

INTRO

I draw on the teachings of the Buddha about conscious, compassionate connection – CCC – to trace another CCC - trajectory of healing from suffering – to be able to move from contention to consenting to contentment. Under those second CCC's are three ways the mind can be in contention with one's self, with another person, or with life. Comparing mind, which tips into complaining, critical mind which tips into contempt, contentious mind itself which tips into conflict. So we'll spend the next three evenings that I'm here exploring comparing mind, critical mind, and contentious mind. Tonight we'll see how comparing mind is at the root of the entire cascade. We'll explore the naturalness, even the benefits of those mental processes of mind but also the inevitable costs in terms of unconscious, uncompassionate, disconnection, suffering. How to use conscious, compassionate connection to move from those states of mind to consenting – awareness, allowing, accepting – to contentment, inner peace and well-being.

COMPARING MIND

We begin with comparing mind, because it's so natural and it has its own positive function – of reflection on our path of healing and awakening. When I compare myself in this moment to myself as I was driving here or myself as I was seeing a patient an hour before that, or myself – how I was or who I was – a week ago compared to now, or a year ago compared to now – I am – I can be – consciously noticing and consciously discerning – am I consciously connected to my own True Nature in this moment? Am I present and aware and open and accepting? Am I recognizing benefits of practice – how I can be less reactive, less contentious today than I was last month or last year. And taking in the good of that as a resource, a reinforcing of faith in practice. If I notice I'm not as present as I would like to be, can I take that awareness as a cue to practice – compassion for myself, how hard it is to be awake and caring in every moment, can I choose to renew my diligence in practice.

When I compare myself to another person, I certainly can trigger envy, jealous, greed, wanting, or perhaps even worse a false superiority or pity – thank goodness I'm not like that. And I can get really caught in that cascade of unconscious, uncompassionate, disconnection which we'll explore more in a moment. But there is also a positive benefit in seeing in another qualities we would like to embody more ourselves. If I talk with someone on the break and I'm touched by their generosity or their kindness, if I meet with a friend and I'm moved by their courage and tenacity in facing a challenging situation for them, if I talk with a colleague and I am reminded by them to be patient and forgiving, I can wisely compare in the moment where I am and where I would more like to be, or in the wisdom of our tradition I can discern where my own Buddha Nature is being obscured and covered over (sometimes by comparing critical or contentious mind) and be reminded of the Buddha nature I would like to more deeply embody, let clearly shine through.

So, comparing mind has its place in the discernment of Wise Effort, noticing and letting go of the unwholesome, noticing and cultivating the wholesome. Becoming itself a tool, at least a cue, to practice.

There's another potential benefit to comparing mind, which is putting things in perspective. I posted an e-newsletter Monday morning about accommodating zebras – taking in new information, new realities, that would shake up our previous views or identities. I mentioned in the posting, as I was writing the newsletter, I kept hearing news of folks who had really big zebras to accommodate – death, loss, illness. And hearing what other people were having to deal with put into perspective my own struggles. And that larger perspective, the proportion of my suffering to the universal human suffering, can definitely open the door to move from contention with whatever is happening to consenting in the sense of It is what it is, to contentment – how I can use practice to deal with it.

We get into trouble with comparing mind in at least four ways:

1. When we get caught in comparing mind, as when we get caught in any mind, we lose the present moment. We lose the awareness and acceptance and the joy of being in the present moment that keeps us steady and that keeps us in conscious, compassionate connection.

My story: I had been in comparing mind when I woke up Monday morning; made some quick notes about losing presence for the talk, went into the shower. So I wasn't in comparing mind as I got in the shower, but I had been, and wasn't fully returned to present. It is my practice to check for insects in the shower before I turn on the water – so I can save them, put them in a cup and take them outside – spiders, daddy-long-legs. Monday morning I checked cursorily but not thoroughly and too late noticed a spider I had drowned it. Immediately felt the remorse of contribution to the death of an innocent being, and then of course immediately felt the poignancy of so many deaths in our world of so many innocent beings. And, this morning, I did catch the cue to practice. I saw the spider, and saved it this time, so my intention to be more present and not in comparing mind paid off.

So, as when we get caught in anything and lose presence of mind, noticing comparing mind is a cue to practice conscious, compassionate connection to come back out, not just into neutral but into full presence and mindfulness again.

- 2) We really get into trouble when we attribute the conclusions of our comparing mind to a fixed sense of self - I am this or they are that, rather than to a natural process of the mind we can consciously, compassionately, work with. We can get caught in self-ing and get confused about what we are supposed to be paying attention to.

So, if I'm comparing myself to another person, and perhaps there are qualities I see in them I would like to see more of in myself, I can mis-attribute those qualities to erroneous conclusions – they are able to be this way because they've been more loved than I have, or had more financial security than I have or they started on this path younger than I did, or they found wiser teachers than I did, and get caught in attributions of self or circumstances rather than opening to practice.

This is where comparing mind begins to tip into complaining mind. We lean into the negative bias of the brain, which we've learned in this sitting group we need to be ever vigilant about and practice practices of wise effort to counter – gratitude, generosity, kindness.

If I see love or joy or confidence in another person, what practices do I need to be more ardent and diligent in to awaken or recover those noble qualities in my self, not simply complain about what I lack or why. What practices of conscious, compassionate connection will plant and water and nourish the seeds of love and joy and confidence (which means with faith) in me?

