offer would not in any way be contingent upon the participant's use of a particular language of religion or spiritual orientation. As part of the screening and intake process, potential participants would be informed that Eastern philosophy and contemplative practices provide sources for some of the curriculum. Furthermore, they can select whatever is meaningful to them.

As mentioned earlier, the participants are informed that their backgrounds and worldviews are respected.

My curriculum is based on participants' experiential learning, as opposed to mere conceptual understanding. Govinda states that: "[...] religious truths and spiritual life are more a matter of transcending our habitual consciousness than of changing our opinions" (1988, p. 16). My curriculum engenders a group culture that encourages the development of the inner wisdom that I believe we all possess. Ideally, my group curriculum will promote healing in the group as a whole and also as a result of the skilful facilitation by the therapist. Epstein (2007) states that developmental trauma occurs and does not heal without a healthy relational context. I feel that this is important because, in group psychotherapy, a person has the opportunity to receive nurturance, support and validation from other group members and the facilitator. The healthy attachments that are formed provide the initial context for a more loving and more compassionate relationship with self. Neff's construct of common humanity relates to Yalom and Leszcz's (2005) concepts of "universality" in groups. Both are talking about experiencing the expansion that comes from the understanding that suffering is shared. "Universality" relates to the power of group and can be achieved by alleviating the client's sense of "uniqueness" of his/her suffering. "Uniqueness" felt by the client may previously have kept him/her from trusting relationships or being open to intimacy. In this withdrawal, they subsequently cut themselves off from the benefits of relationships as well. In addition, *universality* includes the concept of hearing other people in the group disclose intimate and similar experiences. The "uniqueness" of the suffering of the individual is lessened and social connectedness can be increased (p. 6).

My work is founded on skill development, and the curriculum is not designed for an in-depth process group. Although people have a deep need to share their life stories, this should be done with their primary therapist, not in the group. Going into detail about traumatic events can be upsetting to other members, and there is also an ethical concern about individuals expressing memories of trauma when sufficient time and the necessary care might not be available for dealing with them. In long-term group psychotherapy,

there is an opportunity for this kind of exchange. In this nine-week psychoeducational group, however, it would not be appropriate. The process of exploring traumatic events is, in my opinion, most helpful and efficacious, if done with grounding in self-compassion. Participants are encouraged to work with a therapist to process the deep wounding that may occur in early childhood, or as a result of other traumatic events in life, so that they can participate optimally in the group therapy. This is why I recommend individuals receive therapy while concurrently doing the group work.

Research has shown that the central nervous system can be impacted by trauma, which affects a person's ability to problem-solve and emotionally self-regulate (Dimeff & Koerner, 2007). My self-compassion curriculum is anchored in experiential exercises to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which can have a natural healing effect on those who have experienced trauma. In each session, there is a strong focus on facilitating body awareness and learning skills to relax and centre the self. Several contemplative practices in the curriculum involve relaxation of the body and quieting the mind to help regulate the nervous system. In each session, shortly after the check-in, the group process proceeds with an experiential exercise so as to optimize the participants' integration of learning and being present for the whole group.

Davidson and Harrington (2002) state that compassion leads to greater happiness and well-being. The development of compassion also has a transformative impact on the self, and my curriculum is designed to facilitate a kinder friendliness with oneself, while also bringing the self into alignment with one's deepest state of well-being.

It is apparent to me in working with people with mental-health and substance-use problems that shame often diminishes self-worth and self-respect. Shame resulting from trauma is often unconscious and has the same devaluing effect. Developing self-worth and self-respect involves working with the inner critic, as well as living in accordance with who one really is and in relation to one's core values. My curriculum is not merely analytical or insight-based; it has a heartfelt orientation that aims at creating positive transformation of the inner self and the self in daily life.

## **Content-Based and Process-Based Approaches**

As mentioned earlier, Harvey Aronson (2004) presents the difference between "content versus process" (p. 43) foci in therapy. With the advent of mindfulness-based practices, many western psychotherapeutic models use both process-based and content-based approaches. Aronson (2004) says that Buddhist meditative practices focus primarily on process-based approaches. Content-based approaches look at the etiology of mental-health concerns. The participant is encouraged to analyze this content so as to gain insight, which then, hopefully, promotes change. In process-based approaches, the practice is anchored in moment-to-moment awareness that suspends the narrative by not identifying with habitual storylines. Aronson talks about the process method, analyzing and working with experience as it arises in the moment. Mindfulness is an example of the process method and is a state of sustained awareness about what is happening internally or externally. Aronson (2004) contrasts this method with the content-based approach that focuses on personal history and the origin of patterns in the individual. Obviously, a person's internal narratives have many influences, including the cultural.

My self-compassion curriculum, however, utilizes both process- and content-based approaches. Two common mental-health concerns are depression and anxiety. The content-based approach is important in working with these concerns in that one gains insight into how specific psychological patterns are formed. This is especially true when people are able to explore their inner lives with a deeper sense of understanding. Both content- and process-based approaches can bring awareness to patterns so that the patterns can be transformed. This awareness can help foster change in the client's life. The process-based approach is important in that the client can change the pattern by bringing mindfulness into the moment. Then, the awareness creates a space for the client to disentangle himself/herself from identifying with the repetitive negative thought. Some mental-health concerns can have an obsessive quality to them. In the case of depression, it is often obsessive negative rumination. In the case of anxiety, it can involve an obsessive perseveration around the anticipation of the threatening experience.

The two approaches of content and process can complement each other. For example, in terms of the content-based approach in my curriculum, the participants work with deeply ingrained patterns so as to gain insight into some of their unconscious ways of being in the world. In terms of a process-based approach, participants are encouraged to wake up to the moment-to-moment experience, not only during their group process but also in their daily lives.

Often, in group psychotherapy there is an overlap between process and content methods. Jack Kornfield provides a beautiful example of both of these methods being applied in an experiential exercise around skilfully letting go. Kornfield (2008) encourages the person to become aware of what it is she/he is trying to let go of and then to rest into the experience with the embodiment of compassion. Throughout the exercise, the person is reminded to breathe. He suggests the person become aware of how unhappiness is created by grasping onto the experience. Next, he encourages the person to engage with him in a dialogue about whether it is healthy to continue to hold onto the issue. Hopefully, the person will connect with a heart awareness of what is fruitful to his/her wellness. The person can connect thereby with his/her own wisdom of the need to let go. This can be followed by a gentle mantra: "let go, let go..." and relaxing the body, opening the heart, and just letting whatever arises to pass (p. 256). Kornfield continues his guidance by suggesting the participant focus on his/herself in the future, free from the tendrils of the original experience. Again the mantra is repeated. If revisited by the experience, the person is guided to let a kindly compassion be a reminder to self that this holding has been released (Kornfield).

In addition to process- and content-based methods, my curriculum is focused on the power of positive emotions, thoughts and reflections in working with difficult states of mind. I guide participants through various forms of relaxation, meditation, and grounding, so that they may, access deeper states of happiness. Initially, I ask them to describe how they are feeling before we do one of the exercises. After the exercise, I again ask them how they are feeling. This provides participants the opportunity to become aware of a fundamental shift in their minds and bodies, for example, from



agitation to serenity and peace. This experience of being in a resting state allows them to experience more of their true nature of mind— i.e., positive states of mind. In Buddhism, the image of a glass filled with water and dirt particles is used as a metaphor for the disturbed mind. When one calms the mind, the dirt settles to the bottom of the glass, allowing for the experience of mind to be seen as clear and unpolluted.

