**Wise Mindfulness for People with Addictive Personalities or Backgrounds with Trauma**

**Introduction**

It is important to fine tune our Mindfulness and Recovery practices.  Not all meditation practices are helpful for everyone.  Additionally, no one practice is helpful *all the time.*  It seems we have moods, cycles and seasons and we need to chart them in order to better craft our own practices.  This journey can awaken our compassion for the unique challenges that we people in recovery face.  It has led many of us to start asking other teachers and practitioners; w*hat are wise mindfulness practices for those of us with addictive personalities and backgrounds with trauma?*

**The connection between trauma, post-traumatic stress and compulsive personalities**

Over time our psychological and physical understanding of the roots of addiction has evolved greatly.  Myriad studies show that virtually all of us who are recovering from compulsive addictions are also recovering from the effects of trauma.  It is known that the experience of repeated trauma without support leads to embodied trauma and post-traumatic stress.  It is a fact that people who suffer from embodied trauma and post-traumatic stress are many, many times more likely to be susceptible to addictions and compulsive behaviors.

And so, a second important use of the word Recovery now is ***Recovery from the effects of trauma***.  Mindfulness practices are often just as efficacious for survivors of trauma even if they do not self-identify as having addictive personalities. It's important to include both of these understandings of the word *recovery* because each of these understandings points us towards specific components of an effective Mindfulness and Recovery practice.

Some of you may be familiar with Bessel Van Der Kolk’s book *“The Body Keeps the Score.”*  I believe that book may be the single best resource for understanding trauma or post-traumatic stress currently in print.  And it also has a thorough review of the most effective techniques for healing it.

Van Der Kolk acknowledges that it is possible to go through trauma and not be afflicted with PSTD.  But only if a person also gets love and wise support almost immediately.  However, the studies Van der Kolk cites show that when trauma happens to a person and they don’t receive adequate support the result is almost always Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.  Seeing the incredible documentation for this fact really helps.  How?  Because we can finally get that this condition is not our fault.

**Coming Home to the Body**

Survivors of trauma need to understand that our *bodies and minds have been deeply shaped by it* .  All across the spectrum of healing approaches there is now resonance and agreement on a recovery truth which Van Der Kolk puts this way:

“***Trauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies... Physical self-awareness is the first step in releasing the tyranny of the past.”***

We’ve been running from our own bodies and minds.   That was the function of our addictive behaviors.  It turns out that our mindfulness meditation practices are essential to getting back into our bodies.  Yet for us there is also the risk of triggering memories that can overwhelm us into a PSTD episode.  That is why it is so important for folks in recovery or with trauma histories to wisely learn and choose mindfulness practices that work skillfully for us

**Survival patterns learned in childhood**

From the perspective of trauma psychology, it’s also vital that we understand how we ***individually*** survived those difficult situations.  Each of us chose or was forced into learning ***particular*** survival patterns, survival patterns which actually worked for us. We found a particular recipe from the menu of fight, flight, or freeze.  Then our responses were imprinted…they became habits… became solidified.  They may now dominate us in the form of reactive patterns.  We have these reactions even when it is not appropriate, and even though they no longer work.  In other words, we find ourselves still activated in fight, flight, and freeze responses in our ordinary lives in ways that most people will never understand.  And this of course can cause us a lot of suffering.

Let’s try to convert this into the language of recovery and mindfulness practices:  As a part of our careful investigation of our own habitual mental formations and reactivity over time we take an inventory to learn what our particular triggers and reactivity patterns are.

It may take years for us to see how much we are controlled by hyper-vigilance.  It takes the form of habitual social anxiety, perfectionism, and the fear of making mistakes.  Often when I was doing even ordinary tasks, I was unconsciously worried and tense.  I would do ordinary tasks with a high level of vigilance that was exhausting.  Finally, I was able to be mindful of how much of my life I was living in the sympathetic nervous system of fight, flight, or freeze without even knowing it.  Even after doing years of recovery work, I was still unhappy, but my new mindfulness path was working to start to release the trauma that I came to understand was actually stored in my body.

