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For the past couple of weeks, I have been waking up in the morning with a tense jaw. The contemplation of childhood memories is stirring my emotions. I need to care and nurture myself more.

Nurturing myself connects with an interview in an old issue of Buddhadharma of Pema Chodron and Jack Kornfield. The topic was how to handle difficult times. Kornfield recounted a meeting between a large conference of western Buddhist teachers and the Dalai Lama. Sharon Salzberg related a problem she was having with her students profound sense of unworthiness. These feelings arose when trying to do compassion and loving-kindness meditations. The Dalai Lama struggled to grasp the meaning behind the concept of self-hatred. There is no comparable psychological state in Tibetan Culture. This concept is interestingly a western creation. The Dalai Lama asked how many other teachers from the west had this problem. They all raised their hands.

The first step of the meta or loving-kindness meditation is to direct loving-kindness to yourself. For anyone who struggles with unworthiness this step is critical to me. I tell myself four affirmations: May I be safe, happy, healthy and at peace. Until I truly believe I deserve to be safe, happy, healthy and at peace I can offer little to others.

My own version divides the love myself affirmations into 7 moments, 6 points in the past as well as my present moment. I visualize myself as an adult providing love and care to my earlier selves. I combine both a hug/touch and reassuring words and presence. My six points in the past at one and a half (same as the earlier post on "healing meditation"), three (when I filled my stomach with medicine from the medicine cabinet), four (when I covered my bedroom wall with markings from the floor to chest high on all four walls), a teen (frozen in front of girl I desired to kiss and knew she wanted me to kiss her), twenty (unable to leave an abusive relationship), and 40 (blaming my inner emptiness on my marriage and my wife). Finally the last meta affirmations are for me now. In addition to myself, I offer my love to those someone who I love, someone I am neutral too, someone I am in conflict, and finally to all beings everywhere.

The suggested practice is to do the meditation every day for an entire year. I thought that sounded a little extreme at first. But the more I do it. The more it makes sense. Healing takes time. I can already feel a loosening up in my chest and stomach, and throat (where I hold tension). Love to hear from anyone who struggles with unworthiness.

allan lummus

mindful prisoner

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