### **Secular Curriculum**

For the purposes of this dissertation, I feel it is important to present a rationale for a secular curriculum, into which Buddhism can be integrated, as, hopefully, exemplified by my curriculum. I like the term often used by the Dalai Lama of "secular ethics," at the heart of which, he says, is compassion (Dalai Lama, 2012). One of the main reasons I employ the Four Immeasurables or the Four Divine Abodes (*brahmaviharas*) in my curriculum is that they can be easily applied in a secular context, as one can use general terms to elucidate and apply them, such as my usage of the term *virtues*.

I would like to say a few words about the importance and meaning of secular teachings because my curriculum is devised to be used in a setting that ideally includes a large range of people from different cultural, social, religious and non-religious backgrounds. Robert Thurman (2016) says that Shakyamuni Buddha actually provided secular teachings in his time. Thurman goes on to say that the Buddha was not trying to establish a religion or to propagate the religious views of the Brahmins, Vedas or Shramanic yogis of the time. Thurman (2016) adds that the Buddha felt that individual transcendence cannot be orchestrated by a higher being. Also, in contrast to the main religious beliefs of the time, one had to go through the Brahmins who performed religious rituals. It was thought that the Brahmins could facilitate a greater unification with Brahma through sacred pronouncements and ritualistic ceremonies, some of which involved sacrifice and offerings (Berzin, 2003–2016). Thurman states that, originally, the Buddhist path was secular, and that no religious affiliation, allegiance or doctrine need be affixed to it by the individual. The determination and evaluation of the validity of the

path was up to the discernment of the individual in order to help the individual gain the skills to understand his/her own mind and reality.

In accordance with the way of the Buddha, the Dalai Lama lives a life of presenting Buddha-dharma to the "secular, humanist reality of the times" (Thurman, 2016). My understanding of this is that the Dalai Lama tries to reach out to the positive influences of our times through his dialogues, teachings and other means of engaging. The essence of Buddhism holds many universal truths that are not peculiar to time and place. How they are applied is up to the individual. For a person to have direct experience of self-compassion is not contingent on having a knowledge of Buddhism but may be facilitated by some of the Buddhist methodologies.

In terms of secularization, it is interesting to ponder how far one can decontextualize Buddhism and to what degree one can select from Buddhism without watering down a meaningful direct experience for the practitioner, while upholding the essence and truth of the practice. As mentioned earlier, I have ethical concerns about people selecting some aspects from Buddhism, while ignoring the deeply systematic and intricate teaching of their source. Whether one can present methods or practices of Buddhism without in any way attributing or acknowledging their origin and context seems too extreme; however, methods and teachings can be given without transposing the exact language of Buddhism from its original context.

### **Individual Responsibility**

The reason I feel it is so essential for people to cultivate self-compassion is that it is ultimately only through people taking responsibility for themselves and applying diligent means that we can be liberated from suffering. In Buddhism, transcending suffering and the causes of suffering is the individual's responsibility. The Buddha says that he cannot take away another's suffering no matter how much he wishes that he could. What he did offer was a way—a path that can potentially free one from suffering. In his relationship with practitioners, he took on the responsibility to help them by

showing them a skilful path and supporting them along that path. This path results in spiritual, psychological, emotional, attitudinal and behavioural change—from egoic fearfulness, which is always cognizant of self-protection, to being open and vulnerable for a purpose greater than one's ego. Anyen Rinpoche (2016), a Tibetan Buddhist author, confirms that being overly focused on guarding oneself in a protective stance for fear that others may hurt our feelings, may actually alienate us from connecting with who they are. I hope that my curriculum helps people to do, among other things, what Anyen Rinpoche encourages us to do: to learn to pacify some of the intensity of emotions and also not to take thoughts and feelings automatically as valid.

### **My Curriculum**

The highlights that reflect the heart-essence of my curriculum include three components: the spirit (what inspires one to connect to one's deepest nature), mind, and the mind/body connection. Inspirational quotes and art mediums connect participants to the deeper self; psychoeducational topics assist the mind in self-reflection and contemplation; and the mind/body connection is engaged in contemplative practices. The topics and content of my group therapy curriculum are discussed in various chapters throughout this dissertation. I have combined some of these topics and content into psychoeducation and experiential exercises for group work.

In each session, there are three primary components:

1. **A theme, chosen by the facilitator from the list (see below).**

For each theme presented in each session, the psychoeducational piece starts with a group discussion of what the theme means personally to the participants, should they wish to share. The wisdom that comes from the group members is a powerful and meaningful aspect of the group process. It also de-mystifies the facilitator as having all the knowledge. I have found that group participants are less likely to feel marginalized or disenfranchised if they perceive the value of their own powerful contribution to the group.

**Experiential self-compassionate exercises.** These will be led by the facilitator to help participants calm their bodies and heighten their awareness of what comes up, moment-to-moment. These exercises will provide the skills for cultivating a more gentle, friendly and compassionate relationship with oneself. The experiential practices can allow participants to experience being in the body with self-compassion, consciousness and safety. I have found that through contemplative practices people experience, albeit often temporarily, freedom from their own afflictive mind or suffering. A sense of relief and hope may be provided by seeing the transitory nature of sensations, thoughts, and feelings, and this is what people are often yearning for. Experiential contemplative practices are powerful in inspiring participants to continue these practices because they see the positive effects of quiescence, openness and spaciousness. People often express that they did not know that they could experience such peace of mind through contemplative practice.

2. **Group discussion.** Participants will engage in a supportive process of exploration, focusing on the theme and exercises, rather than on the details of past negative stories or thoughts.

Each session is two hours long and would include inspiring quotes and axioms. Each session features experiential exercises in two of the following: reflections, contemplations, movement or meditations. I primarily use breath awareness to help people ground themselves in their bodies. When they feel grounded, I ask them to find their centre in their bodies, to find the kindest way to relate to themselves and then to visualize generating light from that centre. As they rest in this experience of light for a few minutes, I ask them to note how that feels. There would be fifteen-minute evening exercises to do at home, which would be proposed at the end of each two-hour session related to the theme of the group. Two twenty-minute calm-abiding meditations (*shamatha*) would be encouraged in their own time—preferably once in the morning and once at night before going to sleep.

Each group session has the following structure: overview of the session, brief review of group guidelines, check-in, experiential exercise, psychoeducation, application of a skill, experiential exercise, commitment and check-out. The commitment is a powerful and instrumental tool that involves individual accountability to the group. At check-out, each participant makes a commitment based on the theme for the week, talking to the group about an aspect of self-compassion that they particularly want to practise that week. The following week, they would report to the group on the practice. This approach has been found to be important in group therapy as it creates a greater sense of committed group cohesiveness and accountability.

Potentially, an alumni group could be created at the end of the course for those who wish to continue the process. This group would be peer-facilitated (with the support of a trained therapist), with the same structure and themes as in the original group work: psychoeducation on a theme chosen by the facilitator; experiential self-compassionate exercises, which could be followed by creativity exercises using art, for example, to cultivate self-compassion; and processing through supportive, dynamic group discussion. As mentioned earlier, in closing, participants would be encouraged to do two twenty-minute calm-abiding meditations in their own time.

The outline for the nine sessions included in my curriculum is in Appendix B. Appendix B is the facilitator's outline I have devised as well as a separate section of each session's handouts for participants. The facilitator's outline is of nine sessions that elaborate the particular themes and topics as well as the suggested experiential exercises. The handouts for participants include the nine modules of inspirational quotes and journalling.

