

Spirit Rock Meditation Center

June 9-11, 2107

**Shift Happens: Learning to Bounce Back from
Disappointment, Difficulty, even Disaster**

June 11, 2017

Sunday morning, 9:30am-12:30pm

Reflective Intelligence: Awareness, Acceptance, Action

S-111 photo of contemplative woman

Welcome. Let's settle our energy, settling into the final day of our retreat, by sitting together for five minutes, dropping into a silent peaceful lovingpresence, letting the heart and mind find the peace and ease that is the natural peace and ease of the heart of mind, and stay there quietly for five minutes.

Check-ins, reflections from practice yesterday or last evening.
Small groups of 3, 3 minutes each.

This morning we explore tools to strengthen our reflective intelligence that will help create shift and help us to bounce back from disappointment, difficulty, even disaster.

And, of course, here we are at Spirit Rock, one of the leading meditation centers in the world. What is taught here, in classes, daylongs, residential retreats, is mindfulness, vipassana, insight meditation. And concentration practices, too - loving kindness, compassion. Jane Baraz and I will teach an 8-week Mindful Self-Compassion course here this fall.

Mindfulness, as taught here and other Insight Meditation Centers, is taught as a practice powerful enough to lead to full enlightenment. I have a more modest goal: to apply what we cultivate in our mindfulness practice to tools and exercises to help us create shift. Applied mindfulness to help us strengthen our resilience.

S-112 Mindfulness - 7 steps

If we start with these basic steps of the mindfulness practice:

1. We pause; we become present - coming out of distraction, out of dissociation, out of denial; we show up; we're engaged with the experience of the moment. Tara Brach - loving presence.

We help ourselves out here by focusing our attention on sensations in our body, on the perceptions of the senses - seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting. We focus our awareness on our breathing as a reliable anchor for our awareness.

This focused mode of processing in the brain, this focused attention, strengthens the structures of the brain we use for focused attention - the anterior cingulate cortex, the insula. The self-awareness, the self-reflection, strengthens the functioning of the pre-frontal cortex. It strengthens the guardianship of the pre-frontal cortex; strengthening the capacity to choose what we will focus our attention on.

2. We notice and name our experience. I've been taught here to put 50% of our attention on this noticing and naming. Don't get too caught up in the naming; don't go chasing - is it this or is it that? But noticing and naming activates the language centers of the brain, ensuring that our higher conscious brain is online.

One thing we can do is notice and name more complex objects of awareness, which we will do in a moment, strengthening the capacity of our awareness to hold any object of awareness. Important when we want to be aware without being reactive.

3. We step back, dis-entangle from the experience, and reflect on it, cultivating a witness awareness, noticing the witness awareness that is separate from what it is witnessing. Observer separate from what is being observed. Knower separate from what is known.

You may be familiar with the practice taught here of RAIN: to recognize what is happening, to allow or accept what is happening, to inquire into or investigate what is happening, and then to non-identify or let go of it. That is this step. The importance is that mindfulness can hold anything.

Mammogram story - a story to illustrate this.

One day I was meditating in my office on a break between clients, but because I was in my office I had I left the phone on, and when it rang, I answered it. My doctor was calling to say there was an abnormality in my most recent mammogram; would I schedule an appointment to come in and have another x-ray?

My anxiety went right through the roof. All the stories about friends' courses of cancer treatment started rushing through my head. But because I had been meditating and had come into a state of calm awareness before the phone rang, I could clearly see my own anxiety go through the roof, see clearly that it was going through the roof, schedule the appointment for the second mammogram (which turned out to be normal), and return to my meditating, now with a different object of awareness but still held in awareness, aware of being aware.

4. We can then, if we choose, monitor our reactions to experience and modify them. We can begin to make choices about how to respond to this experience.

Mindfulness teachers, and mindful self-compassion teachers, teach us to be with our experience without necessarily trying to change it or fix it. To be with it and accept it rather than trying to resist or repress it.

Ironically, as we're learning more and more from the neuroscience, it is being with the experience and accepting it that shifts it! We've been practicing that on this retreat. The being with is what opens the functioning of the brain to receptivity rather than reactivity, to choices rather than contraction. And the brain can choose to let go, inquire and then let go, choose to shift the experience and let that create the letting go. The mindfulness or mindful self-compassion don't fix the problem, but they do create the openness in the mind from which we can solve the problem.

