

A black silhouette of a person sitting in a meditative pose, facing right. The person's back is curved, and their hands are resting on their knees. The background is a soft, misty landscape with mountains and a body of water.

Buddhist Psychology: From Trauma to Enlightenment

Session 5: Three Trainings and Transformations

Presented by Lotus Vu, CCC, Zen Teacher & Psychotherapist
Clear Way Zen, Regina, Saskatchewan

Covered in this session

- Stages of Trauma Recovery Quick Review
- Three Trainings: Sila, Jhana, Sati (Precepts, Calm Abiding, Mindfulness)
- Meditation Practice to Transformation
- Spiritual Emergence vs. Spiritual Emergency

Stages of Trauma Recovery in Treatment

1. **Safety and Stabilization**

- Physical and emotional safety
- Learning skills to regulate emotions, grounding and coping
- Creating a sense of safety
- Skills: Mindfulness, sensory exercises, yoga, art, music etc.

2. **Processing and mourning the trauma**

- Processing emotions and losses
- Confronting trauma memories, working with grief and difficult feelings
- Making sense of experience

3. **Reconnecting and Integrating with Meaningful Narrative**

- Developing resilience, reconnecting with oneself and others
- Rebuilding relationships and community connections
- Maintaining healthy coping mechanism, building support system, pursuing personal/professional goals to facilitate integration.

Stabilization: Training the Mind with Ethical Boundaries (Precepts)

- Sila: Precepts (Establishing Healthy Boundaries)
 - Non-harming
 - Living in harmony with the natural environment and others
 - Living authentically with oneself in alignment with reality (What's happening, not what you think is happening).
 - Keeping oneself out of trouble and away from bad habits of body and mind
- Benefits of the Precepts
 - Develop **empathy** to translate to **compassion**
 - Helps to keep mind balanced, present and not locked in anxiety or denial
 - Helps to build trust and good relationships with others
 - Establishes the foundation for meditation practice

