Mindfulness Meditation and Self-Compassion to Heal Violations of Personal Vulnerabilities

Elliot Benjamin, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

In this article I will discuss the use of mindfulness meditation and self-compassion to heal violations of personal vulnerabilities, and I will do so through revealing my recent relevant intense and impactful experience of a violation of my personal vulnerabilities through condescending argumentation. I will discuss this in the context of the qualitative research methodologies of autoethnography and heuristic phenomenology, in which the relevant experiences of the researcher are utilized as part of the research exploration. I will describe the practice of mindfulness meditation as formulated by Jon Kabat-Zinn, and relate this to my own current mindfulness meditation practice, both individually and in a spiritual community, as a therapeutic way of healing these violations of personal vulnerabilities, with a focus on self-compassion. I will also discuss the value of my current mindfulness meditation practice for me in dealing constructively with the current political situation in the United States, which was directly related to the violation of my personal vulnerabilities through condescending argumentation.

Keywords: mindfulness mediation, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), self-acceptance, self-compassion, violation of personal vulnerabilities, condescending argumentation.

Introduction

There are many ways in which we can suffer violations of our personal vulnerabilities, ranging from physical violence and rape through non-physical aggression involving sarcasm and condescending argumentation. In this article I will discuss violations of personal vulnerabilities through this latter mechanism, condescending argumentation, and I will do so through revealing my recent relevant intense and impactful experience in this regard, in the context of the qualitative research methodologies of autoethnography (Chang, 2003, Ellis, 2008) and heuristic phenomenology (Moustakas, 1990, 1994), in which the relevant experiences of the researcher are utilized as part of the research exploration. I will begin by describing the practice of mindfulness meditation as formulated by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994, 2005), with a focus on self-compassion, followed by conveying my recent experience of a violation of my personal vulnerabilities through condescending argumentation. I will then relate this to my own current mindfulness meditation practice, both individually and in a spiritual community, as a therapeutic way of healing these violations of personal vulnerabilities, with a focus on self-compassion. In the context of my current mindfulness meditation practice, I will also discuss its value for me in dealing constructively with the current political situation in the United States, which was directly related to the violation of my personal vulnerabilities through condescending argumentation, as I describe in detail in this article.

Mindfulness Meditation and Self-Compassion

Mindfulness meditation is now quite popular and commonplace in the United States, thanks largely to the influence and promotion since the 1970s of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994, 2005), and of the spiritual meditation practices of a number of Eastern gurus and religious organizations, such as Chögyam Trungpa (1984) and the Shambhala organization.¹ I was involved with the Shambhala organization for about 9 months in 2017, and I am familiar with the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn vicariously through my wife’s participation in the MBSR teacher training program, as well as from my readings of some of Kabat-Zinn’s (1994, 2005) books. Although I gained much valuable knowledge about practicing mindfulness meditation from Shambhala, my involvement in the Shambhala organization ended in 2018 due to a number of factors, inclusive especially of the shocking sexual abuse over the period of a number of years by the Shambhala guru (and son of Trungpa) Sakyong Mipham.¹ On the other hand, what I have learned about the MBSR work of Jon Kabat Zinn (1994, 2005) is something that I find continually beneficial as I engage in my current mindfulness meditation practice. However, there is much value to engaging in mindfulness meditation as part of a spiritual community, of course without the dangerous side-effects of following an unethical guru, and the Kabat-Zinn MBSR organization does not lend itself to this kind of social involvement on a regular frequent basis, for me or for my wife Dorothy. Consequently Dorothy and I are now engaging in a safe spiritual community where we can comfortably practice our mindfulness meditation on a regular frequent basis, which is the Unitarian Society in Bangor, Maine. In a subsequent section in this article I will describe my mindfulness meditation practice, inclusive of my current communal mindfulness meditation involvement, and its relationship to self-compassion for me. However, first I will take a brief look at the relationship of mindfulness meditation to self-compassion and self-acceptance, as described by a number of authors in the edited book The Self-Acceptance Project: How to Be Kind & Compassionate Toward Yourself in Any Situation (Simon, 2016).

