

Centering Meditation

Arrive; let go of day; anchor in breath, this breath, this moment; Let sense of goodness, gratitude, appreciation support your well-being. Feel yourself align with awareness and acceptance; focus your attention on your awareness and your acceptance.

Dharma Talk: Learning to Love Ourselves

The title of the book chapter for this month is the Sweetness of Loving Ourselves. But the title of the live course was Learning to Love Ourselves, and I rejoiced at the emphasis on Learning. Like How We Choose to Be Happy. We can learn to love ourselves in the same way we learn anything.

Learning – like anything else: taking in new info from new experiences, letting new info from new experience change old perceptions, templates, schemas, rules. New learning can simply live side by side old learning – holding contradictory truths about ourselves – new learning can override the old – as when negative thought comes up, replace with a positive thought – new learning can even transform – re-wire – the old, what we'll be learning tonight.

Love – the experience of love is: behaviors and practices and skills that both come from love and lead to love. We skillfully cultivate the conditions that incline the heart to love James: taking care of self, speaking kindly, forgiving confusion that led to unwise or unloving actions.

Not so much changing our self to be more lovable but learning to love the self that is. All the parts or facets of our personal self, conditioned as we have been by our relationships and our life experiences. We'll practice exercises tonight to learn to notice and name parts of ourselves, to hold them in awareness and acceptance and compassion until we can tolerate and embrace and integrate them., but first put all that in a context of Buddhist views of self that we love and let go of, and Western views of loving and letting go of self.

Selves are complicated. The Buddhist view of nature of self is it that is ever-changing, as everything in existence is. That it is transient, not fixed or permanent. The view from modern Western psychology is that a sense of self is built over time through experiences and our responses to our experience. Even before neuroscience illuminated how experience triggers the firing of neurons and the encoding of patterns of response to experience in our neural circuitry, developmental psychologists could see that we move through the world with mental models or templates or schemas of who we are, who others are, and how the world works. Those internal working models gel over time in the rules of how we perceive-process-respond to our experience, how we cope. And that is the platform for what we call personality or identity or self. Fortunately, neuroscience also discovered, and completely validated, neuroplasticity; our brains have the capacity to

grow new neurons, new synaptic connections lifelong, even modify brain structures lifelong, that neuroplasticity is the basis of healing and self-transformation, including self-acceptance and self-love, lifelong.

The Buddhist view of suffering is that getting caught in the grasping or aversion we do to protect our selves, the clinging or avoiding, the fighting or fleeing or freezing we do to protect the self, the self-ing, is what causes suffering – and it does.

The western psychology idea of suffering is that when we get caught or embedded in views and habitual responses to experience that are dysfunctional rather than functional, maladaptive rather than adaptive, too rigid or too chaotic rather than an integrated blend of stable and flexible, we suffer – also true.

In both paradigms a skillful letting go of the self or self-ing, which we were practicing last month, is part of the wise effort of cultivating the wholesome learning to love and anchor in our True Nature, our Buddha Nature, our True Self.

The Buddhist view of self is sometimes – mistakenly, I think – construed as our ego – the self absorption or selfishness of the small self that loses perspective of the deeper – and vaster – True Nature, that loses the inter-connectedness – the dependency and the common life force of consciousness that permeates and informs all of existence, all of our knowing of self, or anything else.

Western psychology holds that maturing that ego functioning – a mature integrated wholeness of self – is necessary for functional living beyond surviving, for thriving, for true resilience and well-being. Ken Wilbur, developed of Integral Psychology, maps out a journey from pre-personal self - inchoate, ungelled - through personal self - our adult functioning - to transpersonal self - the larger vaster non-personal consciousness. We have to come out of chaos or void into self or substance, so that when let go of self, we let go not into a void but into the benevolent emptiness that is the is-ness or such-ness of existence.