Biggest lesson I ever had in this was my friend Marilynne meeting her eventual husband just about the same time I began practicing in Sylvia Boorstein's Wednesday morning class at Spirit Rock. Every negative comparison, every greed, envy lack in me got evoked, and it was a struggle as I was beginning to explore waking up and deep caring to apply practices of conscious, compassionate connection to my own circumstances of being single at the time and not wanting to be, to my own perceived suffering

3. As I was in danger of experiencing, we get into further trouble with comparing mind and complaining mind when those mis-attributions and negativity cause us to contract and close down our hearts. We really suffer with comparing mind if, instead of that natural process of the mind becoming a cue to practice we turn away from practice and get caught in greed, hatred and delusion. Our hearts are closed; we're not discerning or learning anything. Of course, there are many cues to practice in the suffering of greed, hatred, and delusion, too, anytime we wake up to them. All is not lost. But we can spend many painful moments of being lost, we can shut down in defensiveness and reactivity for months and years, if we don't wake up to the process of our minds comparing into complaining, critical into contemptuous, contentious into conflictual, and how they lead us into selfing. So, in a moment, we explore apply conscious, compassionate connection to re-open our closed hearts.

4. Another way we get into trouble with comparing mind is we get really confused and disconnected from what is of true value, what is our True nature. We lose our wisdom, our moral compass. This is pushing the envelope on thinking of, if I have this or if I become more like that, I will become happy or loving or content whatever the deep true yearning of the true nature is. We get caught up in false pursuits of false goals, spend endless hours on the internet or sweating over our taxes or dieting or travelling to exotic locations, not that there isn't merit in being inspired by a TED talk or KarmaTube video on the internet, or being financially integrous, or eating healthy food and being grateful to the web of life that sustains us, or cracking open to the sacred by a moment of awe in a beautiful new landscape we've never seen before or a moment of wisdom from a culture we've never been in before. But the merit is in the practice of any of those activities becoming vehicles for conscious, compassionate connection, and the natural process of comparing mind, if not a cue to practice conscious, compassionate connection, can lead to mighty confusion and delusion about what's true and wise.

So one antidote to comparing mind – what comparing mind can cue us to practice - is conscious, compassionate connection. Because conscious, compassionate connection moves us through the inner states of comparing to consenting and contentment. Through consciousness - awareness – clear seeing – wise knowing. Through compassion – allowing accepting embracing. Through re-connection with our own True Nature with the True Nature of others, connecting underneath whatever joys and sorrows we might be comparing our joys and sorrows to - to the vast interconnectedness of being that holds all joy and sorrows as integral to existence.

Conscious, compassionate connection is also the antidote to everything the comparing mind leads to: losing the present moment, getting caught in selfing, closing the heart, pursuing false goals. William James said, The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives. Conscious, compassionate connection is the premier change in attitude we need to change all aspects of our lives. And our relationship to our self, to others, to the world.

We practice conscious, compassionate connection every moment we practice. It just helps me sometimes to say the words to remember what I'm doing when I practice. We stop, we become present, we open to experience in the moment, to experiencing the person we're with in the moment, we open to memories of ourselves and others in other moments as we hold those memories consciously, compassionately in this moment. We become conscious, we notice, we discern, wholesome and unwholesome, we rejoice in the wholesome, take it in, nourish it, celebrate it. We become compassionate for any unwholesome - allowing, accepting, understanding. We re-connect – with deep presence in ourselves, the inner peace and contentment of our own True Nature. We re-connect, even for a brief moment, with the essence of the other, resonating with their true Nature sometimes helping them remember it themselves.

A huge practice opportunity came for me, as I was opening to the dharma and struggling with my best friend getting married and I wasn't, I chose to become a godmother to two different children in two different families. Elijah and Emma are now both 11 ½ so for almost 12 years the focus of the relationships has been the daily practice of conscious, compassionate connection with two amazing emerging beings. Any comparing became the cue to come into presence with them, into accepting with them, with their still radiantly visible true nature, keeping my heart open, focusing on what's true and what's wise, taking in all the nourishing good of what's available right there in those moments of conscious, compassionate connection.

Adyashanti says the greatest compassion, not asking anything to change, changes everything.

We'll do an exercise, in fours this time, so you have a chance to deepen conscious, compassionate connection with more members of our sangha. And then we'll re-group for discussion and inquiry. This may take a bit of scooching around, so find 3 other people to work with. You may sit out the exercise if you wish, of course, and simply sit in a meditative presence, holding the space for the rest of us, move into groups 3 is OK if needed. And then I'll give instructions.

After I give the instructions you can decide who will begin then go around the circle. You'll each have three minutes to

- a) identify a moment of comparing mind, or explore your tendency toward comparing mind in general. One moment will make this exercise easier.
- b) share how this moment or process of comparing mind got you into trouble, losing the present moment, getting caught in selfing, closing your heart, leading to the confusion of false pursuits, or any other suffering of comparing mind you identify and then....

c) how this comparing might have led you into complaining mind and what you noticed then.

d) remember or imagine how a practice of conscious, compassionate connection could help you antidote or re-direct the processing of your mind in that moment of comparing – complaining, at least back to awareness and acceptance of the present moment, but even through consenting to contentment. (That's a lot, I know, that's a daylong.) We'll take three minutes each I'll ring the bell for the next person to share, then we'll regroup.

Discussion