For Tara Brach (2016), compassion is related to both mindfulness and unconditional love:

Despite our conditioning, we each have the potential for mindful presence and unconditional love. Once we see the

Corresponding Author: Elliot Benjamin, Ph.D.
Email: ben496@prexar.com

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And in regard to the main theme of this article about healing from violations of personal vulnerabilities, Friedemann Schaub (2016) stressed that healing, change, and growth can be the outcome of pain, whether it is physical or emotional: "The good news is that pain, whether physical or emotional, can function as a powerful catalyst for healing, change, and growth" (p. 9).

For Jay Earley (2016), founder of Internal Family Systems, being compassionate to ourselves is all about self-acceptance:

Self-acceptance is the ability to accept all of our parts and to be open to them, even interested in them. ... In addition to all of your parts-the protectors and the exiles-there is the Self, which is who we truly are when none of our parts is dominant. ... It is a place of compassion for and curiosity about your parts, a place of connection and calm, and most importantly, a place of self-acceptance. ... When you transform your Inner Critics, you automatically become self-accepting because you are no longer judging or pushing yourself. When you are in Self, you naturally accept and love yourself because that is your true nature. (pp. 37, 40, 43, original emphasis)

And Erin Olivo (2016) related self-compassion to self-worth and self-respect: "Our sense of self-worth is much less easily shaken if it is derived from a deeply held sense of self-compassion and self-respect, rather than being contingent on fulfilling certain ideals" (p. 45).

According to Kristin Neff (2016), we know how to be compassionate to others, but we need to remember to be this way to ourselves, and awareness and mindfulness are important parts of this undertaking:

We know how to be kind and compassionate to others when they're feeling bad about themselves or are suffering in some way. We know what to say and do. We just have to remember to do it for ourselves. ... That's why the mindfulness piece, the awareness piece, is so important. The absolute starting point has to be noticing when self-criticism is happening. Mindfulness can help us develop a refined ear for the self-critical voice. ... Awareness and practice are the way to change habits, including compassion for what's driving the habit. (pp. 63, 67)

And poet/philosopher Mark Nepo (2016) profoundly related self-compassion to self-acceptance:

Self-acceptance is a kind of courage—a quiet courage. It means meeting life with who we are completely, being open to how we're shaped in the same way the shore is shaped by the surf. ... Ultimately, self-acceptance relates to the opening of the heart. It has to do with the long, hard journey of losing ourselves. We need to love that piece in us that has lived forever, listening to it, and letting it show itself despite those who say, "I don't understand," or "That scares me," or "Go away." We need to do this because being hidden from that Self creates a barrier between the world and the heart that is more damaging than any worldly rejection we could meet. ... When each of us meets the world with that honest vulnerability, there are no strangers in the heart. (pp. 117, 124)

Like Kristin Neff (2016), neuroscientist Rick Hanson (2016) also discussed self-compassion in relation to compassion itself:

Compassion is the wish that a being not suffer, usually with a feeling of sympathetic concern: self-compassion simply applies this wish and sympathetic support to the being who wears your name tag. ... You are not resisting the pain or cradling its absence, but simply bringing the same benevolence and concern to yourself that you would to anyone you care about. (p. 130)

And finally, Robert Augustus Masters (2016) conveyed some deep relationships between self-compassion, self-acceptance, and our "inner critics":

Self-acceptance is a great matter, asking much of us, and giving back even more. Exploring and cultivating intimacy with what's in the way of self-acceptance is an essential journey for us, if we are to truly come alive. ... We can learn to generate this quality of compassion toward ourselves. ... To do this, we have to cultivate a willingness to turn toward what is difficult, painful, or challenging in our lives. ... The key here is to develop more compassion for our difficulty in accepting-not condoning, but accepting-where we are, noticing if our inner critic is giving us a hard time about this. ... Our work is, in part, to open our hearts to our closed-heartedness. In other words, to have compassion for the places in us that do not give a damn about what anyone else is experiencing. ... There are some painful, dark, embarrassing things in each of us, things we can easily disown or reject or deny. When we move toward these things, approaching them with both care and curiosity, there is a sense of them leaving the shadows, shifting from being disowned or rejected its to reclaimed me. We can move toward becoming whole through such radical self-acceptance. (pp. 151, 154, 156-158, original emphasis)