5. We practice shifting our perspectives, we practice even knowing that we have a perspective. That we have a view, a lens, a filter to our perceptions of our experience. And this step is where mindfulness gets applied to making a choice. Shit happens. Shift happens, too. And we begin intentionally, consciously creating shift.

6. This allows us to truly discern options and even the potential consequences of our options.

7. Then we can indeed choose wisely - we can let go of the unwholesome and cultivate the wholesome, shaping the brain in a direction that is wise and wholesome, as Richie Davidson says.

So, going back.

S-113 Q JKZ add allowing....

Jon Kabat-Zinn, developer of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, gave us this definition of mindfulness 35 years ago as mindfulness was being brought by Western teachers from the East to the West:

Focused attention on present moment experience without judgment or resistance.

Other teachers, Tara Brach, Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer, have added phrases like with allowing and curiosity.

I use this trajectory: noticing, allowing, tolerating, accepting, embracing, honoring, because that is how mindfulness is applied to post-traumatic growth, which we will explore after the break.

S-114 Noticing more complex objects of awareness

The importance of noticing more complex objects of awareness is to notice content as content, the object of the awareness, no matter how complex, so that we can notice our awareness of the content so we can notice our awareness of Awareness. Eventually resting in the Awareness that can hold any content.

We did practice noticing **Sensations** Friday afternoon in Somatic Intelligence - using the exercises of new conditioning and focused attention - affectionate breathing and soles of the feet - to bring an awareness to the felt sense of our embodied experience. We can practice a sense and savor walk today at lunch; carefully noticing whatever we notice as we walk along a path or trail, or walk through the meadow or through the woods. Notice what our senses notice - seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, even tasting.

Emotions - we did practice noticing the flow and shift of emotions yesterday morning in Emotional Intelligence.

Guy Armstrong, a senior teacher here at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, tells of a time when he was having great difficulty settling into a long, silent meditation retreat at Barre. Restless and agitated, he could finally notice and name what he was experiencing: "Oh, despair!" As soon as he could name the despair, he was no longer embedded in it; he could observe it and begin to let it be, let it naturally unfold, and then let it go. Any time we can notice and name the experience of the moment, we have reengaged our prefrontal cortex. In Guy's case, noticing

and naming allowed him to reflect and come to resolution without feeling caught or trapped.

We can also choose to use and focus on positive emotions to shift the functioning of the brain to a broader, larger, more reflective perspective again.

And we reflect on **Cascades of emotions** - as I had to do when I stepped into the sidewalk of wet cement

For example, we notice that we react to a tickle in the throat by assuming that a cold is coming on, which might mean missing work, which might mean losing our job, which might turn into a financial disaster for the family.. These dreaded outcomes are not always inevitable or even knowable, and jumping to conclusions about them makes us less resilient. When we can become aware of patterns of thinking that lead us in the direction of less resilience, we can begin to identify choice points where we might actually be able to identify and choose alternative options.

S-115 Noticing shifts in patterns of response

As we become more comfortable with focusing our awareness on the sensations in our body and the emotions running through our mind and heart, we can become less afraid of and more

interested in the meaning of those sensations and those emotions and those thought patterns.

I can use a guided visualization like the one I learned from Stuart Eisendrath, who studies mindfulness and depression at the University of California, San Francisco medical school to help us recondition patterns of responding to the meaning of life events. It simply uses our mindfulness - our pausing and becoming present, noticing and naming our experience, so that we can step back from our experience and reflect on it, so that we can notice patterns of response to connection and disconnection in relationship that might be quite unconscious and automatic, we can bring those patterns to consciousness so that we can monitor and modify them, discerning new options and making wise choices about how to respond.

1. Imagine you're walking down the sidewalk of a busy street in your neighborhood. You notice a friend walking toward you on the other side. You wave and call out "Hello!" but the friend does not respond. Notice your own split-second reaction to that lack of response: a contraction in your body, a drop in energy. Notice whatever thoughts might begin to cascade in response to your body's reaction. Maybe you think, "Hmm, that's unusual. I'd better try again." Or, "Whew! He has a lot on his mind. I wonder if I should even bother him?" Notice any reactivity to those thoughts. "Gee, he seems a little stuck up today." Or "Oh, no! What have I done wrong?" Notice whether your thoughts follow a pattern that you have noticed before, such as feeling badly about yourself or wanting to reach out even more.