I hope the curriculum will reflect a unique synthesis of Eastern and Western views, with the contemplative practices and modalities that are interwoven throughout the various modules. The curriculum includes the following topics and themes (research, modalities and original content are subject to permission from the people I cite in the curriculum before it can be implemented in the community):

1. **Discovering and exploring self-compassion and mindfulness.** An explanation of, and instruction in, calm-abiding meditation (*shamatha*) would be given. (Setting the intention in the morning for compassionate and wholesome action, and closing the day with reflection on one's compassionate and positive actions during the day.) Using the author David Rome's (2014) GAP acronym "grounded aware presence" (p. 14) can be helpful for participants in groups.
2. **Emotion regulation**, including Gilbert's (2015) model of three emotion regulation systems.
3. **Meditation, mindfulness and visualization.** The RAIN (RAIN: "recognize," "allow," "investigate" and "non-identification") approach to mindfulness can be helpful (Brach, 2013, p. 62). This section also includes being alone with oneself in a compassionate way in silence and solitude.
4. **The four virtues (Four Immeasurables) and the harmony of the four.**
5. **Loving-kindness meditation.**
6. ***Tonglen* with self.**
7. **Breaking free from habitual patterns**, which can be facilitated by working with the four R's developed by Pema Chödrön: "Recognize," "Refrain," "Relax" and "Resolve" (2005). In addition, Karen Horney's patterns are discussed.
8. **Working with inner dialogue and the conflicted parts of self.** This involves process work (such as Arnold Mindell's work), and working with the inner critic. Self-forgiveness is also discussed.
9. **Wisdom and compassion.**

In conclusion, my curriculum not only emphasizes an enhanced appreciation of one's sense of self but also provides psychoeducation and experiential methods and practices to transform the self so as to create more sustainable well-being.

## 10. Epilogue

The issues explored in this dissertation will hopefully raise awareness and enhance the quality of therapy in the ongoing co-emergence of Buddhist psychology and Western psychotherapy. The dissertation might also help to engender greater sensitivity around the application of mindfulness. I am of the strong belief that a self-compassion curriculum is helpful for people struggling with mental health and substance use. One of the major benefits of self-compassion curriculum is that it may alleviate within the individual the profound effects of overt and covert stigmatization. One of the powers of group therapy is the experience of a sense of self-acceptance through the sharing with others who have shared suffering. People benefit from utilizing their own resources in developing the skill of self-compassion as a buffer against the potentially damaging effects of other people's judgement.

I have created and implemented a nine-session curriculum of self-compassion for group psychotherapy that provides a sound, in-depth training in self-compassion using Eastern philosophy and psychology and Western psychotherapy. The secular curriculum is designed to enhance competency in daily life, wisdom, and emotional transformation.

Self-compassion in Western psychotherapy is in its nascent development; however, as we have seen, integration by Buddhist teachers is nurturing and fostering this development in education and psychotherapy. The study of compassion has implications for the future of science of mind. Further studies may open up meditation and compassion practices to new and larger communities in which there may be further research into positive states of being, and a legitimizing of positive states of mind through the mantle of science, all of which would provide secular society with greater access to efficacious modalities in the development of individual and group therapy self-compassion. I admire and deeply respect those who have created and contributed to current curricula. I hope I have given tribute to their work by including the contributions

of major contributors to the field. Also, it is my heart-felt wish that the content and process of my two curricula add to the well-being of those seeking to develop greater and wiser self-compassion, especially Buddhist practitioners and people suffering from mental health and substance use concerns.



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## Appendix A

### ***Four Armed Avalokiteshvara by the Second Dalai Lama (1475–1542)***

Source: *Avalokiteshvara Sadhana* by Second Dalai Lama (publishing date unknown)

#### **Four Armed Avalokiteshvara**

*By*

***The Second Dalai Lama (1475 - 1542)***

*(With the aspiration to perform the practice of meditation and mantric recitation in accordance with the tradition of Avalokiteshvara in his four-armed form, firstly take refuge, generate the altruistic mind of enlightenment and reflect on the four immeasurable attitudes:)*

I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Teachings and I take refuge in the Spiritual Community until I gain enlightenment. By the virtue I gather by practicing giving and the other perfections, may I attain Buddhahood in order to benefit all beings.

May all beings be endowed with happiness;  
May all beings be free of suffering;  
May all beings never be separated from happiness;  
May all beings abide in equanimity undisturbed by the eight worldly attitudes or preconceptions.

(Recite the above verses three times. Then confirm the emptiness of all phenomena in and beyond cyclic existence by means of the following mantra:)

OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMAH SVABHAVA SHUDDHO  
HAM.

Everything becomes emptiness. Within the sphere of emptiness appears the letter PAM. It transforms into a white lotus upon which is the letter AH. AH becomes a moon disc; at its center is my own mind in the form of a white letter HRIH. HRIH emits rays, which work the weal of sentient beings, transferring them to the rank of a Superior. The rays re-collect into the letter HRIH, which transforms and I emerge as the venerable Superior Avalokiteshvara, with a snow-white body, one face and four arms. The front pair are clasped together at my heart, the rear right one holds a crystal jewel rosary of one hundred and eight beads and the rear left one holds a lotus which blooms beside my ear.

I sit in full lotus posture and I am adorned with eight precious ornaments: for my head, ears, throat, hands and feet. I am clad in silken raiment and have an entrancing serene smile. The letter OM marks the crown of my head, AH my throat, and HUM my heart. Also, a white letter HRIH sits at the center of a moon disc in my heart. The HRIH radiates lights, inviting the might Superior Avalokiteshvara and retinue of Buddhas and bodhisattvas from their southerly abode: JAH HUM BAM HOH; they absorb into me and thus we become one.

Again light goes forth from the HRIH at my heart, inviting the Empowering Deities.

I call to them, "Pray, grant me initiation."

Thus requested they raise aloft vases full of wisdom nectar. (Intoning) OM SARVA TATHAGATA ABHISHEKATA SAMAYA SHRIYE AH HUM; they initiate

me with their nectars, which fill my body and purify all my defilements. The superfluity remaining upon the crown of my head as a protrusion transforms into the Buddha Amitabha, who becomes my crown ornament.

(Then make the offerings, which clear interferences, purify and invoke blessings:)

OM ARYA LOKESHVARA SAPARIVARA ARGHAM (and so forth until SHABDE) PRATICHHAYA SVAHA.

White in color and untarnished by faults,

The Buddha Amitabha embellishing the crown of your head,

You gaze upon sentient beings with overwhelming compassion:

To Avalokiteshvara I humbly bow down.

(Then - )

Visualizing myself as Avalokiteshvara, at my heart appears a circular white moon-disc, upon which is my own mind in the form of a white letter HRIH. At the periphery of the disc stand the six essence-syllables of the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM. They are in block letters and are resplendently white like the rays of the rising moon.

Light comes forth from the syllables, filling my whole body and purifying all my negativities and obscurations. The rays then leave through my pores and purify the negativities and obscurations of all sentient beings, thereby conferring upon them the status of the mighty Superior Avalokiteshvara.

My threefold manner of perception involves seeing all external appearances as rainbow-Deity forms of the mighty Superior Avalokiteshvara; all sound is heard as the six syllable mantra; and mind is imbued with the essence of method conjoined with wisdom, which is the great compassion focused on all sentient beings and the wisdom understanding emptiness, or the wisdom which clearly perceives that all phenomena in and beyond cyclic existence lack even a particle of inherent existence and are but mere imputations.

Thus visualizing oneself as Avalokiteshvara melded within this threefold ambit, one recites the Mani mantra. From the energy of the practice, all the sentient beings of the six realms obtain the Deity form of the Superior Avalokiteshvara. Moreover, in the manner of a full sesame pod, the entire earth, air and sky are filled with the form of Avalokiteshvara. Their combined chanting of OM MANI PADME HUM releases the sound of the Mani mantra like a crescendo of thunder. Contemplating thus, recite OM MANI PADME HUM as many times as possible.

Yet just OM, having the three fold aggregate of A-O-M, signifies the three indivisible adamantines of my body, speech and mind. This mantra is called the "Jewel Holder", for a single enumeration with such perspicacity is meritorious. Thus OM starts the mantra.