**The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems**

Our human bodies actually have two overarching nerve pathways either of which can oversee our bodies; one, the sympathetic nervous system pumps adrenalin and other chemicals in our bloodstream to help us to survive challenges and emergencies.   The other, the parasympathetic nervous system, is calmer and is supposed to be our primary mode of operation.  Healthy people *will revert back to operate in that calm state when* their vagal nervous system releases acetylcholine after a crisis has passed.  However, people with Post Traumatic Stress have had their bodies and neural pathways imprinted so that a large variety of specific triggers can now set them off, and they don’t seem to go back as easily into the calm operation of the parasympathetic nervous system.

Fortunately, we are living in a truly amazing time of understanding and uncovering effective ways to heal.  There are now therapeutic and personal practice techniques to retrain our bodies and mind to free ourselves.  Most of us have already been blessed to find the 12 steps or other recovery pathways.  Now we are starting to learn mindfulness and other trauma healing practices.  This jump starts our recovery.  We can learn to more quickly ground back into the parasympathetic nervous system…into calm and self-trust.  With these wise understandings we are more able to find that peace which is not dependent upon external conditions.

**Learning mindfulness as a way back into the body**

A mindfulness perspective might see this as retraining our mind and body habits.  We learn how to wisely balance our practices in ways that are healthy for us with our background of addictions and trauma.

Along our long journeys we may try a range of meditation practices from mantra concentration to mindfulness practices.  However we may not realize that some of these practices are not appropriate for us.  Some of them could actually trigger and maintain our anxiety, trauma, and hyper-vigilance.  Over time we are better able to see some of the mental habits like perfectionism.  These can completely undermine our mindfulness practices and even trigger anxiety spirals.  Often we find that some body focus techniques (like paying attention to sensations in my chest) can bring us face-to-face with old emotions and memories that were still too overwhelming.  We must first learn how to calm the body and mind with practices like relaxation and compassion.   What follows are a toolbox of mindfulness insights and practices which we've found to be soothing and healing.

**Owning our own Practice**

It’s vital to claim an attitude of responsibility for our mindfulness practice.  All of us are unique and there is no one who will ultimately know better than us which path and techniques work for us to bring us to a state of self-love, calm, wisdom, or liberation.  Yes, we need wise guidance as we enter these new worlds of awakening.  It’s important to have regular check-ins with our teachers and guides.  But ultimately, we will each decide what is best for us to take and when to leave the rest.

Many programs which teach practices appropriate for those of us with recovery backgrounds are given freely at places like Common Ground meditation center.   For example, Christopher Germer and Kristen Neff’s Mindful Self-Compassion Program is amazingly transformative. So is Jon Kabit-Zinn’s Mindful Based Stress Reduction program.  Even more general introductions to Mindfulness Meditation can also be transformative.

**Understanding Our Window of Tolerance**

We can be triggered into extreme emotional states that push us out of our window of tolerance. A window of tolerance is the range within which we function well. When we are pushed out “above our window” we are triggered into hyper arousal or anxiety.  When pushed “below our window” we drop down into avoidance or the desire to shut down and withdraw. We can feel disconnected from our thinking and sensations. Our minds may feel like mud.

Whichever way we go we are then reactive. We are easily triggered and ordinary sensations can disturb us. We may have flashbacks, feel overwhelmed, and be taken away by our emotions.  We cannot function or learn. Our worst habitual reactivity can take over. We may be depressed or rigid.  However, as our self-understanding grows, we expand our window of tolerance by learning tools of mindfulness, acceptance, calming, and compassion.  We slowly change our habits of traumatic reactivity.  We reclaim our confidence and full functioning.  We reclaim our ability to live more empowered, spontaneous, and creative lives.