Buddhist teachers, especially Western Buddhist teachers shaped themselves by a psychological understanding of the nature of suffering and the liberation from suffering, concede that you have to have a self before you can let go of one. And even that loving one's self, be-friending one's self as in loving kindness practice, is essential to opening the heart to the suffering, and then liberation, of all sentient beings.

Neuropsychology is letting us know that the pre-frontal cortex (the third eye) is somewhat the seat of the sense of the self. It's what regulates the arousal of our body, regulates emotions coursing through our body, quells the fear response. It is what allows us to attune to our self and to others, to have empathy and compassion for our self and others. It's what allows us to have insight – of what the nature of self is, and what the coherent, integrated autobiographical narrative of our personal self is. It's what allows response flexibility so we can pause, see clearly, and choose wisely.

The pre-frontal cortex takes about 25 years to fully mature, which corresponds to the development tasks psychologist identify as necessary to have a gelled sense of self, of identity, of our place in the world, who we might want to share a life journey with, and what we might want to contribute to the betterment of mankind.

All of that is based on the capacities of the pre-frontal cortex to integrate bottom up-top down processing, body – sensations, impulses, movements, with heart – emotions, signals to pay attention, something important is happening here, with mind – cortical awareness, integrate right hemisphere and left hemisphere processing, holistic, body-based emotional based, narrative of self with logical linear language mode of left. Integrate past, present and future into coherent autobiographical narrative, this is what happened to me, this is what I did with it, this is how I turned out; this is what I learned and would do differently. This is who I am becoming, my vision for my future unfolding.

The pre-frontal cortex integrates various states of mind or emotional states or states of being. What Western psychologists call parts or voices or sub-personalities. (Not split off dissociated unintegrated of multiple personality disorder; we do have recognizable, nameable parts like the inner critic or the playful child or the sexy 20 year old or the stable rule follower and bill-payer that relate to each other.) Buddhists would say aspects or facets of mental contents, the third foundation of mindfulness. These parts need to be integrated, known and embrace, so they don't go off like landmines or hijack us out of our true self.

The pre-frontal cortex connects our own self with the self of another; each differentiated and whole, but able to resonate, attune, empathize, have compassion for the other. In enlightened inter-connectedness, recognize self as other.

So a mature pre-frontal cortex is integral to learning to love ourselves, to accept and integrate all parts of ourselves. The PFC develops and matures in relationship with other people other PFC's. There is no other way for that maturing to happen. The foundation is laid in our earliest relationship in our families of origin, and then the PFC continues to mature through relationship with friends, peers, teachers, coaches, partners; That's why we seek out good friends and good partners and good therapists and good teachers. Our brains develops fastest in entire lifetime from 0-3 years of age. In that 0-3 year frame we develop styles of attachment depending on the experience with our mother and father and other close adults that profoundly and robustly shape our sense of self. Without that later learning of True Other to True Self, attachment patterns stay pretty much as is. And the level of maturing in the PFC may be de-railed. I've written and taught about attachment a lot.

Tonight offer an overlay of the conditioning we experience in attachment styles to Buddhist hindrances, the causes and conditions of suffering, which dovetail nicely.

In secure attachment – there is a sense of safety, trust, openness to experience and learning, faith in the benevolence of relationships, a flexible focus on self and other, that

corresponds to the experience of our True Nature we can tap into in calm, inner piece of meditation, a sense of OK ness, acceptance, and contentment about self.

In insecure avoidant attachment there is aversion, pushing away or denial, even hatred of experience, emotions, other people, parts of our selves. Even though there can be a focus on self, self-reliance, there's not a balance of opening to or even considering other people, this aversion or hatred makes it very hard to actually love and accept one's self or to trust others.

In insecure anxious attachment there is clinging grasping, focusing on the other for comfort and meaning rather than a balanced focus on self as well.

And in disorganized attachment, there are moments of helplessness paralysis, confusion, and dissociation that correspond to the experience of delusion in Buddhist thought.