Mani means jewel. Padma means lotus, whereas Padme denotes supplication. So with my heartfelt entreaty of Avalokiteshvara, who is "The Jewel in the Lotus," I recite the mantra while dwelling on contemplations such as of the fusion of the mighty Superior Avalokiteshvara's qualities within me.

Furthermore, the respective six syllables cut off the doorways to rebirth in the six realms of cyclic existence. The syllables are also the consummation of the six perfections. Thus the Mani mantra, having these and other excellent qualities, is held

to be of endless advantage and significance. Moreover, the mighty Superior Avalokiteshvara is said to be in general the quintessence of all the Buddhas' compassion and in particular the patron Bodhisattva of Tibet. Therefore one should strive with enthusiasm in the recitation, cultivating Avalokiteshvara as a most excellent Meditational Deity by dint of these special characteristics.

(To conclude the session:)

The entire visualized universe and its inhabitants, who are in the form of the Superior Avalokiteshvara dissolve into me. I dissolve into the HRIH at my heart. HRIH dissolves in the letter H. This vanishes like a rainbow in the sky.

(Contemplate thus with conviction. Then:)

Once more within the sphere of emptiness I instantly arise in the form of the Superior Avalokiteshvara possessing the threefold attitude described above, and at once engage in extensive deeds.

(End with peerless prayers and dedications of merit, such as:)

May I develop the peerless awakening mind which is latent within me; and may that which I have attained go from strength to strength.

May I enjoy repletion both spiritual and otherwise,  
Never parted from my Perfect Master in all of my lives.  
By comprehensively amassing the qualities of the paths and levels,  
May I attain speedily the state of the Vajra Holder.

The colophon: This easily understood meditation upon the mighty Avalokiteshvara was composed by Gyalwa Gendun Gyatso at the mighty insistence of several great Doctrine Holders.

Translated into English by Kevin Garrat with Chomdze Tashi Wangyal and Lozang Gyaltzen.

## **Appendix B**

### **My Curriculum: Self-Compassion Training in Group Psychotherapy with Experiential and Contemplative Practices (nine sessions)**

#### Facilitator's Overview

##### *Overview of the nine sessions*

Group guidelines for facilitator to share with participants include the following: confidentiality, privacy, respectful language, punctuality, group contract regarding disclosure by individuals (group is not focused on history of trauma, violence or abuse; therefore, individuals are encouraged to pursue this kind of disclosure in individual therapy). The facilitator lets participants know that he/she is available during breaks or after group to offer support should issues arise that need immediate attention or the participant is triggered in group.

##### *An overview of the structure of the group and sessions*

Each session will have the following structure: check-in, first contemplative practice, psychoeducation, application of a skill, second contemplative practice, and check-out (includes commitment for the week, additional calm-abiding practice for the week, and sharing one learning taken from the session).

#### **Facilitator's outline for each of the nine sessions**

##### **Session 1: Discovering and exploring self-compassion and mindfulness**

##### **Facilitator's outline**

###### *Check-in*

1. First name
2. A brief statement of what self-compassion means in your life
3. One thing you would like to learn or gain from being on this nine-week course

###### *First contemplative practice*

Calm-abiding meditation using breath awareness. Also, the facilitator shall provide an introduction to GAP ("grounded aware and presence") from David Rome's book, *Your Body Knows the Answer* (p. 14). GAP is taught during the breathing awareness exercises with words that can be said to oneself to calm the nervous system.

A brief explanation of breath work is given. In his book, *Mindfulness in Plain English* (2011), Henepola Gunaratana states that breath is "constant," (p. 46) in that we have it throughout our lives, but changing continuously, in terms of "tactile sensation," of how it is felt in the body (p. 57).

*Psychoeducational presentation:*

- a. Why self-compassion is so important? (Group discussion)
- b. What does self-compassion mean to you? (Group discussion)
- c. Inspirational quotes
- d. Brainstorming on the definition and description of self-compassion
- e. Neff's description of self-compassion:  
Kristin Neff (2003) presents three constructs and practices to describe self-compassion: "self-kindness," "common humanity" and "mindfulness" (2003, p. 230). The opposites of these constructs are part of Neff's presentation as well: "self-judgment" (or self-criticism), "isolation" and "over-identification" (p. 230).
- f. "Two psychologies" of self-compassion according to Gilbert and Chodon will be presented: "the psychology that enables us to be motivated to engage with suffering; to stay with it; and to understand its causes in a nonjudgmental way; a second psychology that enables us to work skilfully toward the alleviation and prevention of suffering and its causes" (2014, p. 128).
- g. A brief presentation of Richard Davidson's six constituents (chapter six).
- h. Description of loving-kindness meditation.

*Second contemplative practice*

Loving-kindness meditation

*Check-out by members*

1. First name
2. One thing to take from the session
3. Personal commitment and calm-abiding commitment for the week

**Session 2: Emotion regulation**

**Facilitator's outline**

*Check-in*

1. First name



2. A brief statement of an example of self-compassion experienced in the last week
3. Commitment and five-minute calm-abiding practice

#### *First contemplative practice*

Calm-abiding meditation using breath awareness, then identifying a minor emotion experienced in the last week, felt sense, visceral and sensations in the body. Describing the sensations. The participant explores the feeling/sensation behind the emotion. What is the need behind the feeling?

#### *Inspirational quotes*

#### *Psychoeducation*

What does emotion regulation mean to you? (Group discussion)

Three emotion regulation systems developed by Dr. Paul Gilbert:

1. "Incentive/resource-focused"
2. "Affiliative-focused"
3. "Threat-focused, protection and safety-seeking" (*The Compassionate Mind*, 2009, p. 22)

#### *Second contemplative practice*

Self-compassion meditation using colours

#### *Check-out*

1. First name
2. One thing to take from the session
3. Commitment

### **Session 3: Meditation, mindfulness and visualization**

#### **Facilitator's outline**

##### *Check-in*

1. First name
2. A brief statement of an example of self-compassion experienced in the last week
3. Commitment and five-minute calm-abiding practice

##### *First contemplative practice*

Calm-abiding meditation using breath awareness, then taking a difficult thought or emotion and applying RAIN.

### *Inspirational quotes*

### *Psychoeducation*

In his book, *Full Catastrophe Living* (1990, pp. 23–29), Jon Kabat-Zinn describes some of the characteristics required for meditation:

- "right attitude"
- "beginner's mind"
- "non-striving"
- "acceptance"
- "non-judging"
- "patience"
- "letting go"
- "trust"
- "commitment/self-discipline"

What does meditation or mindfulness mean to you? (Group discussion)

The following is presented: the five hindrances; RAIN ("recognize," "allow," "investigate" and "non-identification") (Brach, 2013, p. 62); Jon Kabat-Zinn's components of meditation.

Different contemplative exercises are taught so that they may be used in relation to bodily hypoarousal and hyperarousal. A graph is provided to show symptoms and behaviours in hypoarousal and hyperarousal states.

### *Second contemplative practice*

Visualization of sun scintillating on the ocean and then breathing in the sparkling light and visualizing it permeate the entire body. Then breathing out whatever one wants to let go of.

### *Another contemplative guided visualization*

Meditation with three stages: one focuses the compassionate mind on an image of the lotus at the heart centre, stabilizing the image. Then one radiates compassion to the imagined or visualized mirror image of oneself as meditator. Pause for practice. Then the visualized self dissolves back into oneself, enhancing self-compassion.