**Sometimes directly facing our pain may be overwhelming**

The one meditation instruction everyone is asked to try at some point is to *go directly into the pain and feel it.*  That’s what we’re asked often in our recovery programs too. Wise investigation of our unfinished business is a central part of our liberation.  ***Yet there are times when we don’t have the capacity to handle directly being with our memories, thoughts, emotions, or sensations.***  We may be outside of our window of tolerance.  So, if directly going into or facing the pain is our only move, we will soon find that it doesn’t work all the time.  Especially since it’s often subconsciously being driven by the desire to get rid of it.  So, a first condition for wisely relating to dukkha is a commitment to objectively investigate the relationship between the mind's reactivity and pain…but only as we’re able to wisely do it.  But if we are ever triggered into a PSTD overwhelm our top priority is still to switch to practices that restore our regulation and equilibrium.

**Noticing which meditation practices work for us and when**

Eventually we may run into recovery and mindfulness practices which trigger our trauma.  It doesn’t matter whether they do not do that for someone else. At that point we have trust in ourselves and begin cultivating awareness of our own patterns and responses.  Then calmly observing our ongoing reactive patterns will guide us in choosing the very best practices for our awakening and healing.  This wisdom can also guide us in knowing when and how much to practice.

One of our general purposes is to *simply observe what our body, mind and heart are doing without trying to change them*.  In this way we develop a separate sense of self from what is passing.  But as our wisdom and self-trust grow we may also be led sometimes to switch techniques in order to calm… to get back into our window of tolerance.  Our intention is  not to let ourselves be re-traumatized.  We want to challenge our patterns but also need to pace ourselves and keep building the experience that we can trust this process of opening…by being wise about what and how we practice.  If we find we are unable to self-regulate while we develop our practice we may need help from a teacher who is versed in trauma appropriate mindfulness practices.

**When it’s time to restore our equilibrium**

But what do we do when we do become overwhelmed with our sensations, thinking or judgments?  Sometimes we are triggered into old fears and reactivity right in our practice.  There are times we find we do not have sufficient grounded-ness to be with what is arising.  At that point our primary job is to restore our equilibrium first, and there are many, many ways we can do this.  The first and most obvious is to do a relaxation or compassion practice.  We may need to shift position, open our eyes or put a hand over our heart.

Bring your attention to your breathing and notice if your breath is short and shallow or smooth.  You might choose to slow your breath.  Notice your belly rising and falling.  Lengthen your exhalation.  This will invite your body to shift into your parasympathetic nervous system.

If one is unable to regain control or alter one’s practice back towards equilibrium it is an indicator that we may need help from a teacher who is versed in trauma appropriate mindfulness practices.

**Wise advice about how to relate to pain and our aversion to it**

The Buddha taught that the wise view of dukkha, of our suffering, was the gateway to liberation.  Here is a quote from Sayadaw's U Tejaniya, a Buddhist monk who says that his struggles with clinical depression were what first motivated him to develop his skills at self-investigation:

*“So never force yourself to observe pain; this is not a fight, this is a learning opportunity. You are not observing pain to lessen it or to make it go away. You are observing it – especially your mental reactions to it – in order to understand the connection between your mental reactions and your perception of the physical sensations.  Check your attitude first. Wishing for the pain to decrease or go away is the wrong attitude. It does not matter whether the pain goes away or not. Pain is not the biggest problem; the aversive mental reaction to it is the problem that is causing suffering.* ***If the pain is caused by some kind of injury, you should of course be careful not to make things worse,*** *but if you are well and healthy, pain is simply an important opportunity to practice watching the mind at work. When there is pain, the mental feelings and reactions are strong and therefore easy to observe. Learn to watch anger or resistance, tension or discomfort in your mind. If necessary, alternate between checking your feelings and the attitude behind your resistance. There is a direct link between your state of mind and pain. The more relaxed and calm the observing mind, the less intense you will perceive the pain to be. Of course, if your mind reacts strongly to the pain (i.e. if you experience pain as unbearable) you should change your posture and make yourself comfortable…Remember you are not looking at the reactions of the mind to make them go away.   Always take the reactions as an opportunity to investigate their nature. Ask yourself questions! How do they make you feel? What thoughts are in your mind? How does what you think affect the way you feel?  How does what you feel affect the way you think? What is the attitude behind the thoughts? How does any of this change the way you perceive pain?”*

From Sayadaw's U Tejaniya’s Don’t Look Down on the Defilements They Will Laugh At You.

