

Morning Talk

Who is it who goes to work in the morning? The very same person who rolled out of bed, stumbled to the bathroom mirror and, in her mind, commented to the blotchy, puffy face she saw there:

"Oh, sweetie, how tired you look! You've spread yourself too thin, you know. Let's figure out what you can delegate of that big project so you can focus on the parts of it you do best. Then come home and spend tonight listening to music with your honey. Okay?"

Or, seeing that same wreck of a face with that same glint of fear in its eyes - fear of failing at work - she may have said to herself something more like this:

"God, you're getting old! Who'd want a hag like you? And you're nowhere near done with what you promised you'd finish by Friday. You're gonna blow it. Well, it's overtime for you tonight, babe. Stay at that desk till you catch up or they're gonna find out just how incompetent you really are!"

(From "A User's Manual for the Human Being at Work" by Susan Schwartz Senstad)

Which one of these inner dialogues do you think will support this person's wellbeing? If you think it's the first one, we are in agreement. If you think it's the second one - then trust me, for now: it's the first one that would. So, let's go back to it:

"Oh, sweetie, how tired you look! You've spread yourself too thin, you know. Let's figure out what you can delegate of that big project so you can focus on the parts of it you do best. Then come home and spend tonight listening to music with your honey. Okay?"

If this were said to you, what kind of person do you think could be speaking like this? For me, I imagine an old grandma, who puts her wrinkled palm on my cheek and lovingly pats it while saying something of this sort. And I feel loved by her... And who would it be for you? Maybe your mom? Or the nice neighbor lady? Or an old grandma too? Somehow women come to my mind, but perhaps for you it could be a male figure... Can you picture a person (whether you know them or not) who could say this? Take your time to arrive at a decently-detailed image of one.

Once you can envision them, go again to the image of them saying these words to you, looking into your eyes. How does this land for you? Feel, *deeply feel*, the love and care that this person conveys to you. Feel yourself being loved, allow the warmth, the emotion, the tenderness. At this point, it's not about which words they say, but the feeling they convey - so if you have been skeptical of the words, drop them, replace them, do whatever soothes your skeptic, and get to the feeling part.

If you are finding yourself resisting, if you are struggling to drop into feeling that love, if your mind keeps commenting on things and does not let you feel - all these are okay, as each of us goes at our own pace and runs into our own obstacles. You can come back to this later, or not at all.

This could be a good time to pause and write some things down, especially what came up for you when the person in your mind was telling you the words of love and care.

I encourage you to also hydrate and check in with yourself: what's your breath like? what is your emotional state like? how are you feeling about yourself?

The goals of this exercise are:

- to recognize that there exists unconditional love
- to acknowledge that you can be unconditionally loved with all your imperfections
- to model an image of a person expressing their love and care to you
- and to observe where you are in the process of being able to receive this love - accepting that place, being curious about it.

Do you feel these goals have been met for you?

tomorrow?" And drop into that allowing yourself to be imperfect while reminding that making this step is so beneficial for you and is a way of self-loving, of prioritizing your needs over the crazy to-do list. Keep doing your best.

*I do bicycles on my bed every morning. What do you do, or what caught your eye that you may want to try?
Dancing, perhaps? ;) - Aliona*

Health/Immune System

Strong immune system means we experience more resilience and joy, and less pain in life. It is easy to be proactive about staying healthy with a few key ingredients: proper hydration, good rest, nutritional balance, moving blood, getting fresh air, and being aware of the tensions that arise in our bodies or in our minds - and addressing those as soon as we notice them, instead of hoping they will disappear.

Mental Well-Being

Mental well-being has everything to do with brain, so first and foremost - we must support our physical brain. Brain is rejuvenated by sleep/rest and diet. That means:

- ❖ hydrating
- ❖ eating healthy - especially fats: avocados, olive oil, fish and fish oil, flax and chia seeds
- ❖ releasing tensions: massaging or brushing the scalp, finger-tapping all around the head and face
- ❖ increasing blood flow by stretching the neck - rotating the head around is something many of us do already

Feeding Inner Brain

I found it useful to think about the brain (physical as well as functional) this way: there are an Outer Brain and an Inner Brain making up our psyche. Outer Brain includes social and environment-stimulated pathways of the brain; Inner Brain encompasses inner feeling and creative pathways, including passion, sexuality, etc. Outer Brain is more mental, spending energy; Inner Brain is more emotional, generated within, fueling us.

Practice Find your Inner Brain - it is your personal creative power, you expressing yourself - vocally or otherwise. Feed it - keep it active, keep the ball rolling. Protect it - from outer influences of others, of mass consciousness.

Meditate on this for a bit.

So, what is in you Inner Brain? Are you keeping it active, fueling it, supporting it?

Re-charging Our Batteries

We may get good rest but not feel recharged. We may get shitty rest and feel rejuvenated. Why such obscure behaviors? Because rest is just one of the ways to re-charge batteries, and sometimes we need more. Getting a massage, making love, doing stretching, going for a walk - all these give energy to some of us, while others remain untouched.

What is it for you that gets you rejuvenated? Stay here and ponder as long as you need. Then, make a hand-written list of 4-7 items that re-charge your batteries - choose the real ones, the ones that you can do, the ones you don't feel guilty about later on (like, eating ice cream is unlikely to make this list). Maybe it's taking a shower? Maybe it's cuddling? Maybe it's ...