My Intense and Impactful Experience of Violation of My Personal Vulnerabilities

I will now cut to the chase and describe my intense and impactful personal experience of having been violated of my personal vulnerabilities through condescending argumentation, which occurred in August, 2018 during my visit in Virginia to my lifelong friend Barry. I have maintained a friendship with my high school buddy Barry for 54 years. It started in my junior year in high school in 1965, after I lived through a traumatic experience at summer camp, being made fun of by other boys when I was trying to be "part of the gang" and act "macho." As I have described previously:

When I tried to ignore my nature and become part of a group of "normal" aggressive masculine teenage boys during one of my summer camp engagements, I was mercilessly made fun of and stigmatized, and I was left...
History of my Friendship with Barry

In 1965 I developed a very unusual friendship, for teenage boys growing up in Brooklyn, New York, with Barry, as I actually candidly disclosed my traumatic camp experience to him, and Barry was supportive and was always there for me. Our friendship in high school revolved around playing sports together, working on getting dates with girls, and our weekly long walks and talks, where we would engage in stimulating philosophical and metaphysical discussions and express our personal vulnerabilities with each other, though it was mostly me expressing personal vulnerabilities. We didn’t know anything about psychology per se at the time, but I later realized that what I experienced with Barry involved the essence of what Carl Rogers (1961) had described as the qualities of empathy, authenticity, and unconditional positive regard in his person-centered counseling approach to psychotherapy. At any rate, my unusual friendship Barry enabled me to find a way of working through my masculinity issues in high school sufficiently to avoid going into formal therapy and/or becoming unable to socially function in my traditional Brooklyn, New York high school.

Eventually, after sharing a room in our respective jobs at a summer camp in upstate New York, I went to an out-of-town college-State University of New York at Stony Brook, and Barry stayed at home and went to Brooklyn College. I met my college roommate Mike, another friendship that I have maintained for over half a century, who influenced me to smoke marijuana and become a politically progressive semi-hippie, while Barry joined his college house plan, which was essentially a smaller, less harsh, and more informal type of fraternity, and became “one of the guys,” had no interest in ever smoking marijuana, and became a political “moderate.” But somehow we managed to keep up our friendship, as we always got together during my visits back home in Brooklyn, New York.

After college, Barry spent a few years working at odd jobs in different parts of the country, and eventually took a government administration job and got married and settled down in a small town in Virginia. I periodically visited Barry every few years, including throughout my son Jeremy’s growing up years after my divorce in 1985, and Barry occasionally visited me, inclusive of attending Jeremy’s bar mitzvah in Maine in 1994. Jeremy got along very well with Barry’s two sons, and we all enjoyed our visits to Virginia, which included me and Barry continuing to engage in our philosophical and metaphysical discussions, which gradually became more argumentative as I am an agnostic and Barry is an atheist and we were both quite intense and animated in our argumentation, but it never got out-of-hand in terms of damaging our friendship. Our visits also included me revealing my single life dating exploits and non-traditional spiritual explorations (Benjamin, 2018a), and eventually extended to visiting with my second wife Dorothy, who I became romantically involved with in 2005 and married in 2016.