So the four universal styles of attachment, that very largely determine our experience of self and other, overlap completely with the Buddhist sense of True Nature and the three hindrances – greed, hatred, delusion, or grasping, aversion, ignorance.

We'll practice exercises after the break to learn, or re-learn, to love or re-love parts of ourselves that have been split off, denied, avoided. (And we learn to strengthen the pre-frontal cortex to do so.) For it's that be-friending ourselves, be-friending all parts of ourselves, that is at the heart of finding the joy in loving ourselves, and letting our own light shine through. James: previous chapter - let go of told stories and let light of true self shine through. It is Wise Effort, let go of unwholesome, cultivate wholesome. Emerging view in Western psychology – to embrace these old parts at the very best we could do at the time. How we survived to try again another day.

This paradigm illustrated by Rumi's – The Guest House in your Resources.

For now I offer a model of how to hold this complicated work of learning to love ourselves. Nesting dolls. Layers in self and on-self.

- 1) Wounded inner child. This is the realm of parts, facets, aspects, states of ourselves we don't like, even loathe, or are too ashamed of to admit we have or are.
- 2) Adult. Our grown up doing the best it can to navigate the world, with what it has learned about how the world works, how people work, who one's own self is.
- 3) Wiser Self – self-at –best, our wisest, most loving, most compassionate self. We all have a Wiser Self. It is the part of us, for instance, that has kept us interested and passionate about Awakening Joy. What James referred to as a bigger heart, a bigger consciousness offering unconditional love to our wounded parts. A benevolent presence that holds all anger, fear, loneliness.

4) True Nature – universal qualities of kindness, gratitude, joy, generosity, equanimity, qualities that are both the gateway to higher consciousness and the outcome of dissolving self in that experience of higher consciousness that Wise Self is the personal embodiment of. We access this expanded consciousness through Big Mind meditation we did last time. Or the Big Love meditation Patricia Ellsberg did at the course this month, included in your resources. Consciousness can bring into consciousness all that has been held in unconscious.

5) And then higher Consciousness, unborn, undying Beingness. Non-personal, nothingness. Then we learn to open and receive that benevolent presence of love, without deflection, without feeling unworthy.]

The challenge is: the sense of self that we are learning or re-learning to love, develops out of our experiences in our earliest relationships, our patterns of response to our self and to others are conditioned in those relationships. This sense of self is further shaped by other relationships, other family members, peers, friends, teachers, coaches, romantic partners, spouses, therapists.

Depending on how well we experience various facets, aspects, parts of ourselves as seen and accepted and loved and cherished by others, we learn to see and accept and love and cherish those facets and aspects and parts of our selves, too. And if some parts of our selves were not seen and accepted and loved and cherished by others, we find it hard to see and accept and love and cherish those parts of ourselves, too.

It is all those unseen and uncherished parts we are learning or re-learning to love or re-love as part of our Whole Self.

Fortunately, it is always possible to find people who can be True Others to our True Self, friends, partners, spouses, teachers, therapists, someone who for a moment sees our True Buddha Nature and helps us see, experience, embody, express it, too. And always neuroplasticity lifelong to re-wire old views, old names and labels of self into new.

Simple elegant way: Marci Shimoff's ABC's

A awareness – focus attention, be present, open, a simple come into presence, this breath, this moment. Be here now, awareness is the container to hold and love the self

B be with, allowing and holding – my own experience of becoming aware of aspects of my self, parts I like am excited to be with, proud of, other parts conditioning learning to fear or disdain. To allow and hold those parts, and let those parts be present, takes skills. We'll do exercise later to learn how to be with and accept all parts.

C Compassion is what allows us to hold and accept and integrate these parts into ongoing sense of self. It's hard to be a human being! We'll do loving kindness practice to create the conditions for acceptance. Again, if loving self is watershed of spiritual practice, then acceptance of self is watershed of love.