2. Now imagine that your friend sees you and, on his own, waves and calls out “Hello!” to you. Again, notice your own split-second reaction in your body to his connecting with you: maybe a smile, an uplift of energy. Bring awareness to any shifts in your body, notice any shifts in your thoughts: “He noticed me!” Or “I’m glad we weren’t disconnected after all.” As you reflect on your experience, notice whether your thoughts follow a pattern that you have also noticed before, perhaps of relief or gratitude.

3. Take a moment to name the reactions and the patterns you discovered, with compassion for any reactions that may have been triggered by the noticing. With every moment of practice in noticing and naming, you are strengthening your prefrontal cortex. And by pausing to do this, you are conditioning your brain to create choice points, giving yourself the chance to respond with more flexibility and choose a different response the next time.

**S-116 Anything is a Cue to Practice:
Interrupt Automaticity**

Here’s another tool of applied mindfulness to begin to create shift when we notice automatic patterns of thought arising. We use the pattern itself as a cue to interrupt its automaticity and rewire the brain in a different direction.

1. Identify a habitual negative reaction—impatience, boredom, startle, temper, rejection—that you would like to use as a cue to practice rewiring your brain.

2. Identify the new response you would like to substitute: allowing, exploring something new, calming down, pausing to reflect, seeing the good.

3. Identify a positive code word or phrase you will use to break the circuit and cue yourself to change the channel in your brain: “Allow,” “Explore,” “It’s okay,” “Pause,” “What’s the good here?” The choice of words is up to you: what’s important is to use the cue as soon as you identify the trigger, to prevent yourself from falling into your old, conditioned reaction. You may choose a word that already brings to mind a state of resilience or well-being if you have one: “Love,” “Learn,” “Breathe,” “Slow down,” or “Open.” Practice saying your cue word to themselves while you’re in that actual state so that your brain conditions itself to shift to that state when it registers the cue.

My example, critical - critical-bitical-ditical

And singing my anti-stress-while-driving song.

4. Each time the trigger arises, practice the new pattern of response: say your cue word and shift to the state you've chosen as the new experience (for example, a genuine kindness) as many times as you need to for the new pattern to become the new habit.

5. Notice as the old pattern fades away into the background and the new pattern becomes more automatic. You have created shift; you have conditioned new learning in your brain, and you have learned that you can do so. Take in the sense of success and mastery as they experience the actual rewiring in your brain.

S-117 photo of contemplative woman
States of Mind, States of Being

Then we practice noticing more complex states of mind, states of being.

Story me on retreat, broccoli snit, jhana, awareness

I help people practice mindfulness of states of being through this written exercise.

S-118 Five States of Being

- Lonely, discouraged, down
- Friendly, warm-hearted, generous in spirit
- Tense, agitated, frazzled
- Thoughtful, contemplative, in a reverie
- Hostile, jealous, resentful
 - Identify five states
 - Identify conditions that trigger these states
 - Identify tools you can use to shift these states;
practice to interrupt automaticity

Five minutes written reflection; share in groups of three, 3 minutes each.

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

S-119 I

I walk down the street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk

I fall in.

I am lost...I am helpless

It isn't my fault.

It takes me forever to find a way out.

S-120 II

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I pretend I don't see it.

I fall in again.

I can't believe I'm in the same place

But, it isn't my fault.

It still takes a long time to get out.

S-121 III

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I see it is there.

I still fall in...it's a habit

My eyes are open,

I know where I am.

It is my fault.

I get out immediately.

S-122 IV

I walk down the same street
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.

-Portia Nelson

S-123 photo of woman meditating

For the last exercise before the break, we'll shift to the **default mode of processing** in the brain and use the more open, spacious awareness mode of mindfulness to create new insights that can build more resilience.