### *Check-out*

1. First name

2. One thing to take from the session
3. Commitment

## **Session 4: The Four Virtues**

### **Facilitator's outline**

#### *Check-in*

1. First name
2. A brief statement of an example of self-compassion experienced in the last week.
3. Commitment and five-minute calm-abiding practice

#### *First contemplative practice*

Calm-abiding meditation using breath awareness is offered before the loving-kindness meditation.

#### *Inspirational quotes*

#### *Psychoeducation*

What is the meaning of these virtues (the Four Immeasurables—*loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity*) to you? (Group discussion)

#### *Second contemplative practice*

Recall a recent struggle in your daily life. Re-infuse the event with the visualization of seeing yourself with loving-kindness.

#### *Check-out*

1. First name
2. One thing to take from the session
3. Commitment

## **Session 5: Loving-kindness**

### **Facilitator's outline**

#### *Check-in*

1. First name
2. A brief statement of an example of self-compassion experienced in the last week

### 3. Commitment and five-minute calm-abiding practice

#### *First contemplative practice*

Calm-abiding meditation using breath awareness, then loving-kindness meditation.

#### *Inspirational quotes*

#### *Psychoeducation*

What does loving-kindness mean to you? (Group discussion)

#### *Second contemplative practice*

Grounding using the senses

#### *Check-out*

1. First name
2. One thing to take from the session
3. Commitment

## **Session 6: *Tonglen* for self-practice**

### **Facilitator's outline**

#### *Check-in*

1. First name
2. A brief statement of an example of self-compassion experienced in the last week
3. Commitment and five-minute calm-abiding practice

#### *First contemplative practice*

Calm-abiding meditation using breath awareness, then *tonglen* for self.

#### *Inspirational quotes*

#### *Psychoeducation*

What are some barriers to allowing compassion or loving-kindness to flow towards yourself? (Group discussion)

*Tonglen* for self, using loving-kindness and visualization

*Second contemplative practice*

Apply *tonglen* for a difficult part of yourself using loving kindness. Visualize a mirror image of yourself in front of yourself as meditator, taking a difficult aspect into your heart of loving-kindness. Then send out loving-kindness to yourself, and see yourself as free of the affliction.

*Check-out*

1. First name
2. One thing to take from the session
3. Commitment

**Session 7: Habitual patterns**

**Facilitator's outline**

*Check-in*

1. First name
2. A brief statement of an example of self-compassion experienced in the last week
3. Commitment and five-minute calm-abiding practice

*First contemplative practice*

The facilitator will guide calm-abiding meditation using breath awareness, teaching five types of breathing (thoracic, diaphragmatic, nine-round breathing, vagus-nerve breathing, and four-four-four breathing).

*Inspirational quotes*

*Psychoeducation*

What do psychological patterns mean to you? (Group discussion)

Karen Horney's three patterns from her book, *Inner Conflicts*: "Moving towards, moving against, and moving away" (1976).

Pema Chödrön's "self-soothing, self-numbing and self-aggression" patterns, and applying the four R's ("recognize," "refrain," "relax" and "resolve") (2005).

Daniel Siegel's (2008) work and his book, *The Neurobiology of We*.

### *Second contemplative practice*

Calm-abiding meditation and working with painful patterns. Scan your life and identify a pattern. Get into the felt sense in the body—the energy and impulse of the pattern. Then, accept yourself by generating soothing affection and warmth towards that felt sense. If this is too difficult to do for yourself, imagine a friend is helping you.

### *Check-out*

1. First name
2. One thing to take from the session
3. Commitment

## **Session 8: Working with inner dialogue and the conflicted parts of self—Process-Oriented Psychology (Arnold Mindell) and working with the inner critic**

### **Facilitator's outline**

#### *Check-in*

1. First name
2. A brief statement of an example of self-compassion experienced in the last week
3. Commitment and five-minute calm-abiding practice

#### *First contemplative practice*

Calm-abiding meditation using breath awareness. Then use Process-Oriented Psychology with the six channels.

#### *Inspirational quotes*

#### *Psychoeducation*

What is the meaning of internal critic to you? (Group discussion)

Arnold Mindell's six channels: "body feeling or proprioception," "visualization," "hearing," "movement or kinesthesia," "relationships" and "world phenomena" (Mindell, 2002, p. 22).

Self-forgiveness psychoeducation—a four-step process: (1) recognize and regret that which is to be forgiven; (2) personally identify that which will transform and rely on that; (3) transform and let go of that which is to be forgiven; (4) resolve to not continue that pattern into the future (adapted from the four opponent powers of Tibetan Buddhist practice).

### *Second contemplative practice*

Working with the inner critic using Process-Oriented Psychology with the channels.

#### *Check-out*

1. First name
2. One thing to take from the session
3. Commitment

## **Session 9: Wisdom and compassion**

### **Facilitator's outline**

#### *Check-in*

1. First name
2. A brief statement of an example of self-compassion experienced in the last week
3. Commitment and five-minute calm-abiding practice

#### *First contemplative practice*

Calm-abiding meditation igniting inner wisdom

#### *Inspirational quotes*

#### *Psychoeducation*

What is wisdom? (Group brainstorm and discussion)

With wisdom discussion, the group is encouraged to employ a method of deep listening after every comment. The pause should be for at least thirty seconds. Quakers, Thich Nhat Hahn and Tara Brach (among others) use this method, which is essential in cultivating wisdom as it allows one to reflect upon and integrate the information more deeply. The next participant is more likely to comment with compassionate mindfulness.

#### **Wisdom:**

Wisdom is the ability to think about the consequences of one's actions;

Wisdom is the ability to appreciate the moments of beauty in one's life;

Wisdom is the ability to try to not create harm;

Wisdom is the ability to take care of oneself;

Self-reflection and self-contemplation can facilitate a deeper understanding and wisdom of oneself that can facilitate greater empathy for self and others.

Relationship between wisdom and self-compassion:

1. Actions are more likely to be self-destructive or destructive to others if not grounded in deep wisdom and the ability to be mindful of one's emotional reactivity.
2. Compassion without wisdom can inadvertently cause harm. When combined with wisdom, compassion promotes skilful means.
3. Wisdom allows for reflection and contemplation so that we can make healthy choices. Wisdom allows one to perceive reality more accurately; as in seeing the changing natural flow of one's life. Wisdom can be based on objective observations through mindfulness as opposed to being subsumed in emotional reactivity.
4. "Compassion and wisdom are qualities of mind that allow us to tolerate, accept, and even grow from suffering (Siegel & Germer, 2012, p. 3). It [Wisdom] allows us to view problems from many angles, realize that circumstances are constantly changing, and understand that how we *relate* to our experience (tenderly-harshly, accepting-resisting, curious-avoidant) affects our sense of well-being even more than the conditions of our lives" (In Germer & Siegel, *Wisdom and Compassion in Psychotherapy*, p. 3).

*Second contemplative practice*

Calm-abiding meditation and then visualizing with the mind's eye one's higher self with core values.

*Check-out*

1. First name
2. One thing to take from the session
3. Commitment

## **Handouts for Each of the Nine Sessions for Participants**

### **Session 1: Handout on discovering and exploring self-compassion and mindfulness**

*Inspirational quotes*

"If someone strikes my heart, it does not break, but it bursts, and the flame coming out of it becomes a torch on my path."



—Hazrat Inayat Khan (Retrieved from <http://www.quotter.net>)

"The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently."

—*When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* by Pema Chödrön (1997, p. 41).

"The boundary to what we can accept is the boundary to our freedom."

— Author unknown. Cited in *Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha* (cited in Tara Brach, 2003, p. 44).

"Clearly recognizing what is happening inside us, and regarding what we see with an open, kind and loving heart, is what I call Radical Acceptance. If we are holding back from any part of our experience, if our heart shuts out any part of who we are and what we feel, we are fueling the fears and feelings of separation that sustain the trance of unworthiness. Radical Acceptance directly dismantles the very foundations of this trance."