Once there is acceptance, then there can be coming to terms with, embracing, learning the lessons from, forgiveness, integration, wholeness. Forgiveness: see the confusion that led to the act, forgive the confusion. Then ABC aware being with compassion becomes new way of being, loving ourselves becomes gateway to loving others, next month's theme. For it's that be-friending ourselves, be-friending all parts of ourselves, that is at the heart of finding the joy in loving ourselves, and letting our own light shine through.

Experiential Exercises

James said kindness first. It's hard to be a human being! In East, practice loving kindness before mindfulness. Even before we use our minds to cultivate practice of kindness, use body-mind to create experience of kindness.

Experiential Exercise #1: Hand on the Heart

- a. Sit comfortably in your chair; allow your eyes to gently close. Focus your awareness on your breathing, gently in and out. When that's steady, place your own hand on your own heart, feeling the warmth of the touch of your hand on your heart. Breathe gently and deeply into your heart center. Breathe into your heart center any sense of goodness, safety, trust, acceptance, ease, you can muster. You may elaborate this as you wish. Breathing in a sense of contentment, well-being, a sense of kindness for yourself, gratitude for others. Slowly, gently, breathe into your heart qualities of self acceptance and appreciation, even delight.
- b. Once that's steady, call to mind a moment of being with someone who loves you unconditionally, someone you feel completely safe with. This may be a moment with your beloved partner, or a beloved child, or parent, though the dynamics of those relationships can sometimes be complicated and the emotions mixed, so you may choose a moment of being with a dear friend, a trusted teacher, a close colleague or neighbor, a moment when you felt seen and accepted, loved and cherished. You may choose to remember your therapist, your grandmother, a third grade teacher. You may evoke the love of a spiritual figure like Jesus or the Dalai Lama. You may imagine being with a beloved pet. Pets are great, actually.
- c. As you remember feeling safe and loved with this person or pet, see if you can feel the feelings and sensations that come up with that memory in your body. Take a small moment to really savor this feeling of warmth, safety, trust, love in your body. When that feeling is steady, let go of the image and simply bathe in the feeling for 30 seconds.

Experience of love activates release of oxytocin; oxytocin in system evokes feeling of safety and trust, belonging and connection, love and well-being. Practice I would like to see become standard practice Hand on Heart, personal memory or benevolence of sangha here tonight. Let safety and goodness hold all of you're here. Let yourself receive.

I suggest hand on heart. James taught about hand on cheek; his practice for two years.

Experiential Exercise #2: Loving Kindness

Metta or loving kindness practice is the container to re-learn to love. See Sharon Salzberg's book on your resources page. Traditionally, metta phrases are repeated for self, benefactor, dear friend, neutral person, difficult person. Tonight, this month, we focus on wishing well for our selves.

You may gently repeat any of these phrases to yourself as we silently practice metta together:

Metta phrases from James:

May I be happy. May I be peaceful. May I be kind to myself. May I love and accept myself just as I am. May I feel my goodness. May I share my love well.

My metta phrases:

May I know that I am held, safe and secure. May I know that I am loved and cherished. May I know that I am able to trust. May I know that I am able to love others, with understanding, compassion, forgiveness.

Even a simple what do I need for myself right now for my well-being. Use that.

James points out loving kindness includes speaking kindly to one's self. Mind pops up thought; it's how we respond that matters. I was ill a few weeks ago with food poisoning and so I threw up a few times. It occurred to me how much shame poisoning is like food poisoning. The food that was making me ill was not me but it was making me very ill. The shame that poisons my sense of myself is not me, but it sure does make me feel ill. James identified "shoulds" as not very kind to one's self. NVC, should is violent.

Experiential Exercise #3: Seeing Yourself as Others See You

Another exercise from James to generate loving kindness:

Settle comfortably in your seat, allow your eyes to gently close, focus your attention on your breathing, rest comfortably in the simple presence of awareness. When you're ready, let yourself become aware of how you are holding yourself in this moment, are you kind toward yourself? Are you uneasy with yourself? Are you feeling critical of yourself? Just noticing, just awareness and acceptance of what is, without judgment, or if there judgment, noticing that.

