**Meditation for Trauma & Anxiety**

Posture – Letting your spine rise from the root of the pelvis. Drawing your chin slightly down and lengthen the back of your neck.

scanning the body and release tension – soften hands and belly

noticing the breath down in the lowest part of the belly….

Noticing the body in relation to gravity – feeling the sensation of the feet touching the ground – the buttocks touching the chair or cushion.

Now imagining an Inner Smile in your belly. With each breath feeling your inner belly smile expanding and alive within you.

Breathing in, feeling the breathing in the belly and the sensations in the feet.

Breathing out, feeling the breath at the nostrils.

repeat

Becoming aware of the Inner Smile in your heart-space. Noticing your breath expanding the smile in your heart, awakening compassionate love and self-love.

Feeling the Inner Smile within every cell of your whole being. Trillions of Inner Smiles glowing golden in synchrony with each other.

This smile yoga is not to cover over anything, but rather to create a space that can hold anything

Bringing to mind a being that it feels easy to extend love toward – friend, parent, teacher, pet

Sense that being’s goodness – what makes that person dear to you

It might be their caring nature or humor

Feel them being close to you, imagining their face and eyes

Taking in their love and kindness

Feeling into how you experience love for this being

Bringing attention to yourself and opening to your own basic goodness

Recalling acts of kindness and the longing for wisdom to benefit all beings

If you find acknowledging your own goodness is difficult, imagine how a person that loves you, sees you

Once you have connected with your basic goodness, dwell in this feeling

With a silent whisper offer yourself phrases of LK

Perhaps placing your hand on your heart

Sensing into the meaning of the phrases

May I be filled with LK, and realize LK as my essence

May I be happy, May I love myself just as I am, May I feel peaceful and safe

May my heart and mind awaken and be free

If you sense any resistance or feelings of not being worthy, feel into your intention to be loving and kind

As you repeat the phrases connecting with the meaning of the words

Allowing awareness to open in all directions – infinitely

In this vast space, sense that your loving presences is holding all beings

Your boundless heart holding all beings

Repeat phrases –

May we all be kind

May we live in peace

May there be peace on earth and everywhere

**Talk – Trauma and the Dharma: Healing and Transformation**

This talk is for everyone whether you have exp trauma or not.

With covid, we are experiencing a kind of collective trauma. All the practices we will explore here are extremely helpful in these times of collective anxiety around the pandemic.

People experiences things like economic stressors, isolation, over work, boredom, being quarantined, worry about being infected or infecting others, struggling with multiple roles, feeling losses around our “old lives”, and grief.

If you have experienced trauma and have begun a healing process, I invite you to begin the process with a therapist. It is important that you have connected with your trauma narrative in some way. It is also impt to titrate your engagement with traumatic stress.

talk will define trauma, and how we can relate to it in our practice. This session we will specifically examine how to relate to the body. The body holds the memory of past traumas and is key to overcoming traumatic stress.

Over the coming weeks we will explore body awareness practices, somatic experiencing, attentional awareness, emotional and nervous system regulation, and self-compassion practices,

Julie Yau – “Trauma, at its core, creates disconnection—a lack of capacity to be fully present with your own being and with others, while distorting your view of the world.”

It is through the healing of trauma, that a deep spiritual awakening can occur. Trauma can make us feel isolated and separate. When we heal and see through it, we begin to feel whole and connected. Lenard Cohen- “it is through the broken places that the light shines through.”

Having said that, meditation and in particular concentration practices can elicit flashbacks or the resurfacing of traumatic experiences. If the flashback of such a painful memory occurs it is appropriate to stop meditating and seek help.

The practices presented here are aimed at meditators with trauma histories, but they can apply to anyone coping with difficult emotions or mind states.

CAMH def –“ Trauma is a term used to describe the challenging emotional consequences that living through a distressing event can have for an individual. Traumatic events can be difficult to define because the same event may be more traumatic for some people than for others. When thoughts and memories of the traumatic event don’t go away or get worse, they may lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which can seriously disrupt a person’s ability to regulate their emotions and maintain healthy relationships.”

can include being the victim of or witness to violence, such as sexual or physical abuse, rape, assault, torture, or military combat. Trauma can also occur following a serious illness or accident. There is also collective trauma where a the trauma experienced by a group of people is experienced personally, for example racism, homophobia. As well, there is evidence of generational trauma – residential schools, physical abuse

With trauma people may experience feelings of powerlessness, low self-esteem, and self-blame. Trauma can also affect the ability to trust, form intimate relationships, and find motivation and meaning in life.