—*Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha* by Tara Brach (2003, p. 26).

"Self-compassion isn't a 'thing' that we either have or don't have. Instead, as a practitioner and as a therapist, I try to remain open to emotional pain and breathe kindness into it, one moment after the next."

—*The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions* by Christopher K. Germer (2009, p. 240).

"Whereas acceptance usually refers to what's happening to us—accepting a feeling or a thought—self-compassion is acceptance of the person to whom it's happening. It's acceptance of ourselves while we're in pain."

—*The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts* by Christopher Germer (2009, p. 33).

"When you begin to touch your heart or let your heart be touched, you begin to discover that it's bottomless, that it doesn't have any resolution, that this heart is huge, vast, and limitless. You begin to discover how much warmth and gentleness is there, as well as how much space."

—*Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living* by Pema Chödrön (2001, p. 91).

### *Journalling*

- Name some areas in which you would like to practise self-compassion.

- What are some of your beliefs about self-compassion?
- How has self-compassion been helpful in your life?
- What are some of your blocks to self-compassion?

## **Session 2: Handout on emotion regulation**

### *Inspirational quotes*

"The privilege of a lifetime is being who you are."

—Joseph Campbell

Cited in *A Joseph Campbell Companion: Reflections on the Art of Living* by Diane Osbon (1995, p. 15).

"We define emotion dysregulation as difficulty or inability in coping with experience or processing emotions. Dysregulation may manifest as either excessive intensification of emotion or excessive deactivation of emotion. Excessive intensification of emotion includes any rise of the intensity of an emotion that is experienced by the individual as unwanted, intrusive, overwhelming, or problematic. Increase of emotion resulting in panic, terror, trauma, dread or a sense of urgency that one is overwhelmed and has difficulty tolerating an emotion would qualify under these criteria."

—*Emotion Regulation and Psychotherapy: A Practitioners Guide* by Robert Leahy & Dennis Tirch, & Lisa Napolitano (2011, p. 2).

"Having compassion starts and ends with having compassion for all those unwanted parts of ourselves, all those imperfections that we don't even want to look at. Compassion isn't some kind of self-improvement project or ideal that we're trying to live up to."

—*When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* by Pema Chödrön (1997, p. 104).

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

—*Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor E. Frankl (2006, pp. 65–66).

"Often life is a frantic avoidance of the truth."

—Adyashanti (Retrieved from [www.inspiringquotes.com](http://www.inspiringquotes.com))

"If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far."

—Daniel Goleman (Retrieved from <http://www.shareguide.com/Goleman.html>)

"The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind."

—William James (Retrieved from <https://www.brainyquote.com>)

"An important aspect of self-compassion is to be able to empathically hold both parts of ourselves—the self that regrets a past action and the self that took the action in the first place."

—*Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* by Marshall Rosenberg (2003, p.134).

"There is no change from darkness to light or from inertia to movement without emotion."

—C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Second Edition, Collected Works, Vol. 9, I, "Psychological Aspects of the Mother's Archetypes" (1977, p. 96).

"The heart has its reasons which reason does not know."

—Blaise Pascal (Cited in *Divine Sparks* by Karen Speerstra, 2005, p. 192)

"A big, tough samurai once went to see a little monk. 'Monk,' he said in the voice accustomed to instant obedience, 'teach me about heaven and hell!' The monk looked up at the mighty warrior and replied in utter disdain, 'Teach you about heaven and hell? I couldn't teach you about anything. You're dirty. You smell. Your blade is rusty. You're a disgrace, an embarrassment to the samurai class. Get out of my sight. I can't stand you.'

The samurai was furious. He shook, got all red in the face, was speechless with rage. He pulled out his sword and raised it above him, preparing to slay the monk.

'That's hell,' said the monk softly.

The samurai was overwhelmed. The compassion and surrender of this little man who had offered his life to give this teaching to show him hell! He slowly put down his sword, filled with gratitude and suddenly peaceful.

'And that's heaven,' said the monk softly."

—*A Zen Story: Heaven and Hell in How Can I help? Stories and Reflections on Service* by Ram Dass & Paul Gorman (1985, pp. 99–100).

"I have just three things to teach:  
simplicity, patience, compassion.  
These three are your greatest treasures.  
Simple in actions and in thoughts,  
you return to the source of being.  
Patient with both friends and enemies,  
you accord with the way things are.  
Compassionate toward yourself,  
you reconcile all beings in the world."

—Lao-Tzu *Tao Te Ching* No. 67 Translation by S. Mitchell (Retrieved from:  
<http://acc6.its.brooklyn.cuny.edu>)

"No feeling is final."

—Rainer Maria Rilke (Retrieved from <http://exceptindreams.livejournal.com>)

"We can try to control the uncontrollable by looking for security and predictability, always hoping to be comfortable and safe. But the truth is that we can never avoid uncertainty and fear. So the central question is not how we avoid uncertainty and fear but how we relate to discomfort. How do we practice with difficulty, with our emotions, with the unpredictable encounters of an ordinary day? When we doubt that we're up to it, we can ask ourselves this question: 'Do I prefer to grow up and relate to life directly, or do I choose to live ...in fear?'"

—*108 Teachings on Cultivating Fearlessness and Compassion* by Pema Chödrön (2003, p. 5).

"Kindness in words creates confidence. Kindness in thinking creates profoundness. Kindness in giving creates love."

—Lao Tzu (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

### *Journalling*

Reflecting on Gilbert's three emotion-regulation systems ("incentive/resource-focused; affiliative-focused; and threat-focused, protection- and safety-seeking"), consider the following questions:

- Where do you spend most of your time in terms of Gilbert's emotion-regulation systems?
- What has helped you move into the affiliative-focused area?
- What calms your emotions?

- Behind an intense emotion that you experience, what are some other less intense emotions that are felt at the same time? Can you identify the need behind the emotion?
- In what areas of your life are you more likely to practise emotion regulation?
- In what areas of your life do you feel most centred?
- What are some internal statements that help calm/soothe your nervous system?

### **Session 3: Handout on meditation, mindfulness and visualization**

#### *Inspirational quotes*

"The seed of mystery lies in muddy water. [...] Water becomes clear through stillness. How can I become still? By flowing with the stream."

—Lao Tzu (Retrieved from [www.azquotes.com](http://www.azquotes.com))

"Seek not that the things which happen should happen as you wish; but wish the things which happen to be as they are, and you will have a tranquil flow of life."

—Epictetus (Retrieved from <http://www.azquotes.com>)

"A lake that is absolutely calm gives to you a perfect reflection. The moment it becomes disturbed in the least, the reflection is distorted; and if the agitation is increased, the reflection will be completely lost. Your consciousness is the lake."

—James B. Schafer (Cited in *Treasury of Spiritual Wisdom, A Collection of 10,000 Inspirational Quotations* by Andy Zubko, 2013, p. 67).

"Any addiction is a falling into unconsciousness."

—Marion Woodman (Cited in *Treasury of Spiritual Wisdom, A Collection of 10,000 Inspirational Quotations* by Andy Zubko, 2013, p. 67).

"When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness."

—Joseph Campbell (Cited in *Treasury of Spiritual Wisdom, A Collection of 10,000 Inspirational Quotations* by Andy Zubko, 2013, p. 69).

"Do not race your heart like a horse, or you will exhaust its energy.  
Do not fly your heart like a bird, or you will injure its wings.  
Never frantically move things around just for the sake of seeing what will happen.  
If you move things around, you dislocate them from their proper place.  
If you will be calm and patient, everything will come to you by itself."