In March, 1977, during my first visit to Barry in Virginia, soon before he got married, I wrote an essay which I have never published, entitled On Continuity and Identity, that describes how deeply important my friendship with Barry was to me at that time, and this feeling has continued for me to the present day, which is 42 years later. The following are some relevant passages from this essay, followed by a relevant passage about my fictional best friend Barry Gray from my autobiographical unpublished novel, in which the character Walter is essentially myself, and is based upon my friendship with my real life friend Barry:

Barry and I were best friends throughout high school, and have kept up our friendship ever since. The way Barry and I became friends is very interesting. When I was 15, I somehow felt what it meant to be “real” and “authentic,” and I opened myself up to Barry and he-in turn - although much more hesitantly and tempered, did so to me. Thus, I learned for the first time what it meant to feel a special bond with a friend. Barry and I felt like we were very much apart from the rest of our cliqueish jockish counterparts in high school, and whereas I felt beneath my social peers, Barry would assure me that it was not us who were abnormal and unfit, but rather that we were legitimate normal persons and the rest of our peers were all on ego trips. So Barry and I pulled each other through adolescence-confiding in each other, trying to pick up girls together, playing various sports together including pool [billiards], and then eventually going our separate ways when I went out of town to college and he went to his college at home. We developed very differently, as Barry joined a house plan at Brooklyn College and became “one of the guys,” and I grew my hair long and got interested in marijuana and mysticism.

Barry became conservative politically and I became radical politically, affirming that I would go to Canada before I would allow myself to be drafted into the army. But when I would come home on vacations, and when we were together again, all these differences just didn’t seem to matter, as we always got back in touch-somehow or other.

Barry visited me at Stony Brook... was an usher at my wedding, for which he flew into New York from Denver to be at... Barry and I had remarkably contrasting views about the most important things in life to me. As I delved headfirst into Scientology and spiritualism [see Benjamin, 2018a], I was all the time aware that Barry, being an affirmed atheist, would not take me seriously for one instant. As I discovered my most cherished book and author, Demian and Hermann Hesse ([1965]), Barry, reading Demian to satisfy my continuous requests, labeled both Hesse and Demian as mysticism, and got very little out of it. And lastly and that which hurt most of all-after my mother died and I was desperately in need of a friend

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to confide in Barry was unwilling and/or unable to be the way I needed him to be. So what is the result? The result is that here I am in . . . Virginia—spending a week with my old friend Barry, as we slowly recapture the powerful feelings of our friendship. Thus this personal anecdote stands as the beginning of my theory of "continuity and identity."[2]

Barry Gray had been Walter’s best friend for the past 3 years. They first met in high school, and struck up a friendship through a mutual interest in baseball. Soon they were talking about girls, personal hangups, philosophy and religion, and just about everything under the sun. Walter and Barry learned from each other the meaning of trust, support, and intimacy. Without Barry, Walter felt that he never could have made it through his adolescent years without seeing a psychiatrist. Walter was very shy, and while the rest of his peers started dating girls, Walter could hardly get up the courage to even speak to a girl. Barry was somewhat more self-assured, but enjoyed very much having someone to confide in, about his own topsyturvy neophyte relationships with girls. Barry also greatly looked forward to his philosophical discussions with Walter, as Walter had quite an active mind; a mind that was filled with ideas, notions, and most of all questions. And so, when Walter was faced with making the biggest decision of his life, it was Barry that he turned to. He called Barry up 10:00 Saturday morning, and they met at the Midwood Field tennis courts, which was halfway between their houses. Then they took one of their habitual long walks through the Flatbush area of Brooklyn, and let their moods and hearts say what was inside. Walter started the conversation:[3]

Barry’s Violation of My Personal Vulnerabilities

In late August, 2018, Dorothy and I once again visited Barry and his wife in Virginia, and the argumentation between me and Barry entered the political arena, things did get out-of-hand, and our 53+ year friendship was most certainly damaged, at least for me, and very nearly came to an end. To backtrack a bit, I had been and still am deeply affected and concerned about what I perceive as the immense danger to our country and the world of United States president Donald Trump, and I have written and published a number of articles expressing my concerns. This evolved into my deciding to purchase eight copies of the book The Constitution Demands It: The Case for the Impeachment of Donald Trump (Fein, Bonifaz, & Clements, 2018), and distribute it to friends and family members whom I thought would be interested in and open to what is conveyed in this book (Benjamin, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d). Consequently I brought one of these books to Virginia during my last visit to Barry, and within 2 hours of our visit, as the topic of conversation very naturally became involved with Trump, I started talking about impeachment. Barry strongly and didactically conveyed that he did not think at this time there were sufficient grounds for impeachment, and this stimulated me to give him my book, much earlier in the visit than I had intended to do.