Laughter! Good laughter re-charges all of us. So - homework for you is:

Practice Find a 30-minute video of comedy - whatever *you* consider hilarious; not just funny - hilarious! Once you find the video, bookmark it and watch it as frequently as time permits.

Brain Chatter

Let us address the "firmware" of the brain - our mental chat, both verbal and not. The non-verbal chat is when we think about something, but we don't have a conversation about it in our head, verbal chat is when we put words to it. Mental chat is sometimes useful for us - we get to process what goes on, solve problems, remember things. Other times, it keeps playing the same old record, or keeps complaining about something, judging, venting, bitching. We are in control of it - even though many times we forget that we are. Here is one easy and useful technique to address brain chatter, that, I recently confirmed with one of new tech gadgets, indeed changes the brain waves to be more stable:

Practice Toning. Take a deep slow breath, and as you breathe out slowly through your mouth - make sound "o". This is that same technique they use in yoga classes - making the sound "Omm" or "Aum" on the out-breath.

Specifically voicing it makes your vocal chords vibrate in a way, that reverberates into the brain and literally vibrates

Week 5. Self-Empowerment

Overview

Welcome to week 5 of self-love practice group.

So far, we have set a vision for ourselves and learning to talk to ourselves lovingly in week 1, integrated daily observing of our complete physical, mental, emotional well-being in week 2, identified a way of practicing self-acceptance by respecting our both met and unmet needs in week 3, found our voice and learnt useful words for naming our needs and requests in week 4.

This week we will explore the Self-Empowerment ingredient of Self-Love. We have a tendency to give our power away, and feeling powerless puts us into a victim mentality, which then leads us to self-pity and fear. It is very difficult to shift from fearful, powerless existence into self-loving and thriving. However, we will see that we can tackle this puzzle head on - we do not have to give our power away, but we can choose to collaborate, we can choose what we do and how we respond to things. That memory - that we have a choice - is frequently faded from our daily lives, and it is easy to dismiss a reminder about it: "I have a choice? I don't! I have to be going to work and making money and paying the bills." Self-empowerment practices we do today will expand this perspective that many of us hold, assisting in shifting from hopelessness to encouragement, choice, inspiration and self-love.

We will dip our toes into philosophy for a short bit - and wonder why we run into challenges in our lives. We will reflect on how we face them - frequently with an "I should" kind of attitude. We will discuss how we can find and practice the self-empowering way of living life: the way of choosing.

Are you comfortable? Did you silence your phone? Do you have water or tea nearby? Do you have writing surface, paper and pencil ready?

Take a few deep slow breaths - in through your nose, out through your mouth, watching your rib cage or your belly rise up and down. When you feel quite relaxed, let's proceed.

* * *

I asked for Strength...
And God gave me Challenges to make me strong.
I asked for Wisdom...
And God gave me problems to solve.
I asked for Prosperity...
And God gave me Brain and Brawn to work.
I asked for Courage...
And God gave me Danger to overcome.
I asked for Love...
And God gave me Troubled people to help.
I asked for Favors...
And God gave me Opportunities.
I received nothing I wanted.
I received everything I needed.

-The 8 Human Talents, Gurmukh Kaur Khalsa



Now, let us reflect on what may be our blind spots within self-empowerment and how we can notice them and shift into a self-loving mode.

Not: Beating myself up

For many of us, there is an inner critic always awaiting its chance to gloat, to put us down, to disparage and even destroy our self-esteem altogether - because then this inner critic will be in power over our inner landscape. It is so easy to fall short of our ideals and expectations - and I guarantee you it will happen, we are not perfect. Having a practice already in our daily/weekly routine that we are familiar with - helps to keep us afloat, especially if we are in a darker space of our soul; it is supportive and self-loving and self-strengthening. Doing these practices in non-dark times helps strengthen our self-compassion muscle and lovingly overcome the self-criticisms and self-beating that may happen.

Two relevant practices when we are being unkind to ourselves are: morning self-talk (p.6 week 1) and self-acceptance (p.22 week 3).

- Doing **(morning) self-talk** regularly, even when we are being self-loving, is a simple yet powerful way to invite love and care in. Practicing it frequently, we find the best imagery of who it is that is comforting to us (or arrive at realization that it is ourselves), we find the right voice (an old loving grandma? a joyful young woman? a quiet but strong male voice?), the right tone, the right words... It is this already-established and familiar imagery of a loving space and loving being, that can assist us in sorrow, in dark and difficult times. Familiarity of it allows it precedent over inner critic as well.
 - Notice that the 'right' here is what is very individual and subjective here - it's what works for me and may not work for you or anyone else. Finding that 'right' is a self-discovery as well as self-compassion, playfulness and entertainment! We may choose to imagine ourselves as a child, being comforted by a loving adult; or we may imagine ourselves as an adult, being comforted by a loving caring child. It's our individual inner canvas that we are drawing this on - and regular practice allows us to select the best colors that touch us the deepest.
- The practice of **self-acceptance**, in order to provide support and empowerment to us, serves us best when we are aware of our needs - those that we are meeting and those that remain not met. When we fall short of our benchmark and get down on ourselves - it is always the case that we had that that moment two conflicting needs, and the one we chose to meet was different from what we would choose now. So, knowing those needs allows to see their polarity and at the same time hold them both as ours; we can then allow acknowledge them and feel any feelings that come up (be that grief, sorrow, sadness, disappointment, discouragement, anger, fear, etc) and recognize them as valid; finally, we can ponder if/how we can make a different choice in the future.