At some point in our lives, we will all experience trauma.

About 60%–75% of individuals in North America experience a traumatic event at some point in their lifetime. About 3% of Canadians experience PTSD. (Mindfulness-based treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder: a review of the treatment literature and neurobiological evidence, Boyd et al.)

Trauma is painful, but it is not necessarily crippling or a disaster requiring a lifetime of therapy

Questions you can ask yourself to determine whether you have experienced some past trauma:

1. Do you have an exaggerated startle response? – hyperarousal of FFF
2. Do you have unexplained body pain i.e. back pain, headaches?
3. Do you have excessive self-judgments
4. Do you have difficulty accessing positive emotions?
5. Do you have distressing dreams?
6. Are you excessively self-critical or engage in self-blame
7. Do you often feel alienated from other people and lonely?

There are a variety of therapies and Pharmacological approaches to trauma. For example, cognitive behavioral treatments have demonstrated efficacy. mindfulness-based approaches such as MBSR and MBCT are being increasingly used. Some have found that DBT and ACT with a focus on mindful acceptance as a primary goal to be useful in the treatment of trauma related problems.

I am not going into all of these therapies and MB interventions, rather I will explore Dharma practice and meditation.

People with trauma symptoms that persist often have a narrow repertoire of responses to aversive internal experiences. This often presents as an increasing use of a variety of avoidant behaviors. Some examples that are commonly observed include efforts to suppress intrusive thoughts, removal of oneself from situations that elicit negative internal experiences, substance use, and emotional numbing. This avoidance is a counterproductive strategy.

there is considerable evidence illustrating the paradoxical effects of avoidance, which can increase the occurrence of intrusive thoughts. What you resist, persists or even amplifies.

The integration of mindfulness skills into exposure therapy can improve effectiveness through increasing the person ability to contact painful memories, thoughts, and feelings without engaging in avoidance strategies.

Research has found that mindful, intentional shifting of attention to the present moment fosters a capacity for attentional control and may lead to reductions in attentional bias to trauma-related stimuli, reduce ruminative tendencies and a nonjudgmental outlook may promote a willingness to approach fear-provoking stimuli, leading to reduced avoidance.

1. attentional control
2. nervous system regulation
3. reduced rumination – relating to thoughts
4. willingness to open – reduced avoidance
5. reduced self-blame and shame

people with traumatic stress tend to have dis-regulation in their nervous system. Hyperarousal FFF and sympathetic nervous system. Helpful to learn way to access parasympathetic NS, which is the calming element in NS – like a brake.

Five practices that we will review.

1. Awareness of Body and Breath
2. Gentle and light Practice
3. Relating to difficult Emotions and trigger taming
4. Relating to Thoughts
5. Learning Self-compassion

Over the next few sessions, we will explore each of these.

**Awareness of Body and Breath**

somatic psychology has recently shown that our bodies hold on to trauma, and trauma can manifest in physical symptoms, such as pain, hormone imbalance, sexual dysfunction, and addiction.

I have turned to teachers such as Reggie Ray and Perter Levine. Practices such as t’chi or hatha yoga can be helpful.

BA helps us connect with our bodies and rewire old patterns.

Body and breath are useful anchors for awareness.

There’s a simile that the Buddha used to teach us how awareness of the body can keep us from being pull out of balance and equanimity when the senses try to pull us away from our “home base” or anchor.

“Imagine six different animals, each one having a favorite food and a favored habitat. In the sutta, the animals are a snake, a crocodile, a bird, a dog, a jackal, and a monkey. These animals are analogous to our six senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, tactile sensations, and thinking) which each have their own domains. When we are not grounded in whole-body awareness, it’s as if the animals (senses) are tethered to each other, but not to any fixed point, so at a given time, the strongest animal, or the hungriest, will yank the others in its desired direction. In this way, our senses distract us and make us forget our intentions. But if the six animals are tethered not only to each other, but to a firm post planted in the ground, then each one will only be able to wander the length of the rope that binds it. In the same way, if we are grounded in whole-body awareness, we’ll be aware of seeing, hearing, etc., but we won’t lose our balance or direction”

Breath awareness (which is a form of body awareness) is especially useful for people that have experienced trauma, who tend to hold their breath as a way of not connecting with the present moment. Holding the breath is an unconscious response to anxiety, and may also be part of the process of dissociating from experience or avoidance.