Empathy versus Compassion

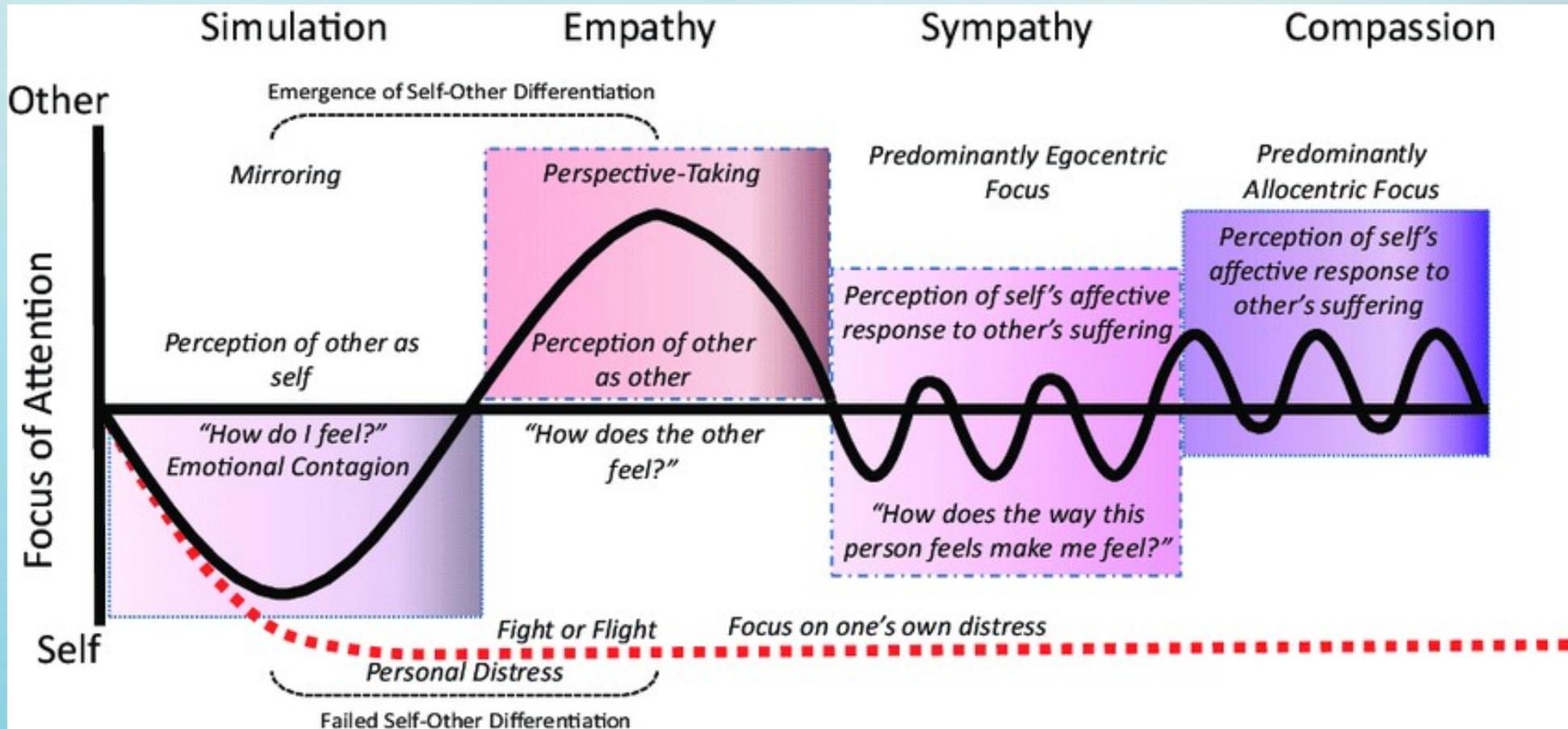
Empathy	Compassion
I feel you	I see you
Feeling the same emotions of another person	Feeling care & warmth for another person
I feel with you	I am moved by you; I am here to help
Acutely feeling someone's emotional or physical pain, which triggers an impulse to help relieve suffering	Not the easiest or most obvious action, but with a more meaningful impact.
More reactive to a specific situation or person	More rational response
Triggers emotions and emotional response	Targets the source of the problem
Less emotional boundaries	Allows for emotional boundaries
Takes more energy emotionally	More balanced energy
Empathy can lead to poor health & burnout	Maintains balance emotionally
Long-term feelings of empathy can be damaging to people & organizations	Evidence based outcomes that are better for people & organizations
Not action oriented	Action oriented
You can empathize with someone and <i>not</i> manage to ease their pain. Empathy is vulnerable to bias	For compassion to be effective, we need to practice <i>self-compassion</i> as well. Being aware of how full our tank is to be able to serve others.

Why develop empathy into compassion?



1. Psychopathy (normal people are all on the spectrum), especially for Secondary Psychopathy.
2. Having feelings is a good thing (if you can generate, modulate and manage them) to take practical, present, and productive actions ethically.
3. Altruism helps all, including ourselves.

Compassion vs. Empathy



Woodruff, C. & Stevens, Larry. (2018). *Where Caring for Self and Others Lives in the Brain, and How It Can Be Enhanced and Diminished: Observations on the Neuroscience of Empathy, Compassion, and Self-Compassion*. [10.1016/B978-0-12-809837-0.00011-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-809837-0.00011-8).

Compassion

- 1) Self-Kindness versus Self-Judgment,
- 2) Mindfulness versus Over-Identification, and
- 3) Common Humanity versus Isolation