So, we don’t want to just force ourselves to observe pain.  We kindly watch our changing attitude and continue to build self-trust by going slow.   Sometimes it is wise to keep returning to our object of focus.  Other times we need to kindly welcome our arising reactivity.  Other times we need to switch to another practice or take a break.  Yet our purpose is not to try to end pain or rigidly control. When we find that we are not able to maintain our practice it is especially important for us to have an open accepting and allowing mind and heart. Relaxation is an important intention that we gift ourselves with.  And again, if we find we ourselves unable to restore equanimity or reach any Samadhi in our practices it is an indication either that the specific practices are not right for us or that we need the guidance of a teacher familiar with trauma sensitive mindfulness techniques.

**A liberating intention of equanimity**

Our particular bodies, minds, and hearts have their particular history.  So, in a given moment when we're triggered it is very skillful  for us to have a variety of techniques for coming back to body states of calm, trust, joy, and equanimity. Our mindfulness path reveals that when we stop fighting what’s unpleasant and clinging onto only positive experiences that we finally connect with our Buddha Nature…the part of us which is not pushed around by experience. We truly discover the joy that is not dependent upon external conditions.

**Having the right therapist as a dharma friend**

Before we go through any specific practices, it should be said that for people with severe trauma finding a good therapist can be critically helpful.  A therapist can also be very helpful in learning to choose your own favorite mindfulness practices.   I want to recommend another author and speaker you can find on the internet, his name is David A Treleaven.  He wrote a book called Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing, which is of course exactly what our subject is here.

**The Medusa Problem in survivors of trauma**

Before David Treveaven starts discussing specific meditation practices, he describes a conundrum which he’s found his trauma patients often have.   He calls it “the Medusa Problem,” and it is ***“the tendency to over attend traumatic stimuli in meditation****.”*   This is more than already challenging negativity bias which all animals have built in to help us survive.  Often when trauma survivors pay closer sustained attention to our experience, we eventually come into contact with un-integrated remnants of trauma.  This can take myriad forms; general anxiety or particular sensations, more difficult breathing, or areas of the body that reflexively tense up.  Then paying attention to these sensations can spark a fight, flight, or freeze cycle.   Survivors can become locked in a self-perpetuating loop which leaves them more helpless, isolated, and alarmed.

**The first solution to the tendency to over attend traumatic stimuli is simply to be aware of these phenomena.**  We have to see it when it arises.  We have to know where we are in our window of tolerance.  Then we have permission to return to our object of focus.  We can switch practices.  We can be kind.   We can remember it will pass.  We can remember that it is not self, not who we really are.  We understand that it takes time to learn self-observation and familiarity with alternative mindfulness tools.   However, becoming aware of our own potential pitfalls is the precursor to paying attention to how to skillfully navigate around them.

**Considering Meditation Practices for People in Recovery**

*The following is a discussion of practices for the purpose of illuminating what often works best for people in recovery or with trauma backgrounds.  It is not intended to be a guide to any one of the practices.  Rather it is intended* ***to begin*** *a discussion of what works, why it works and when it works for both teachers and practitioners of Mindfulness and Recovery.  Specific examples of meditation scripts tailored for Mindfulness and Recovery practitioners can be found in in the “Recovery Dharma” book.*

**Concentration Practices**

Focusing on the breath or body sensations are examples of concentration practices.  Doing these practices effectively can get us out of our heads and into peaceful seclusion.  Concentration leads to the experience of Samadhi that we need as a background so that we can handle the Dukkha that we find in our investigation. Without Samadhi we will turn to denial, avoidance, or resistance instead of practicing openness, acceptance, and non-attachment.