Just as in psychotherapy I help clients strengthen a sense of self - authentic and autonomous - that can be aware and accepting of experience, of themselves and take wise action to perceive, allow, reflect, and respond to experience, I also know there is

tremendous value in being able to let go of that sense of self, as least not be so caught in it, not take it so personally,

With mindfulness, we begin to notice that all experience unfolds moment by moment. We notice our how breathing changes: inhalation, exhalation, quick or slow, deep or shallow. Our mood changes over longer periods. Maybe I felt hunky-dory two hours ago, but now the job of fixing a leaky faucet has turned into a major and expensive re-plumbing of the entire house, and I'm starting to feel deeply worried and unsure of what to do. Or maybe this morning I was so annoyed with my nephew that I wanted to ship him off to Australia, but now, watching him build an airport out of Lego blocks, I can't even remember what the fuss was about.

As we mindfully focus on our experiences in the moment, we realize that it is in the nature of all experience to change: this too shall pass. That insight into the impermanence of all experience helps us to begin to unpack what's actually happening, to see clearly all the elements contributing to the situation and understand how they, too, are changing, no matter how inescapable or compelling the experience feels to us in the moment. Mindful awareness—observing and reflecting—allows us to step back from the experience of the moment and observe it from a larger field of awareness *that is not any of those experiences*, that is larger than any of those patterns. With that awareness, we can begin to see different possibilities of responding.

S-124 How Mindfulness Dissolves the “Stuff” of Self

With steady practice, mindfulness begins to penetrate the “substance” of our personal self, much as modern physics has been able to understand the substance of any material object. We now know that there is far more space between atoms, and particles of atoms, than there is “stuff,” or matter. There is a vast spaciousness in the densest of matter, paralleling the vast spaciousness between the stars in the galaxies.

Similarly, the practice of mindfulness allows us to experience a spaciousness between the thoughts, judgments, and reactivities of the self and to experience the possibility of flow. As the functioning of our brain shifts from an intentional focus on stuff to a receptive awareness of the space between the stuff, we begin to experience a flow among the many parts that make up what we identify as the self. Instead of a self as a noun, an object with defined perimeters, we begin to see it as a verb, a process of continual change.

With a more fluid understanding of the self, we relax into an experience of openness, clarity, and calm. With practice in mindfulness, this can happen within a breath or two. Even though we have penetrated through the layers of “stuff” to the space that holds the stuff, a kind of emptiness or nothingness, the subjective experience is often more of an all-embracing awareness of everything, a sense of abundance. This new object

of our awareness—*nonself*—is called *true nature* in the Buddhist tradition or *presence* or *essence* in other traditions. It is a universal phenomenon of being human, no matter how much our conditioning might obscure it

This true nature feels like home. We feel centered, balanced, at peace, whole, and complete. The qualities that people have identified as the expressions of this true nature—trust, equanimity, energy, integrity, and generosity, to name a few—are the qualities we come to recognize as constituting the *true self*.

In meditation not focused concentrated practice like cultivating loving kindness or compassion but opening to open spacious awareness like vast sky with clouds blowing through.

Neuroscience of this state, open space awareness, is in its infancy. While the patterns of neural firing that generate this subjective experience of true nature have not yet been fully mapped by neuroscientists, - called the hard problem of consciousness - the experience itself has been verified by millions of individual practitioners over thousands of years.

S-125 Breathing into Infinity

But I can lead you in an exercise that I have found very safe and very reliable in helping clients experience awareness expand and

the sense of self simply fall away, at least for the moment. They rest in a peaceful, spacious awareness, and awareness of awareness.

1. Sit comfortably. Allow your eyes to gently close. Focus your awareness on your breathing, gently in and out. As you follow your breathing, notice your own awareness of your breathing, the awareness that allows you to know that you are breathing.

2. When that awareness of your breathing is steady, begin to notice the breathing of any people around you, or people you imagine being around you. There's no need to do anything; just notice or imagine other people breathing as you are breathing, and notice your awareness of that. Notice what you are aware of in your own being as you rest in this awareness.

3. Staying anchored in an awareness of your own breathing, expand your awareness of breathing to include the breathing of more people you know, who are not necessarily physically near you. Notice your awareness of your awareness of everyone breathing. Notice your awareness of your own being as you remain aware.