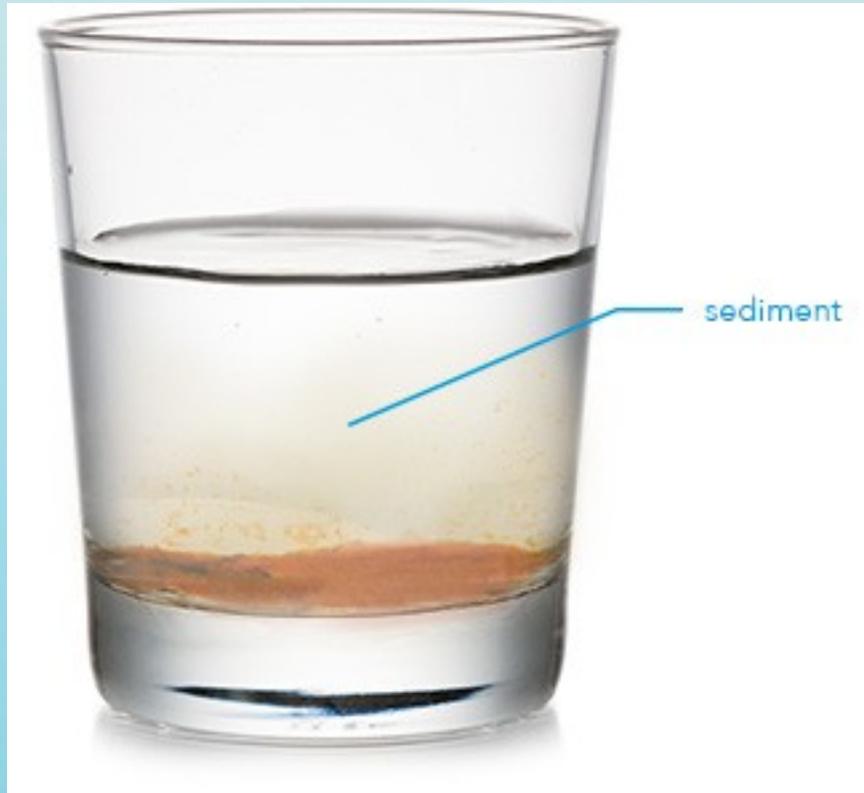
Compassion cannot be exhausted or become fatigued, as it resides in a state of **alert attention in the present, characterized by a degree of mental clarity and calmness.**

Sati (Mindfulness)

- To be attentively aware but NOT absorbed in the object of observation (*Meta-awareness*)
- ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) calls it ***Cognitive Defusion***.
- Requires 2 elements:
 - **Attention** and noticing attention moving
 - **Awareness** of objects that are diffused to encompass backgrounds that attention isn't placed on.
- Buddha: 4 things you can be aware of internally
 - Sensations from senses
 - Feelings
 - Mental States
 - Thoughts or mental objects



Jhana: Attention Training in Meditation



Zen training has its meditative practice roots in early Buddhism, focusing on the Jhanas (***Calm, relaxed, aware attentive states***)

Jhana -> Dhyana -> Chan -> Zen

The Jhanas and its successive levels help to clear the lens of observation to be able to experience deeper states of ***samadhi*** (tranquility) and practice rigorous and increasing clarity for ***meta-awareness observation*** (Sati/mindfulness)

Jhana: Attention Training in Meditation



Samadhi = To collect or bring together attention

Ekaggata = Unification of mind, mind no longer wandering

Samatha = joyful serenity that follows after complete unification of mind (through samadhi)

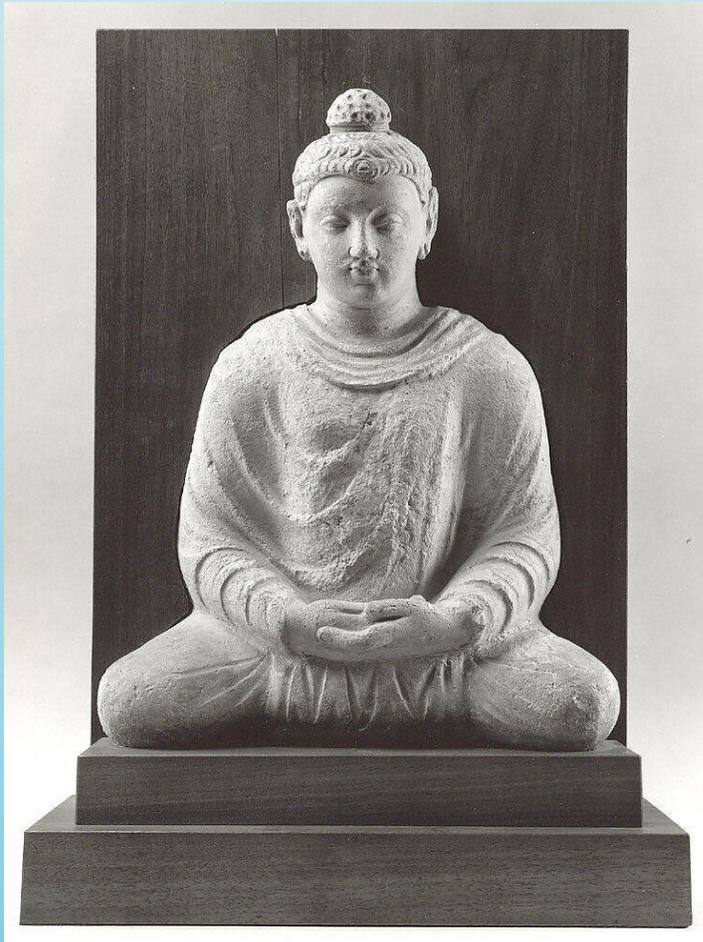
Absorption = State of being absorbed into an object or activity. A “good” state of absorption is best described by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi in his book *“Flow: The psychology of Optimal Experience.”*