Then, when you're ready, bring to mind someone in your life whom you know unconditionally, genuinely loves you. They love and cherish you; your very being feels

safe in their presence. It could be a teacher or dear friend, could be a partner or a child, could be your beloved dog or cat. Could be a spiritual figure – Quan Yin or the Dalai Lama, your own Wiser Self. Someone who simply accepts you as you are, and loves you.

Imagine yourself being with them face to face,. They are looking at you with such acceptance and tenderness, such love, such joy. Feel yourself taking in their love, their acceptance of you.

Now imagine yourself being them, looking at you, looking at yourself through their eyes. You – being them – seeing yourself as they see you. All the love and openness, feel that as them toward yourself.

Now come back to being yourself, you are in your own body again, experiencing them looking at you again, with so much love and acceptance. Feel yourself taking in their love, their acceptance. Let the love deeply into your own being. Feel it in your body; set the intention to remember this feeling any time you need to.

Experiential Exercise #4 to Reflect on Your Good Qualities

James tells the story in the book of a ritual of the Babembe tribe in Africa. Whenever someone commits a crime or harms someone in the village, they are placed standing in the center of a circle of all the villagers. For three days they hear nothing but all that is good about themselves. They are called back to their inner essential goodness. And then it's over; that's the punishment – to hear your goodness from others and recover a sense of it for yourself.

Take the time to reflect on your own good qualities and appreciate the goodness of your own True Nature. As we do this, remember: Mindfulness is the capacity to notice experience we also practice patience and compassion when stuck.

Forgive yourself.

Now is the only time you have to be whole.

Now is the sole moment that exists

To live in the light of your true Self.

Perfection is not a prerequisite

For anything but pain.

Please, oh please,

Don't continue to believe in your disbelief.

This is the day of your awakening.

- Danna Faulds, Go In and In

Mindfulness of this breath, this moment, notice experience, notice names and labels for experience, notice names and labels for your self for having this experience, notice any

parts that are hindrances to the light of your True nature shining through, any blocks, any push away, any grasping, any confusion, notice any shoulds. Aware of, be with, have compassion for.....

Experiential Exercise #5: To Accept All Parts of Ourselves

This guided visualization called the Parts Party, developed by Virginia Satir, allows us to access and integrate various parts of ourselves with understanding and compassion.

When you're ready, you imagine you're outside a theater, a stage theater where they present plays. Imagine the building, the doors, the posters outside. When you're ready, walk up to one of the doors, open it, walk into the lobby; walk on through the lobby to one of the doors into the auditorium, open that door and walk into the empty theater. Walk all the way down to the first or second row and take a set in the center of the row. Now you're seeing an empty stage in front of you. All is quiet.

Now imagine the first figure to come out on the stage is your wise guide, standing in the center where you can see them clearly. Your wise guide may have evolved since you first visualized him or her; that's OK. This is a figure that to you represents wisdom, acceptance, compassion; it may be your Larger Self that you feel completely safe with

Now we're going to imagine other characters on the stage one by one. All of the characters embody a particular quality about your self. So it could be someone you know, yourself at a different age, someone you know from the movies or history or literature, could even be a certain character or an animal.

The first character embodies a quality about your self you really, really like, any quality at all, just something you feel very positive about yourself. Take a moment to let that character on the stage, remember them, perhaps jot them down.

Now a second character comes on stage embodying another positive quality about yourself you really, really like. Take a moment to let that character materialize on the stage, remember them, perhaps jot them down.

Now a third character comes on stage embodying yet another positive quality about yourself that you really, really like. Take a moment to let them materialize, remember them, jot them down.

Now you have three characters on stage that embody qualities about yourself that you really, really like, and your wise guide. Take a moment to remember them all.