4. Still anchored in an awareness of your own breathing, expand your awareness further to include people you don't know, outside the building you are in, perhaps elsewhere in the neighborhood, throughout the city, across the region. Become

aware of all of them breathing together. Notice your awareness of your awareness: you are simply being, being aware.

5. Continue to expand your awareness to include people all over the country, all over the planet, all breathing. Expand your awareness to include all living creatures breathing in the parks, the forests, underground, in the lakes and rivers, in the oceans, the sky, of all sentient beings breathing together. Notice your awareness of your awareness of existence, and your awareness of simply being.

6. Expand your awareness to include all forms of existence, some breathing, some not – the air, the water, the rocks.. And notice your awareness of your awareness of the breathing, and your awareness of simply being.

7. Expand your awareness beyond our planet to other planets, other stars, other galaxies, and the space between the planets and stars and galaxies. Expand your awareness as far as you can possibly imagine; notice your awareness of your awareness expanding. Rest comfortably, safely, in this vast spacious awareness, in this vast simply being, for as long as you choose. Take your time.

8. Gently bring your awareness back to your awareness of sitting in the room you are in, in this moment, breathing. Focus your awareness on simply breathing. Take a moment to shift gears

and reflect more fully on your experience of simply being. You may experience a lightness, a spaciousness, or an openness in your being.

We can toggle back and forth between the focused mode of attention - we are paying attention to our experience, noticing, naming, stepping back and reflecting, shifting our responses to an experience, choosing to harness the brain's neuroplasticity to rewire old patterns of response - and this more spacious awareness that simply lets us rest in awareness our own goodness.

My friend Andy Dreitcer, professor of theology at Claremont School of Theology, says, I take it all seriously, and hold it all lightly.

S-126 Belly Botany

You can practice this shift in perspective any time you're out in nature. Plenty of opportunity to do this here at Spirit Rock on a break or at lunch.

- Select a one square foot patch of earth. Observe patch from two feet away/above for two minutes.
 - (light and shadow, movement and stillness, beauty and decay, life and death)

- Shift your view to the larger landscape, all the way to the horizon.
- Reflect on shift in perspective.

BREAK

S-127 Resilience and Post-Traumatic Growth

Focus on post-traumatic growth because focus on growth.

More than resilience, more than coping, surviving, getting back to baseline. When some life altering, life shattering event happens, no getting back to baseline. When a catastrophic tragedy happens, our world is completely upheaved, our sense of how the world is supposed to work is shattered, need specific tools to help us not only cope with potential trauma but actually develop strengths, resources, connections with other, that allow us to recover, even learn and grow and thrive and flourish.

new science of post-traumatic growth, pioneered by Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun at the University of North Carolina - Charlotte.

That while 75% of all Americans will experience at least one potentially traumatizing event in their lifetimes, only 8% will developed full-blown PTSD - the seemingly intractable symptoms of hyperarousal - flashbacks, nightmares, or hypo-

arousal - numbing out, withdrawal and isolation, depression. They found that more than half of all people experiencing at least one potentially traumatizing event will fully recover, *fully recover*, meaning they have

S-128 Post-Traumatic Growth

- New personal strengths
- New opportunities and possibilities
- Deeper sense of meaning and purpose
- Deeper relationships, intimate and community
- Greater appreciation for life *because* of process of recovery, not in spite of it

Tedeschi and Calhoun found that even among people who survived a plane crash, or lost a child in a car accident, or were detained in a prisoner of war camp or a refugee camp, people whose lives were completely upheaved by losing a limb or by losing their financial security, many such people could still move through the trauma, could find a new perspective in their lives, and choose to create changes in their lives that not only overcame the trauma but set the course of their life in a completely new direction.

Trauma is a fact of life. It doesn't have to be a life sentence.

- Peter Levine, developer of Somatic Experiencing trauma therapy

Post-Traumatic Growth

Now I want to introduce the factors that contribute to post-traumatic growth and some tools to strengthen the capacities to learn from and transform our lives after the trauma, not just in spite of the trauma we experience, but even learning-growing-thriving-flourishing because of it.

S-129 Factors that Predict Post-Traumatic Growth

- Acceptance of reality and consequences
- Resourcing with people
- Recognizing the positive
- Coherent narrative
- Appreciation for new life because of trauma, not just in spite of it

We'll go over each of these one by one.