Different Types of Jhanas

Zen Jhanas = Sutta Jhana (based on the earliest writings of Buddhism), most Zen practitioners practice what Culadasa calls "*Ultra Light*", "*Lite*," or "*Light*" Jhanas. In solitary meditation, the "*Deep Jhanas*" are accessible after **Kensho**.

Burmese Pak Auk Forest Monastery or Thai Forest Tradition involves **Deep Jhana** (arising from [Visuddhimmagga](#), 430 A.D. in Sri Lanka by [Buddhaghosa](#), a Buddhist Scholar)

3 Trainings: Sila, Jhana, Sati



All Jhanas described were Jhanas experienced by the Buddha, but he taught ***Jhana with Sati (investigative dispassionate observation) to practice with Sila***, not the Hindu Jhanas that he had learned before Enlightenment.

Buddha's Jhana is a **"natural state"** with **"relaxation"** that can be experienced **"off-cushion."**

Disclaimer:

Why it's dangerous knowledge to know the Meditative Experiences of Others and the Jhanas!



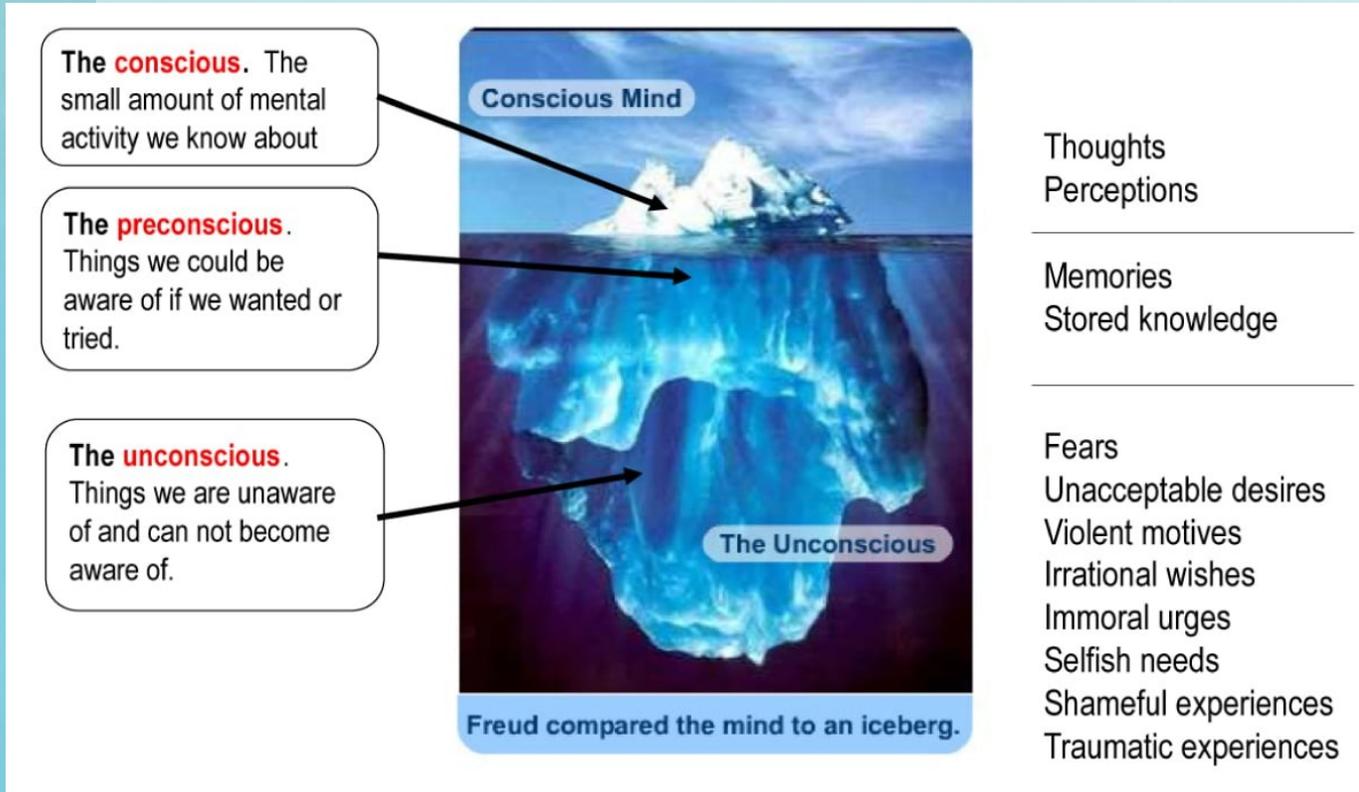
This could be YOU in meditation practice! Grasping the concepts instead of having the experience.