If one’s trauma is related to breathing, for example, choking or sexual abuse, then the breath is not recommended as an anchor. Use something else like sound or sensations in another part of the body, such as hands or sitting bones touching the cushion or chair, sensation of gravity, the hands touching the legs or each other, and the feet touching the mat, and rotate your attention among these points.

Scan your body for a place that feels relaxed and even a little bit comfortable. Perhaps it is a finger, a toe, or somewhere deep in your body. Focus on that place. Notice what “comfortable” feels like.

Need to learn to read our bodies

Meditation is the laboratory where we tune into our bodies and decondition the trauma – also the place where we can nurture the parasympathetic nervous system which puts the brakes on for the FFF system

reasons to practice body awareness for trauma:

We can tune into the joys of living, beneath the layers of concept. When we practice, we’re opening ourselves to the full experience of being alive, with all the joy that can bring. In the words of the poet Rumi: “Just being sentient and in a body with the sun coming up is a state of rapture.”

The body is always in the present. When we take our attention to body sensations, we’re naturally drawn to the here and now. You can’t feel yesterday or tomorrow, only right now. The body thus is a natural anchor for the practice.

We deal with trauma in the PM not the past or future.

Body awareness has a grounding effect. When we bring awareness to the body, we’re getting down to earth. The body has weight—it offers a good counterbalance to the abstract mind that’s continually churning off into ideas and ruminations. Mindful of the body, we’re bringing our centre of attention downward.

Feeling the groundedness of the body activates the parasympathetic NS.

Since bodily experiences are concrete, they are helpful in developing attentional control and we can more easily work with them. If our body is in discomfort and we try to ignore it, resist it, or ruminate on it, we see how we create additional suffering. We can see concretely how being with the experience of the body, rather than trying to control it or avoid, can lead to more ease and peacefulness. Body awareness re-trains our habit patterns so that we can experience a peace even when things aren’t pleasant.

How to practice

Find a quiet place, if possible and sit comfortably in an upright posture. Relaxed and alter.

Being to notice sensation in the entire body

Notice pleasant and unpleasant sensation and your reaction to this. Are you resisting or allowing

When the mind wanders, gently come back to the body

If the mind feels scattered, try breathing into and out of the body through the top of the head

Try to bring this presence to the body as you move into the day

**Gentle and light Practice**

People with trauma memories may have a tendency to push themselves to extremes, to be driven or overzealous.

If you notice a tendency to practice for hours and override the bodies signals of pain, then stop. You may be worsening the trauma.

People learnt to push through and to persevere. This is what seemed to work and the patterns are well developed. Internal signals may not seem trustworthy or helpful.

The Buddha taught a warrior-style of practice – even said, practice like you hair is on fire. Trauma survivors should probably lighten up on this.

people with trauma seem to always feel that they are not working hard enough and need to try harder. They think they are not progressing because they aren’t doing enough

Try:

Shorter practices

Practices are relaxing

Notice self-critical thoughts

Rest, exercise and eat regularly.

Focus on balance and equanimity rather than effort and progress.

Build in breaks and remember that it’s not a weakness to be kind and gradual.

Start gradually and at the beginning do the practice when things seem settled and relaxed.

Also breakdown in interpersonal communication. Don’t trust or feel safe. always on high alert.

RMT example – 2. Emphasize working on personal, interpersonal, and structural issues, action the world and communication; went slowly and still about ½ of participants had trauma memories arise in class – a more personalized approach necessary

Associations run deep, especially if there is trauma

With trauma proceed slowly and with self-compassion

Titrate the amount we open – over time the mind becomes deconditioned from the associations

**Relating to difficult Emotions**

Offered many MBSR programs to people showing up to learn how to relate to stress in their lives, or perhaps coming to get rid of stress

Saw many people with suppressed trauma.