Focus on the body or breath are among the first commonly taught practices to establishing stable attention.  Developing concentration is not just calming, it is also the first step in the muscle of focus.  We can then utilize that focus in other mindfulness practices which have more specific liberating purposes.  Yet people in recovery may find that while some “anchors” work, that others can trigger or intensify trauma sensations.  So over time ***we must* *notice which types of concentration objects work best for us.***

***Breath***is one of the most common practices but the best place to pay attention can vary.  Common places to focus are at the tip of the nose, in the lungs, or at the abdomen.  Or, it can be calming to watch the breath as a whole.  If we need to drop ourselves out of an anxious state, we can practice 2 to 1 breathing where the exhalation is twice as long as the inhalation.  This practice can quickly bring us back to enough calm where we can return to other ways of meditating.

***Body Scans*** are another common type of concentration practices.  Body scans can be very skillful for folks in recovery or who have active minds because in them we are not asked to keep our focus very long in one spot.

***Relaxation Exercises*** are a type of body meditations which are an often used tool in a recovery person’s toolbox.  These can be done sitting but are even more effective lying down.  It can be skillful to integrate several short relaxation exercises throughout the day to stay peaceful enough that mindfulness is possible.  Relaxation exercises are an essential meditation practice in their own right.

***Walking Meditations*** are also very skillful for folks in recovery or who have active minds or restlessness.   They can be a shortcut to getting back into our bodies.  They are also a practice which can train us to stay mindful as we go about our entire day.

***Sounds*** are another potentially easy concentration object, especially when in nature or at a quiet place like Common Ground.  Hearing can be calming provided that there aren’t too upsetting sounds like barking chain saws or sirens.  However, when those intrude for periods of time they can be a great practice object for facing our aversion and anxiety triggers. *Mantra Meditation* is another common form of sound meditation.

***Sight*** is often used.  Many people choose soothing objects like candles or a tree.

***Loving Kindness Practices*** are also considered concentration practices as we are asked to keep focus on the tone of the Brahma Viharas of kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity.  Yet loving kindness practices are an entirely separate and necessary study because learning to access these heart states is an indispensable part of our practice.  In fact, it’s often said that “*There are two wings on the bird of awakening. Without using both wings we will not fly.*”  The first wing is awareness.  The second wing we need to fly is compassion.

We start practicing the first wing early in recovery, as we became ***aware***of our compulsions and the survival habits which are no longer serving us.  However, seeing the powerful momentum of these habits and our ever-changing emotions can be ***overwhelming*** for us.  Without the second wing of ***compassion,*** we might never be able to take the weight of our new recovery awareness.  Compassion is how we handle the starkness of really being present and seeing our challenges.  We need compassion just as much to hold the suffering we see in the world as well as our powerlessness over most of it.

Loving kindness practices ***can*** also be used in an attempt to avoid opening and accepting suffering.  It can be wise to turn to compassion meditations if we are feeling overwhelmed.  Initially we may experience great relief, like a balm or medication.  However, it may be less helpful if we are simply trying to change our moods instead of investigating the hidden beliefs that are creating them.

Many of us are grateful for the profound teachings of Tara Brach.  She shares compassion practices often but also reminds us to watch for this avoidance habit.  She suggests that two core attitudes in a wise practice are a commitment to vulnerability and openness.   Like Samadhi, compassion can be a space wherein we can face difficult experiences.  The compassion practices can also lead to a dropping of aversion.  Finally, since they lead to connection with all other sufferers, compassion can restore our confidence as we connect with this universal strength of our Buddha nature

**The Anapanasati Sutta**

**The Buddha’s 16 step meditation for developing the Jhanas as a basis for Vipassana meditation**

There are many ways to create the spaciousness needed for an investigative attitude.  A most widely taught one is the*Buddha’s 16 instructions meditation:*wherewe begin focusing the mind on breath or body into states of focus, calm, joy, and then ease before turning back to study the mind’s habits.  Yet our states continue to change and again we can become dysregulated, not have the capacity to be with what is arising.