Meditative States		Description	Relations to 5 Aggregates
Access Concentration		Basic level concentration -Breath count, mindfulness of breathing, body scan, loving-kindness, mantra etc.	All present
1st Jhana	Awareness of Body & Duality	Shift attention to hold on to pleasant sensation erupts to Piti (glee) & Sukha (joy/happiness) sustained. Piti rises like gooseflesh all over the body, all your cells dancing with pure pleasure.	All Present w/ Increase feelings & sensory pleasantness
2nd Jhana		Background thoughts quieter/distant Inner tranquillity, unified through a calm, contented emotional experience, reduced Piti.	All present w/ Reduced feelings & increase Contentment & quietness
3rd Jhana		The pleasure of contentment goes away, emotionally neutral, no Piti. The body's perceptions of limbs come and go like it is not there.	Sensory experience reduced
4th Jhana		Steady stillness, in-distractibility, no more background thoughts A sharp mind with clarity	No thoughts
Base of Infinite Space		Expansive awareness, reduced awareness of body, joyous feelings of expansive freedom Loss of body awareness	No thoughts, no sensation, still subtle feelings, Perception and consciousness
Base of Infinite Consciousness	Oneness	Disappearance of object perception, everything is the watcher/observer. As if everything is pure consciousness/oneness. This is where most spiritual traditions falsely mistaken this place for enlightenment.	
Base of Infinite Nothingness	Non-Duality	Cessation of Feelings and Perceptions: Non-dual state, mind very clear. Outside of meditation, if experiencing this, all labels/Perception of objects perceived falls away.	No conceptualizing, no perception
Base of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception		Very reduced consciousness. Consciousness is collected in a small, dim center. Like REM sleep, mental formations appear like blurry phantom images in the background. You cannot tell what you are experiencing from the sensory input from outside.	no feelings, no sensory
Nirodha		Cessation of Perception, Feelings, and Consciousness (All Five Aggregates Absent)	No consciousness

Results of Practicing the 3 Trainings

1. Less chaotic internal environment
2. Understand and see your mental and behavioural patterns clearer
3. Understand how your mind and motivations work
4. Realizing you're causing a lot of your sufferings!
5. Realizing that you don't even know yourself well, never mind others.
6. Humility ensues