People had effectively avoided troublesome emotions and mind states

Protective mechanism numbs us from painful feelings, often until something else comes up in our lives, such as the loss of loved one or a job

Emotions are not a problem – natural – problem is how we deal with them

We can either deny emotions or get stuck in them replying them endlessly

Trauma often goes hand-in-hand with fear based emotions

Fear and the FFF response it provokes are natural and necessary

The problem is when it is unnecessarily activated or chronically activated

Saw this with veterans – would constantly brace for an attach

Experienced this after Philippines – standing on beach and helicopter went by and I “hit the dirt” – realized I needed to work with suppressed emotions

Much of our society is centered around avoiding mind states

Rather than numbing or being ever vigilant and overcontrolling we can learn to relate to, and express emotions and learn from them

We need to acknowledge our emotions, rather than suppress

Then we can open and bring awareness to them

Watch our emotions like clouds passing

Third step is expressing emotions – can be healing

Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Jesus quoted as saying, “if you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you”

Ways to express emotions – journaling, drawing, talk with someone about it, hold it in awareness with compassion

**Triggers**

Unfaced trauma sits just below the surface until a trigger comes along

A present moment trigger can feel like the actual past trauma - Often FF is activated

Kosovo children example. Draw a picture of “you”, draw a picture of you with your biggest problem, draw a picture of you with your problem solved.

Tendency is to pull back – practice is to see them for what they are – empty images arising in the mind – no actual power except the power we give them by association

Five stages to trigger taming

1. Being aware that you are triggered. Many times comes without warning and are obvious. Sometimes can be difficult to see. If we have disassociated ourselves from the past trauma then all we might feel is a heaviness in body or dread feeling. Body will tell you
2. Calming mind and body – deep belly breathing brings us back to the PM. Breathing into the lower belly, saying “in” on the in breath and “out” on the outbreath.
3. Disperse the energy by exercising, body shaking, yoga. Shake, rattle and roll – play fast music and shake the body from the feet up. Let go of the shoulders and neck. Close eyes. No comparing mind. Don’t say dance as this brings up associations and judgements. Laughing yoga
4. Reflect on “what just happened” – hold question in awareness without trying to answer it. “what is calling out to be known and felt”?

**Learning Self-Compassion** – Jack K “if your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete”

Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) is the process of combining the skills developed through mindfulness with the emotional practice of self-compassion.

The basic ingredients of MSC are:

- Clearly seeing one’s faults rather than ignoring, distorting or hiding them

Intentional awareness that is non-judgmental and curious. Recognize when you are being hard on yourself and then let it fucking go

- Using the lens of shared humanity

Not alone in suffering or making errors. Something we all go through. We are all interconnected and do not face these difficulties in isolation

- Treating oneself with kindness – notice the harsh inner-critic and the extra suffering that it causes. Embrace yourself as you are. Treat and talk to yourself as you would a good friend.

Chris Germer *“Self-compassion involves the capacity to comfort and soothe ourselves, and to motivate ourselves with encouragement, when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate. Self-compassion is learned in part by connecting with our innate compassion for others, and self-compassion also helps to grow and sustain our compassion for others.”*

allows self-acceptance without rumination

Neff (2003) coined the term ‘over-identification’, which is essentially the process of ruminating on negative or painful experiences and allowing this narrative to dictate our thought processes.

1. Develop an awareness of triggers – not avoiding rather understanding them.
2. Practice Mindfulness – Incorporate a daily mindfulness practice, specifically focused on or around your triggers. Explore what emotions or internal thoughts arise and how you relate to them
3. Explore difficult emotions or thoughts
4. Embrace what you’ve been avoiding – Often we avoid or try to remove negative triggers from our lives. Identify how or when you might be doing this, and accept this as a part of who you are. It’s a self-preservation tactic. Instead, try to allow yourself space to acknowledge and accept what you’ve been avoiding.
5. Be your own best friend – When you do feel negative thoughts of judgment for the self begin to arise again, ask yourself how you would respond to a best friend who thought or felt that way about themselves? Would you be cruel and critical, or kind and compassionate? Apply this to yourself.

Especially important for Survivors of sexual violence – self-blame is painful