—Guanzi (Writings of Master Guan) circa 26 BCE (Retrieved from <http://www.wayofwellness.com>)

### *Journalling*

- Describe a time/situation when breath work or meditation was useful to you in coping with a difficult situation.
- What barriers or hindrances to practising breath work are you experiencing?
- At what time of the day do you find it helpful to meditate?
- How has meditation helped you in dealing with your mind?

### **Session 4: Handout on the Four Virtues**

#### *Inspirational quotes*

"Never let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you have to, with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present."

—*Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"The meditative mind sees disagreeable or agreeable things with equanimity, patience, and good-will. Transcendent knowledge is seeing reality in utter simplicity."

—Jean-Yves Leloup (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"A modern definition of equanimity: cool. This refers to one whose mind remains stable and calm in all situations."

—Allan Lokos (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Equanimity is grounded in active awareness (insight). It is not indifference, laziness, or dullness of mind. It is earned through diligent training and is not to be confused with passing mood. At the same time there is ease about equanimity that allows it to be present without strenuous effort which is expended again and again. Equanimity strengthens itself but only as it has been developed and sustained by insight."

—*Through the Flames* by Allan Lokos (2015, p. 200).

"Sorrow prepares you for joy. It violently sweeps everything out of your house, so that new joy can find space to enter. It shakes the yellow leaves from the bough of your heart, so that fresh, green leaves can grow in their place. It pulls up the rotten roots, so that new roots hidden beneath have room to grow. Whatever sorrow shakes from your heart, far better things will take their place."

—Rumi (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a harder battle."

—*Socrates* (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"All I ever wanted was to reach out and touch another human being, not just with my hands but with my heart."

—Tahereh Mafi (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."

—Mother Teresa (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Where love rules, there is no will to power; and where power predominates, there love is lacking. The one is the shadow of the other."

—Carl Jung (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"One cannot be deeply responsive to the world without being saddened very often."

—Erich Fromm (Retrieved from [www.wisdomquotes.com](http://www.wisdomquotes.com))

"At the center of your being you have the answer; you know who you are and you know what you want."

—Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"In our culture, when we talk about love, we usually mean either passion or sentimentality. It is crucial to distinguish [loving-kindness] from both of these states. Passion is enmeshed with feelings of desire, of wanting or of owning and possessing. Passion gets entangled with needing things to be a certain way, with having our expectations met. The expectation of exchange that underlies most passion is both conditional and ultimately defeating. 'I will love you as long as you behave in the following fifteen ways, or as long as you love me in return at least as much as I love you.' It is not a coincidence that the word passion derives from the Latin word for *suffering*. Wanting and expecting inevitably entail suffering."

—*Loving-kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* by Sharon Salzberg (2004, p. 23).

### *Journalling*

Reflect on the virtues of loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity when pondering the following questions:

1. Do you feel that significant energy should be spent on developing these virtues? If so, why?

2. In what ways do these virtues feel balanced or out of balance in your life?
3. Of the four virtues, which do you particularly struggle with and why?
4. Give an example of practising one of these virtues?
5. What is one of your barriers to achieving one of these virtues?
6. Which virtue do you aspire most to achieve on a regular basis?
7. Describe a situation in which someone practised one of these virtues.

### **Session 5: Handout on loving-kindness**

#### *Inspirational quotes*

"We all are so deeply interconnected; we have no option but to love all. Be kind and do good for any one and that will be reflected. The ripples of the kind heart are the highest blessings of the Universe."

—*Yoga and Vipassana: An Integrated Lifestyle* by Amit Ray (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Sometimes we think that to develop an open heart, to be truly loving and compassionate, means that we need to be passive, to allow others to abuse us, to smile and let anyone do what they want with us. Yet this is not what is meant by compassion. Quite the contrary. Compassion is not at all weak. It is the strength that arises out of seeing the true nature of suffering in the world. Compassion allows us to bear witness to that suffering, whether it is in ourselves or others, without fear; it allows us to name injustice without hesitation, and to act strongly, with all the skill at our disposal."

— *Loving-kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* by Sharon Salzberg (2004, p. 131).

"The difference between misery and happiness depends on what we do with our attention."

—*Loving-kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* by Sharon Salzberg (2004, p. 15).

"Clearly recognizing what is happening inside us, and regarding what we see with an open, kind and loving heart, is what I call Radical Acceptance. If we are holding back from any part of our experience, if our heart shuts out any part of who we are and what we feel, we are fueling the fears and feelings of separation that sustain the trance of unworthiness. Radical Acceptance directly dismantles the very foundations of this trance."



—*Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha* by Tara Brach (2004, p. 26).

"For all of us, love can be the natural state of our own being; naturally at peace, naturally connected, because this becomes the reflection of who we simply are."

—*Loving-kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* by Sharon Salzberg (1995, p. 73).

"A wise woman who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation. The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime. But a few days later he came back to return the stone to the wise woman. 'I've been thinking,' he said, 'I know how valuable the stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone.'"

—*The Wise Woman's Stone* by an original author unknown, featured in *Chicken Soup for the Woman's Soul* by Jack Canfield, Mark Hansen, Jennifer Hawthorne, & Marcy Shimoff (2012, p. 244).

### *Journalling*

1. During the loving-kindness meditation, whom was it easiest for you to express this to: yourself, a beloved, a stranger or an enemy?
2. What was your inner experience with loving-kindness?
3. Would you practise this as a meditation and, if so, why?
4. Give an example of when another person expressed loving-kindness towards you and describe how you felt.

### **Session 6: Handout for *tonglen***

"The worst loneliness is to not be comfortable with yourself."

—Mark Twain (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"As I began to love myself, I recognized that my mind can disturb me and it can make me sick. But as I connected it to my heart, my mind became a valuable ally. Today, I call this connection wisdom of the heart."

—Charlie Chaplin (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"If you begin to understand what you are without trying to change it, then what you are undergoes a transformation."

—Jiddu Krishnamurti (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Self-improvement without self-love is like building a house upon sand. You can build and build, but it will always sink."

—Vironika Tugaleva (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"A moment of self-compassion can change your entire day. A string of such moments can change the course of your life."

—Christopher K. Germer from *Mindful Path to Self-Compassion* (2009, p. 2).

"Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity."

—Pema Chödrön (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"We think that the point is to pass the test or overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don't really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. It's just like that. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy."

—Pema Chödrön (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"We habitually erect a barrier called blame that keeps us from communicating genuinely with others, and we fortify it with our concepts of who's right and who's wrong. We do that with the people who are closest to us and we do it with political systems, with all kinds of things that we don't like about our associates or our society. It is a very common, ancient, well-perfected device for trying to feel better. Blame others... Blaming is a way to protect your heart, trying to protect what is soft and open and tender in yourself. Rather than own that pain, we scramble to find some comfortable ground."

—*When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* by Pema Chödrön (1997, p. 104).

"Perhaps the biggest tragedy of our lives is that freedom is possible, yet we can pass our years trapped in the same old patterns [...] We may want to love other people without holding back, to feel authentic, to breathe in the beauty around us, to dance and sing. Yet each day we listen to inner voices that keep our life small."

—*Radical Acceptance* by Tara Brach (2003, p. 25).

*Journalling*

1. Describe what the practice of *tonglen* was like for you.
2. When would you most likely use this practice?
3. What emotions would you like to work with in *tonglen*?

## **Session 7: Handout on habitual patterns**

### *Inspirational quotes*

"It is impossible to understand addiction without asking what relief the person finds, or hopes to find, in the drug or the addictive behaviour."

—*In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* by Gabor Maté (2010, p. 33).

"Your beliefs become your thoughts,  
Your thoughts become your words,  
Your words become your actions,  
Your actions become your habits,  
Your habits become your values,  
Your values become your destiny."