Arising of Unconscious Materials

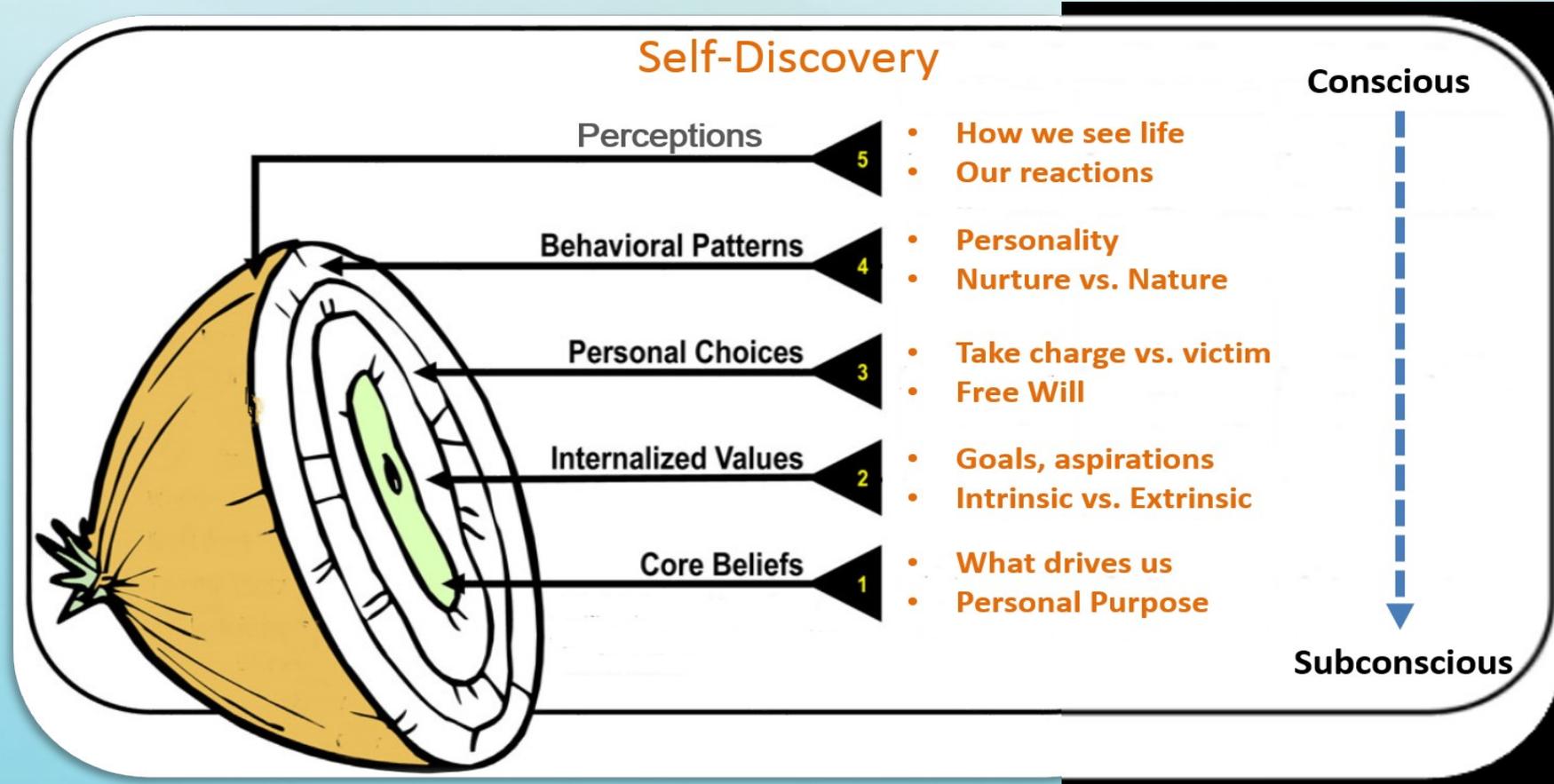


- Things we believe and our behaviours are two different things!
- Our minds tend to deny, minimize, or repress uncomfortable experiences.
- **Incomplete cycles of experiencing life:** *arising, sustaining, changing and disappearing and letting go* causes the holding of unconscious materials.

Common Experiences in Meditation

- Anxiety (especially with past or future)
- Crying, grief
- Laughter, joy
- Irritation, anger
- Boredom, sensation seeking (of objects for mind to attach to)
- Fear, existential or something perceived as real in future
- Depersonalization
- Derealization

Do you really know who you are?



A lot is happening underneath the surface and above;
we really have no idea!

What layers have you lost in your Zen journey?



Each layer represents a “self-process” developed out of “learning” from your environment

You have many selves!