S-130 Acceptance of reality

This happened. Never should have. Not fair. The consequences are devastating and recovery could take years.

We wake up to “bad things happen to good people.” That we cannot do enough or be good enough to protect ourselves nor our loved one from the possibility, even the likelihood, of tragedy, trouble, even trauma.

Researchers have found that it can be particularly difficult for Americans to not only have their lives blown apart by the truly awful, but to have their world view of how the world is supposed to work blown apart - if you work hard enough and follow the rules and take care to take care, you should be able to avoid or prevent bad things happening to you or your loved ones, and that's not what's true. That's part of why the results of the presidential elections and the ongoing aftermath of that election have been so devastating to so many people.

Be willing to have it so. Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune. – William James, founder of American psychology

Accepting this is the new reality is considered a significant predictor of how well people will cope with trauma. Mindfulness and self-compassion practices can be very helpful here.

S-131 Resourcing with people

Resourcing with people who understand the reality of the tragedy and who deeply believe in the reality of recovery.

When a person is struggling to keep their head above water, it's very important that they are held in a safety net of support of people who believe in their recovery, because very often it's difficult for the person to believe in their own recovery, to see the light at the end of a very long and dark tunnel.

And it can sometimes be difficult for a person to receive that support. "I'm fine!" is a way of coping, and people can cope that way, or try to cope that way, for years. So the trauma remains compartmentalized, unresolved, and the potential learning and growth never gets to happen.

So it's very important that the person be offered help and support from family and friends in therapy that they are encouraged and helped to receive that support, and that they be protected from people who are also saying "You're fine, move on!" Or who doubt the person's capacities to recover or doubt the process of recovery.

So, physical, logistical, financial support are all very necessary and helpful, but it's the strength and abundance of relational

resources that's key; therapy and group therapy can be very helpful here.

Several different phases to this.

1) First is people as refuge; resources of safety and protection. People who love us, care about us, believe in our resilience and recovery and growth. But who don't need anything from us, don't need us to be a certain way or move at a certain pace. They allow us and support us in being with whatever we need to be aware of, be with, and accept. Compassionate companion.

2) Then people as support, even resource. Here I'm focusing on sharing your story; telling other people what has happened, how you are coping and feeling received, understood, supported in their listening. Why support groups can be so helpful. Don't have to explain or defend anything.

Resourcing with people can include participating in a community of shared trauma. It can be so helpful to receive help and support from people who have experienced the same trauma or similar trauma - and group therapy can be very helpful here - a cancer support group, an Alzheimer's caregiver support group, a group for parents who have lost a child to violence, illness, or natural disaster.

Being able to share the story and hear other peoples' stories, without having to explain or defend or justify anything, can be very normalizing and regulating. The experience of common humanity can be very healing. The client gets actual tangible support in moving from a victim stance to an empowered agentic stance. Receiving the understanding, help and support of others in the group can be very powerful, offering understanding, help and support to others can be even more powerful in recovering a sense of choice and mastery.

It is important to remember the sage advice of Brene Brown, author of *Rising Strong* and *Daring Greatly*. "Share your story with people who have earned the right to hear it."

Sharing finding courage in hard times.

Take a moment now to silently remember a time when you found the courage to meet and deal with something scary, difficult, potentially overwhelming. Take a moment to reflect, and then you'll do a written reflection, but for now an inward inquiry, when have I found courage in dark times? Specific times, specific moments. Not necessarily how I did that, though it could be, but when. Finding previous moments of courage in your own life journey.

Moment to reflect.

Three minutes to write.

Share in groups of three. Three minutes each sharing, listening, going around again reflecting, what was it like to share your story, hear the other person's story.

Large group de-briefing.

3) Then sharing our story with a larger audience and experiencing that when people hear our story and validate our experience, even learn from our experience of coping, recovery and growth, we get to feel more competent in this journey toward post-traumatic growth. Speaking to groups, get to explain. Strengthens sense of competence, mastery, efficacy. I am coping, I am growing and learning, I can change in real and significant ways.

This resourcing with other people is an important transition from needing a refuge, a place to retreat and re-group to feeling understood and support and accepted to re-engaging in the world, becoming a contributing member to the large society again with whatever we have learned from our particular trauma and our particular journey of coping with it.