**Wisely Dancing with dukkha; more strategies for investigation and being with what is arising**

If we feel like we still have some capacity to be with difficult states we can do what our guiding teacher Mark Nunberg calls ***“touch and go*.”** One might think of the strategy as only taking small sips..*.*you simply touch a little piece of it... something you can handle ...and then go back to some other safe focal point.

Another way might be called ***orbiting at a distance***.  This might be literally holding in mind some kind of spaciousness like big mind or empty sky and looking at an experience from a distance, or from not-self.

Another strategy Mark Nunberg describes might be called ***holding many objects***.  We simultaneously hold many objects of focus and this makes any one object feel less intense.

Another similar practice we might call ***jumping around.***   We rather quickly go back-and-forth between different objects of focus.  So, for example one might alternate between breath, body, sound, sight, spaciousness, compassion, temperature, and a painful object.  Again, what is difficult feels much smaller relatively.

A particularly helpful self-compassion practice might be called ***Compassion holding Dukkha.***  Tara Brach teaches versions of this which begin by generating a large base of self-compassion and then turn the mind towards a pain. The practice is then to *hold the experience inside of the compassion.*There are many ways to do this. One that Tara frequently teaches is the Tonglin meditation practice of touching the pain on the in breath and holding it inside the universe of compassion on the out breath.  Again, our wise attitude is curious, open and welcoming.  We let go of any aversion or desire to stop what is difficult...rather we intend to simply hold it.  Compassion is holding pain.

**Visualization** is not often taught as a part of mindfulness practices.  But it does come up when we do practices like loving kindness or those concentrating on our impermanence and mortality.   For example: simply imagine yourself being able to do something you want to be able to do.  Or watch others do it until you can fully imagine yourself doing it.

**Open monitoring** meditation or **open awareness** meditation usually comes after more specific concentration practices which build the focus needed for it.  It encourages broadened awareness of all aspects of the environment, training of thought and sense of self, it may include becoming aware of thoughts, feelings or impulses that we normally try to suppress.

**Skillfully changing direction during a meditation**

Another strategy when sensations overwhelm is to ***reorient attention.***   We get around the *Medusa problem* if we get stuck on something aversive and get back into the window of tolerance.  So, for example if paying attention to the breath causes someone to become agitated, they can open their eyes and attend to something different.  Survivors take responsibility for their practice learning to be skillfully self-responsive if they have become dysregulated.

Once we have a tool box of calming, relaxing, or soothing practices we start to learn when to use them.  Sometimes if we’re in a body state we just can’t think clearly.  We can’t just will ourselves into a relaxed and open state.  In such moments a first choice might be a body practice.  Over time and in the moment, we learn whether a body scan, walking meditation, relaxation, or compassion practice is a skillful way to get back into a state of regulation again.  And of course, sharing with other recovery dharma friends is another time-tested way we can get us back into our bodies and hearts.

**When we’re grounded; Wisdom meditation**

When we are calm, we have the capacity to practice Vipassana meditation which is sometimes called insight or wisdom meditation.  In Vipassana meditation we turn the cleared instrument of our awareness back onto what is arising for the purpose of gaining wisdom.  As we watch our own patterns in the calm of Samadhi our practice deepens and our experiential wisdom grows over time.

A common form of this is called *open awareness.*  After getting focused we widen our attention out to all six senses.  Sometimes called *open monitoring,* this is a practice of observing our experience without letting our focus be taken over by any specific focus.   So, a common guided practice starts with some kind of concentration or focused attention and moves to open monitoring.   In this practice, we recovery folks will need to stay mindful of where we are in our own window of tolerance.   We keep learning about our own reactivity and which practices are most skillful.