Zen Sickness



Zen Sickness

A phenomenon where individuals, while meditating, experience negative symptoms:

- Physical symptoms caused by repressed emotional release: fatigue, headaches, sleeplessness, depression, fear or anxiety etc..
- Over-identification with “Zen” identity (Ego inflation or deflation)
- Detachment from own body and mind (not a psychosis or disassociation)

Solution:

- Rule out any possible physical illness
- Follow your teacher’s instructions
- Physical exercises like Qi Gong, Chinese Herbal remedy to balance energy, and lots of walking/grounding exercise.

Let's discuss some unconscious transformation experiences!



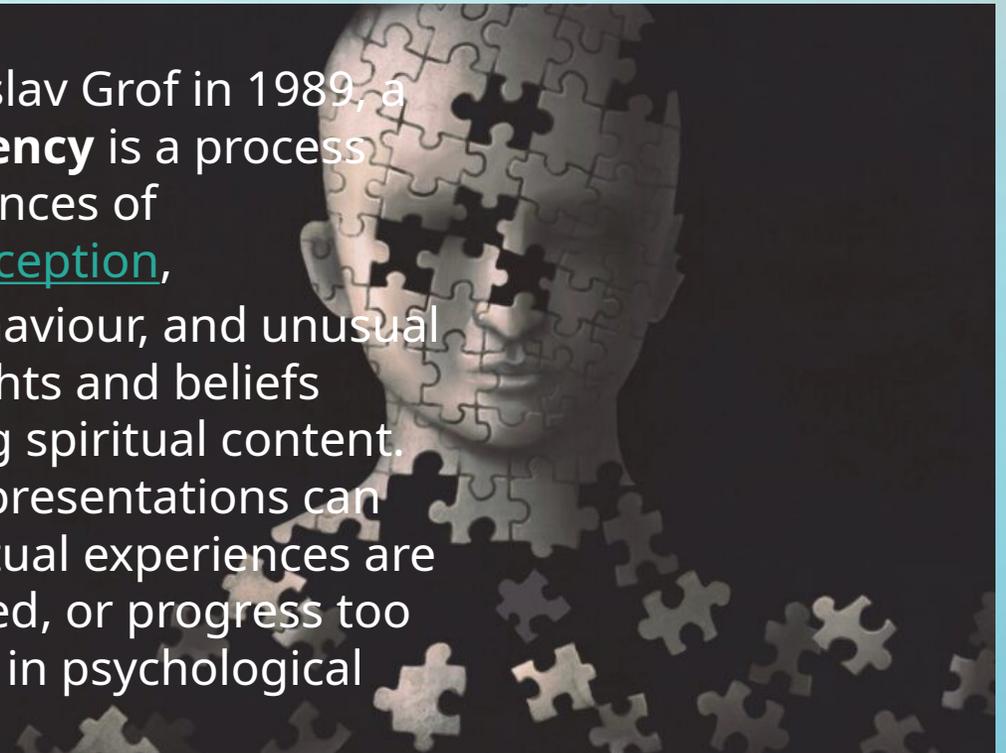
Spiritual Emergency



[David Lukoff Ph.D.](#)
co-author of the DSM-IV category
"Religious or Spiritual Problem"
<https://spiritualcompetencyacademy.com>

"In traditional societies, people who have had these spiritual emergency experiences do much better with community support in spiritual and religious contexts that better understand and support these experiences."

Defined by Stanislav Grof in 1989, a **spiritual emergency** is a process involving experiences of [extrasensory perception](#), disorganized behaviour, and unusual or illogical thoughts and beliefs containing strong spiritual content. These troubling presentations can occur when spiritual experiences are not well integrated, or progress too quickly, resulting in psychological difficulties.



Next Week

Transformation of trauma and self-process
experiences in meditation

References

- Lukoff, David. (2014). From personal experience to clinical practice to research: A career path leading to public policy changes in integrating spirituality into mental health. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*. 1. 145-152.
- Neff, K. (2003). The development and validation of a scale to measure self-compassion. *Self and Identity*, 2, 223–250.
- Vieten, C., & Lukoff, D. (2022). Spiritual and religious competencies in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 77(1), 26–38. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000821>
- Woodruff, C. & Stevens, Larry. (2018). *Where Caring for Self and Others Lives in the Brain, and How It Can Be Enhanced and Diminished: Observations on the Neuroscience of Empathy, Compassion, and Self-Compassion*. [10.1016/B978-0-12-809837-0.00011-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-809837-0.00011-8).