S-132 Recognizing the positive

It may seem completely counter-intuitive at first to encourage clients to find positive moments in the midst of a catastrophe, and we certainly don't do that to avoid being with and empathizing with the fear, the grief, the agony of the experience. But finding moments of respite, in a warm cup of coffee, in the smile of a friend, in playing with a puppy, are essential to shift the functioning of the brain out of contraction, reactivity and rumination, into possibilities and a larger perspective.

Cultivating positive emotions and taking in the good can be very helpful here. A temporary respite from unbearable uncertainty, fear, grief. Finding a space to breathe and re-group in the midst of a very difficult effort.

This step of recognizing the positive can include practices of **skillful distraction**. When thoughts, feelings, and sensations begin to seem unworkable, one tool that is invaluable and often undervalued is that of skillful distraction - being able to shift the focus of attention, switch the channel, not distracting into denial or dissociation. Watch a favorite TV show, or cook a good meal, or work out at the gym.

Skillful distraction is a skill, and when we are mindful, wisely discerning whether indeed we are creating a refuge or going into denial, which could be a form of refuge, could be skillful sometimes, we are using that time of refuge to re-settle our molecules, to re-group and re-emerge to fight the good fight again. shift our focus of attention and their physical energy - do

something different, move in a different way, and when we feel settled and grounded again, then we can return to exploring the difficult feeling or memory.

Returning to resourcing with the positive; one excellent way to bring brain and sense of self out of contraction, reactivity, negativity bias of brain, which the traumatizing event may have triggered big time, is a practice of gratitude. Gratitude is taught a lot in the Buddhist tradition, in programs like James Baraz's Awakening Joy, as part of Rick Hanson's Foundations of Well-Being program or Greater Good Science Center's Science of a Meaningful Life.

Here we use a gratitude practice to begin to identify one past event that triggered a trauma response in us at the time, we can go back now and find something in the event, or in the recovery from the event, to be grateful for.

Again, this is not to be pie in the sky or Pollyana, never to minimize or push away the real misery and confusion or impact of the trauma event. We are aware, we accept, we are resourcing. But the new meaning, new purpose, that is the hallmark of post-traumatic growth may hinge on our developing our capacity to find the gift in the mistake, turning a regrettable moment into a teachable moment, as the neuroscience writer Jonah Lehrer said in his book *Imagine*.

Exercise - written reflection. One-two sentences about the event; that's all; most of your writing on what you learned from the event or from recovering from the event. How you changed because of it. What the silver lining of the event was or the process of recovering from the event was.

3-4 minutes

Then groups of 3; not share event; sharing the learning, the gift. Then around again sharing what it was like to share your process in this journey of recovery from trauma to post-traumatic growth.

Large group de-briefing.

S-133 Coherent Narrative

These first three factors help us reframe the entire event, or series of events, or a lifetime of events into what's known in trauma therapy as a coherent narrative. The life story that includes the trauma as part of the story, but the trauma is not the whole story. When a person can come to a new larger sense of identity and purpose that includes the trauma but is not entirely defined by the trauma, then the trauma can take its place in the story without determining the rest of the story. We will do the coherent narrative exercise in just a moment.

Stephen Joseph, psychologist at the University of Nottingham, says:

The ability to abandon the old assumptive self or narrative and to develop a new one is at the heart of the process that can result in post-traumatic growth. People are always telling themselves stories; it is how we make sense of the significance of what has happened to us. In the wake of trauma, people are often telling themselves stories of mental defeat and hopelessness. And they need to be in a position to begin reframing their story, as one that looks to the future and begins to view things in a beneficial way.

And the other from Rachel Yehuda, director of the Traumatic Stress Studies Division, Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

Trauma causes changes. There are a lot of opinions out there about how that change manifests, but you just don't stay the same. That is a really radical idea. You do recover in some ways, but that recovery doesn't actually involve returning to the baseline. It involves recalibration towards something new. PTSD is a way of describing that in a very negative light, and post-traumatic growth is a way of describing that in a very positive light.

Journaling for Post-Traumatic Growth

What can help us move through all of these five factors and integrate the work of rewiring their brain for all four intelligences in the use of writing the coherent narrative, which is a **deconditioning exercise for Reflective Intelligence**.