**Other *Tools and Recovery Practices* for Getting Back into the Window of Tolerance**

**A focus on resilience and looking for the good.**

Another way to work with attention is to focus on resilience.  Resilience is a counterbalance to trauma.  Resilience is our inherent capacity to see beauty find connection and commune with something larger than ourselves and create even in or out of horrendous experiences.   One way of building resilience is looking for the good.  We can build it by purposely turning our attention to what brings us energy. Practices which develop our access to the Brahma Viharas of kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity definitely build our resilience.   We get stronger by noticing when we are able to transform suffering.  A common practice of therapists is to coach clients while they remember or imagine a safe anchor place perhaps in a memory or recalling a powerful place in nature.  We can practice remembering mentors, loved ones or guides who helped to create safety for us.  Any memory that connects us to a sense of well-being can be an anchor for us to return back into our grounded essence.

**Prayer**

Another strategy is seeking blessings, (also known as  intercessory prayers.) From the perspective of the personality this is surrendering and opening up to support. We do a third, seventh, or eleventh step.  We turn our will, lives, and challenges over to a power greater than ourselves.  It is wise to have a toolbox of prayer practices that work to help us back into a surrendered and trusting state.   From the perspective of transcendence my prayer is remembering to go into the larger oneness.   IE:  Reminding myself that my mind may get lost but I am not ever really separate from my Buddha, Christ, or universal nature which is clear and compassionate…which is not pushed around by experience.  This is a practice of learning how to shift more quickly and easily out of small- self by identifying with oneness.

**More wise view: finding a balance between compassion and determination**

Now I see that there is a subtle balance to be struck between compassion and determination in my practices.  In my most difficult years I was suffering in my mindfulness practice by feeling triggered and overwhelmed.   I see this now as a paradoxical challenge.  From the perspective of western psychology, a trauma therapist’s goal is to help liberate “survivors” from the unconscious habits that they have accumulated as survival habits.   It is believed that their reflexive reactivity was initially conditioned by trauma.  Thus, one task of a therapist is to create a safe container within which a patient slowly and carefully learns to trust their growing ability to face their unfinished business.

This goal is not far from that of mindfulness meditation practices.  We too are trying to learn how to create safe practices within which we can carefully grow our ability to be Equanimous and face our unfinished business.  We wonder *is the phenomena of trauma also universal* to some extent?  So, on the Buddhist path we come to believe that a central part of becoming liberated from our own reactive habits is the wise and compassionate practice of mindfulness.

It seems that there are two important and seemingly opposite goals for those of us who are survivors of trauma.  When we feel overwhelmed or hear voices of doubt we want to have a wise and balanced response.  We want to proceed carefully and compassionately so as to practice in ways that build our trust and resilience in the experience in our mindfulness practices.  And we also want to stretch ourselves where we can wisely begin to build and know our resilience/strength.  So, we also want to repeat every day that we can trust our mindfulness path.  Ultimately, we need to know that we can go within and face ourselves.  Wise compassionate grateful liberation is possible; both our recovery and mindfulness paths point to this truth.

**In closing; helping our recovery friends to see the gifts in our unique challenges**

As mindfulness and recovery teachers we need to understand the patterns of trauma so that we can wisely share practices which build wisdom and Samadhi.  Then with this wisdom and calm our recovery friends can move on and do more direct investigation of their unfinished business.  Sometimes this may require recovery practitioners to take small sips.  However, this does not mean encouraging a belief in a static victim self-identity.   So, it’s paradoxical; first we accept that one has been wounded and may have limited capacity during the process of healing…that we should wisely pace ourselves.  However, our ultimate liberation also lies in trusting a view of empowerment with an intention to stretch oneself…fully believing in our capacity to stand upright and healthy.

We who are in recovery from addictions or trauma may eventually come to see our experience as a rare and valuable blessing; we may discover that our difficulties are actually our tough teachers, our liberators, our spiritual Angels.  They have been part of the opening and tempering of our Buddha or Christ nature.  The renunciation they are teaching us comes with a peace which is not dependent upon external conditions.  And we discover that our experiences have given us rare and perfect gifts we now can share with those who are still suffering.