Now, you bring a fourth character to the stage that embodies a quality about yourself that you really don't like all that much. In fact, you wish it weren't true, but you know it is. And this character embodying a negative or afflictive quality about you comes on stage; take a moment to materialize this character, remember them, jot them down.

Now you bring on a fifth character that embodies another negative or afflictive quality about you; take a moment to materialize them and remember them, jot them down.

Now you bring on the last character, a sixth character embodying just one more negative or afflictive quality about your self, a quality you don't like very much and wish weren't true but it is. Take a moment to materialize them, remember them, jot them down.

Now you have on stage your wise guide, three characters embodying positive qualities and three characters embodying negative qualities. In your imagination, ask each character in turn, what special gift they bring to you by being part of you. What lesson do you get to learn from them by their being a part of you. Ask each of these characters, the positive ones first, then the negative ones, and listen carefully to what they have to say to you; each one has some wisdom or learning to offer.

Now, in your imagination, briefly thank each of these characters for coming to be with you in this way today.... Have them exit off the stage one by one. When the wise guide is left on the stage, ask your wise guide for any words of wisdom or advice they have for you. Thank your wise guide for their guidance, and then imagine them walking off the stage as well. Then imagine yourself getting up out of your seat, walking to the aisle, walking back up the aisle out of the auditorium, through the lobby and back outside the theater. Turn around to look at the theater where this all happened. Then slowly come to awareness again of sitting in this room, your breathing, and when you're ready, open your eyes.

Experiential Exercise #6: Loving All Parts of Ourselves

Sit comfortably, let yourself settle into presence. Mindful presence, loving presence. Anchor your awareness in our breathing if you wish. When you're ready, call to mind a moment when you felt a lot of care and concern, a lot of empathy and compassion and love for someone: children and pets work great here. Imagine this person or pet sitting in front of you, or even sitting in your lap. Feel the empathy, compassion and love flowing from your body, your heart to them, sitting with you. When the feelings of love and compassion and empathy are steady enough, simply slip a felt sense of yourself into that love stream. You are receiving your own empathy, compassion, love. At any age or level of your psyche that needs to receive it. Let yourself feel the receiving of this empathy, feeling it and taking it in to your own body in imagination. Letting it soothe and comfort you. When you're ready, bring your awareness back to sitting in this room hearing my voice.

Experiential Exercise #7: Letting the Love In

I learned this exercise on a yoga retreat. Identify something about yourself you would like to be appreciated for. Some quality or behavior of yours you know is good and you would like other people to see in you. Then, in turn, we will go around the circle, each person sharing what they want to be appreciated for. The rest of us rub our hands

together to generate some heat, and then “shine” our hands toward the person receiving the appreciation. The receiver simply looks all around the circle, taking in the love and appreciation from everyone in the group. (This is far more powerful to experience than you can imagine until you do it.)

Then we learn to open and receive that benevolent presence of love without deflection without feeling unworthy.

Closing Meditation

May our sincere efforts to learn to love ourselves steady us in a deeper and deeper awareness and acceptance of all of who we are, and may that open our hearts to deeper and deeper joy.

Homework

1. From John Makransky: Receive love from others. Someone smiles at you, opens the door for you, lets you cross at the crosswalk, etc. Receive this benevolence from the universe and receive your deserving it.
2. From Marci Shimoff: Write down 3 qualities you appreciate about yourself, every day for 30 days. Take in this love and appreciation for yourself, no deflection into unworthiness, just true about you in this moment. And...
- 3.....Look into a mirror for one minute every day; say all the things you appreciate about yourself for that day, then (your name) I love you.
4. From Carol Dweck’s research at Stanford:
 - a. praise any specific positive efforts you make
 - b. praise any specific healthy choices you make
 - c. praise yourself for adopting specific strategies that you appreciate.

Resources

Awakening Through Love: Unveiling Our Deepest Goodness by John Makransky.