—Mahatma Gandhi (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Self-doubt is the greatest enemy of any new good habit."

—Victoria Moran (Retrieved from [www.azquotes.com](http://www.azquotes.com))

"Habits can be learned until they become ingrained into your entire being so that you no longer notice you are doing it."

—Skip Powell (Retrieved from [www.wow4u.com](http://www.wow4u.com))

"You need to be content with small steps. That's all life is. Small steps that you take every day so when you look back down the road it all adds up and you know you covered some distance. It took me a long time to accept that, but it's true. You need to have patience."

—*Awaken* by Katie Kacvinsky (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together."

—Vincent van Gogh (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Radical acceptance is the only way out of hell—it means letting go of fighting reality. Acceptance is the way to turn suffering that cannot be tolerated into pain that can be tolerated."

—Marsha Linehan (Cited in *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Anxiety Disorders* by Eifert, Forsyth, Hayes, 2005, p. 69).

"Self-compassion and courage are vital. Staying with pain without loving-kindness is just warfare."

—*The Places that Scare You* by Pema Chödrön (2002, p. 3).

"It is only by practising through a continual succession of agreeable and disagreeable situations that we acquire true strengths. To accept that pain is inherent and to live our lives from this understanding is to create the causes and conditions for happiness."

—Suzuki Roshi (Cited in the *Place that Scare You*, Pema Chödrön.)

"A lecturer, when explaining stress management to a class, raised a glass of water and asked, 'How heavy is this glass of water?' Answers called out ranged from 20g to 500g. The lecturer replied, 'The absolute weight doesn't matter. It depends on how long you try to hold it. If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem. If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my right arm. If I hold it for a day, you'll have to call an ambulance. In each case, it's the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes.'

He continued: 'And that's the way it is with stress. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, as the burden becomes increasingly heavy, we won't be able to carry on. As with the glass of water, you have to put it down for a while and rest before holding it again. When we're refreshed, we can carry on with the demands of life.'"

—Source unknown (Retrieved from [www.gannett.cornell.edu](http://www.gannett.cornell.edu))

### *Journaling*

Karen Horney says the key ingredient for working with inner conflicts is awareness. With this in mind, consider the following questions:

1. Have there been times in your life when you have found awareness helpful in recognizing one of Karen Horney's patterns of moving towards, moving against and/or moving away?
2. How did awareness help you to work with that pattern?
3. Instead of engaging in one of these patterns in relationship, describe some ways you would like to transform this pattern of relating with others.

**Session 8: Handout for working with inner dialogue and the conflicted parts of self—process work (Arnold Mindell's work)—and working with the inner critic**

### *Inspirational quotes*

"When hard times come, the greatest danger does not necessarily lie in the circumstances we face, but rather in the way we treat ourselves at the time. Nothing is more dangerous than self-hate. Nothing makes it more difficult to heal or to find the grace of peace than self-attack and the agony of self-doubt."

—Stephen Schwartz (Retrieved from [www.azquotes.com](http://www.azquotes.com))

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, *Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?* Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

—*Return to Love* by Marianne Williamson (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"The biggest enemies of willpower: temptation, self-criticism, and stress. [...] these three skills—self-awareness, self-care, and remembering what matters most—are the foundation for self-control."

—Kelly McGonigal (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"The real connection we long for is the connection with ourselves; the connection with where we are here and now [...] When the connection with our own presence is broken everything just starts to feel empty."

—Jeff Foster (Retrieved from [www.befriendingourselves.com](http://www.befriendingourselves.com))

"It [speaking with words that bring about harmony] consists of speaking of what is good about people, instead of what is wrong with them. For some people this is an almost impossible exercise, for they have become totally habituated to speaking critically. We all seem to have a special talent for finding critical things to say about the world, about others, and about ourselves!"

—Jean-Yves Leloup (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"You don't want to beat yourself up for beating yourself up in the vain hope that it will somehow make you stop beating yourself up. Just as hate can't conquer hate—but only strengthens and reinforces it—self-judgment can't stop self-judgment."

—*Stop Beating Yourself up and Leave Insecurity Behind* by Kristin Neff (2011, p. 34).

"For some reason, we are truly convinced that if we criticize ourselves, the criticism will lead to change. If we are harsh, we believe we will end up being kind. If we shame

ourselves, we believe we end up loving ourselves. It has never been true, not for a moment, that shame leads to love. Only love leads to love."

—Geneen Roth (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"What is this self inside us, this silent observer,  
Severe and speechless critic, who can terrorize us  
And urge us to futile activity,  
And in the end, Judge us still more severely,  
For the errors into which his own reproaches drove us?"

—*The Elder Statesman* by T.S. Eliot (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Go back and take care of yourself. Your body needs you, your feelings need you, your perceptions need you. Your suffering needs you to acknowledge it. Go home and be there for all these things."

—Thich Nhat Hanh (Retrieved from [www.befriendingourselves.com](http://www.befriendingourselves.com))

"We cannot change anything until we accept it. Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses."

—Carl Jung, *Modern Man in Search of his Soul* (2001, p. 240)

"We are composed of self-contradictions.  
Each of us is loving in some moments—hateful in others.  
Patient and calm sometimes—harried by urgency at others.  
Understanding—and self-absorbed.  
Reassuring—and sarcastic.  
Generous—and greedy.  
Trusting—and jealous.  
Comforting—and snappish.  
Original—and stuck in a rut.  
Thankful—and needy.  
Forgiving—and vengeful.  
Nurturing ourself—and stuffing ourself with fast food.  
Honoring our bodies—and overstressing.  
Being joyful—and suffering."

—Jonathan Lockwood Huie (Retrieved from [www.jonathanlockwoodhuie.com](http://www.jonathanlockwoodhuie.com))

### *Journalling*

1. What has helped reduce your self-criticism?
2. Name a minor area in which you are self-critical.
3. What is the need behind the self-criticism?

4. What feelings would be left if you were not self-critical?
5. Does your self-criticism sometimes have value or serve a positive purpose? If so, how?

## **Session 9: Handout on wisdom**

### *Inspirational quotes*

"Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

—Albert Einstein (Retrieved from [www.brainyquote.com](http://www.brainyquote.com))

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

—Albert Einstein (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius has its limits."

—Albert Einstein (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"The only source of knowledge is experience."

—Albert Einstein (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination."

—Albert Einstein (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty."

—Albert Einstein (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"For Einstein, insight did not come from logic or mathematics. It came, as it does for artists, from intuition and inspiration. As he told one friend, "When I examine myself and my methods of thought, I come close to the conclusion that the gift of imagination has meant more to me than any talent for absorbing absolute knowledge."

—Michele and Robert Root-Bernstein, *Psychology Today* (Retrieved from [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com))

"Before you speak, think:

Is it necessary?

Is it true?

Is it kind?

Will it hurt anyone?  
Will it improve on the silence?"

—Baba (Retrieved from [www.saidarshan.org](http://www.saidarshan.org))

"One way of putting this is that I feel that I have become more adequate in letting myself become who I am [...] the curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I change."

—Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (1961, p. 17).

"The most precious gift we can offer anyone is our attention."

—Thich Nhat Hahn (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."

—Leo Buscaglia (Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com))

"Wisdom is the reward for a lifetime of listening... when you'd have preferred to talk."

—D. J. Kaufman (Retrieved from [www.worldofquotes.com](http://www.worldofquotes.com))

### *Journalling*

1. Describe a time when you used wisdom to practise self-compassion.
2. How has wisdom helped you make a decision to take care of yourself?
3. During the exercise of group sharing and deep listening, what feelings or resistance came up for you?
4. In what ways has self-compassion enhanced your mental health?
5. In what areas of your life would you like to apply more wisdom and compassion?