James Pennebaker, chair of the psychology department at the University of Texas-Austin, found that reflecting through journaling can be a very effective way for people to make sense of their story. The brain processes information and experience differently when we are remembering or imagining an experience from when we are talking with another person about the experience from when we are writing about the experience. Writing requires processing in the higher brain, the left hemisphere of the brain, the verbal, sequential, symbolic centers of the brain. So when we write about our experiences, we are actually creating a little distance between ourselves and the experience. We activate our observing ego or witness awareness and can be less caught in the emotional turmoil of the experience.

S-134 Coherent Narrative

The Coherent Narrative is an exercise to help people rewrite the story of the trauma and thus their story of themselves. Let go of stories that are not helpful, skillful, resourceful, that keep people caught in the feelings or the beliefs about the trauma or because of the trauma, and create a narrative of their life that integrates the trauma into the life story.

Coherent narrative is a big tool. It may take a long time to do this reflection and write the narrative. It can be done many times.

Here today please follow the format in your handout.

Identify one event you want to work with. I do strongly suggest this is an event that you did cope with, processed and learned from. It's in the past. Important to work with something not much risk of being re-triggered. This is not trauma therapy retreat; stay with as much as you can safely work with so you can get the benefit of the exercise.

You see the prompts.

This is what happened; these were the consequences.

Again, mindfulness and self-compassion to be able to come to that observer awareness and acceptance and relate to the event somewhat objectively rather than caught in the trauma response.

These were the resources, practices, tools and coping strategies I used at the time.

Honest awareness and acceptance, so no shame-blame.
Also recovering strengths and resources we did have at the time.

These are the resources, etc. I would use now if I could do this over.

Because there has been new growth and new learning. This step integrates that learning.

These were the lessons I learned, growth I experienced, positive meanings I found.

Taking time with this because this IS the turning point of post-traumatic growth.

This is what I now appreciate because of the event.

Post-traumatic growth is more than coping, it is learning, redeeming, thriving. This step make take some time also. But is the hallmark of fully recovering from trauma.

1) just sit and reflect on prompts. No right or wrong answer, no answers. Just using default network of brain, memory, imagination, intuition.

2) take 7-10 minutes, written reflection on all of these prompts.

3) small groups of three; not the event but the process of writing the narrative

S-135 Appreciating the New Life *Because* of the Trauma

The final factor is appreciating that a new reality, life as it is now, might not have emerged at all if it weren't for the trauma, life lessons learned, the life's lessons lived, in new work, new relationships, a deeper sense of meaning and purpose with bows to the trauma and the recovery from the trauma that brought the person to the other side of the trauma, to a new day.

Positing this possibility is a huge shift in perspective in the trauma field - that suffering and overcoming suffering could have a redemptive purpose.

As Richard Tedeschi, pioneering researcher in post-traumatic growth says:

Because there is no returning to baseline for people whose worlds have been upended by trauma, a traumatic event is not simply a hardship to be overcome. The trauma becomes a dividing line in people's lives. It can catalyze deep transformation. People do more than survive; they become wise.

- Richard Tedeschi

And to quote Michaela Haas in *Bouncing Forward: Transforming Bad Breaks into Breakthroughs*:

Post-traumatic stress is a catalyst for the emotional growth. The worst has happened, and we are changed. Let's face it. Few of us live our best and kindest lives. Most of us hurtle along, propelled by bills and responsibilities, somewhat impervious to our true potential. A breakdown also breaks down the musts and should-haves that ruled our daily routines, along with life as we knew it. Temporarily suspended in a vacuum, we can recalibrate, and maybe for the first time, tune into what truly matters.

It's the process of re-building and re-discovering who you are in a world where "bad things happen to good people" that fosters new meaning, new purpose, new direction for people. Not just bouncing back but bouncing forward into a new sense of fulfillment and thriving. That's the growth.

S-136 Q Cohen

Ring the bells that still can ring.

Forget your perfect offering.

There's a crack in everything.

That's how the light gets in.

- Leonard Cohen, Anthem

LUNCH

Spend some time integrating the take-aways. What from this morning will you commit to practicing at home. What might get in the way? What are your resources to overcome those obstacles?