Non-Violent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg.

Loving Kindness by Sharon Salzberg

Happy For No Reason: 7 Steps to Being Happy from the Inside Out by Marci Shimoff.

Poetry and Quotes

The Guest House

This being human is a guest-house.
 Every morning a new arrival.
 A joy, a depression, a meanness,
 Some momentary awareness come
 As an unexpected visitor.
 Welcome and entertain them all!
 Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
 who violently sweep your house
 empty of its furniture,
 still, treat each guest honorably.
 He may be clearing you
 out for some new delight.
 The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
 meet them at the door laughing,
 and invite them in.
 Be grateful for whoever comes,
 because each has been sent
 as a guide from beyond.

- Rumi

Forgive yourself.
 Now is the only time you have to be whole.
 Now is the sole moment that exists
 To live in the light of your true Self.
 Perfection is not a prerequisite
 For anything but pain.
 Please, oh please,
 Don't continue to believe in your disbelief.
 This is the day of your awakening.

- Danna Faulds, Go In and In

Last night, as I was sleeping,
 I dreamt – marvelous error! -
 that there was a beehive
 here inside my heart.
 and the golden bees
 were making white combs
 and sweet honey
 from my old failures.

- Antonio Machado

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 and fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.

Your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

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 consciously give other people
permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.

- Marianne Williamson
(quoted in Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech)

The belief that we are deficient and unworthy makes it difficult to trust that we are truly loved. Many of us live with an undercurrent of depression or hopelessness about ever feeling close to other people. We fear that if they realize we are boring or stupid, selfish or insecure, they'll reject us. If we're not attractive enough, we may never be loved in an intimate, romantic way. We yearn for an unquestioned experience of belonging, to feel at home with ourselves and others, at ease and fully accepted. But the trance of unworthiness keeps the sweetness of belonging out of reach.

- Tara Brach, PhD

Where did we ever get the crazy idea that in order to make children do better, first we have to make them feel worse? Think of the last time you felt humiliated and treated unfairly. Did you feel like cooperating or doing better?

- Jane Nelson

We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us there is something valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch. Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight or any experience that reveals the human spirit.

- e.e. cummings

I wish they would only take me as I am.
- Vincent Van Gogh

The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.
- Carl Rogers.

Ah, the comfort,
The inexpressible comfort
Of feeling safe with a person.
Having neither to weigh out thoughts
Nor words,
But pouring them all right out, just as they are,
Chaff and grain together;
Certain that a faithful hand
Will take them and sift them;
Keeping what is worth keeping and,
With the breath of kindness,
Blow the rest away.
- Anonymous

The Buddhist teachings are fabulous at simply working with what's happening as your path of awakening, rather than treating your life experiences as some kind of deviation from what is supposed to be happening. The more difficulties you have, in fact, the greater opportunity there is to let them transform you. The difficult things provoke all your irritations and bring your habitual patterns to the surface. And that becomes the moment of truth. You have the choice to launch into the lousy habitual patterns you already have, or to stay with the rawness and discomfort of the situation and let it transform you, on the spot.
- Pema Chodron

You carry in yourself all the obstacles necessary to make your realization perfect. If you discover a very black hole, a thick shadow, be sure there is somewhere in you a great light. It is up to you to know how to use the one to realize the other.
- Sri Auribindo

As we grow more intimate with things as they are, as we grow more intimate with the people around us, we begin to notice the glory of God in each one. It's the Namaste: the God within me greets the God within you.

In my own life, the one place this was the most there for me was when my daughter was born and I looked into her newborn eyes... and I could see straight through into the universe. There was nothing there; all that was there was love, just love.

As we become more open-hearted with one another – and as we see the image of God and the love that is there present in each other – we find the boundaries between us just a

little more diffuse. And it's not just between us; it's between the trees and the grass and all of it. And then I guess your consciousness has been truly transformed.

- David Parks-Ramage