Well how can I describe what happened over the weekend between me and Barry? To make a long story short, Barry proceeded to tear down everything the authors of the book on impeachment said, as he relentlessly explained to me how they were looking at the impeachment issue in a narrow-minded way, not taking into account other perspectives which disagreed with their conclusions. When I countered that they supported all their contentions for their eight grounds of impeachment (they currently have 11 grounds of impeachment), with references to the illustrious founding fathers of the constitution, such as Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, Barry emphatically conveyed to me that there were "other" founding fathers of the constitution who thought differently about the grounds for impeachment and who the authors intentionally did not mention, but who critics could utilize in making a different argument. From there things got worse, as Barry accused me of being narrow-minded, as I rarely read newspapers and get most of my information from progressive sources on the Internet. He very condescendingly was amazed that I had not heard of a well-known political author who has a regular column for the New York Times, and he made me promise that I would start reading the New York Times before discussing political issues with him again.

While all this was happening, I could feel my insides churning and my self-esteem diminishing, until my self-confidence was at the lowest point I can remember it being at since I was in high school, over 50 years ago. And this was stimulated by my supposed best friend! It was all I could do to change the subject of conversation, though I weakly brought up related political issues over the weekend, and Barry had continuously strong and emphatic responses to everything I brought up. We did have some good times, as Barry and I played tennis, and we all played scrubble and went out to dinner, but underneath it all I knew that I was deeply hurt and offended by Barry. And the culmination of my disturbing interactions with Barry occurred on the morning that we left. I was keeping my fingers crossed that this would not happen, but it happened. As I proceeded to go into the kitchen to have a quick breakfast before we left the house, on the kitchen table was my book, as Barry nonchalantly told me to not forget my book. And it was all I could to keep my feelings of utter humiliation to myself, as I managed to compose myself, pack my book, and have me and Dorothy leave the house and say our good-byes as soon as possible.

Now I understood that Barry did not intentionally try to hurt me, neither in our intensive political argumentation, nor in his insensitive returning my book to me, but hurt me he did. I also knew that this tied deeply for me with my vulnerable sense of masculinity, and it was so ironic that here was my hero from my boyhood, interacting with me in a way that made me feel like I was 15 again, at the bottom of the hierarchy of teenage boys. Intellectually I of course knew better. After all, I have two Ph.D’s, over 180 published articles, four published books, and I have been a well-respected online Ph.D psychology mentor and committee chair at Capella University for over 3 years, preceded by being the director of an online transpersonal psychology program for 3 years. My Integral World articles have been read by over 100,000 people, my three Shambhala Integral World articles were, during my visit with Barry, on the top 10 of Integral World articles most frequently read, including the No. 1 and No. 3 spots, and over 1500 people have read my various articles on Research Gate.
My loving wife Dorothy tried her best to remind me of my self-worth as we went to sleep in Virginia that first night. But when one’s personal vulnerabilities are violated, the emotions can easily dominate the cognitive intellect, and this was what was happening to me. The criticism itself was not the problem, as I view myself as an authentic philosopher and I am certainly open to criticism. And it is true that it would be beneficial for me to read public newspapers more often, in particular The New York Times, when I write about political events. But the way criticism is given to someone makes all the difference, and Barry’s condescending argumentation was personally devastating to me. I tried to convey to Barry that the authors of the impeachment book were just saying that there was sufficient grounds to at least start impeachment proceedings, letting Congress decide the merits of the constitutional arguments, but Barry was persistent in saying that they did not make the case to justify this. I later learned that the authors had consulted 58 constitutional lawyers in writing their book, but I know that conveying this to Barry would also have backfired, as he would have probably just said that there are at least 58 constitutional lawyers who think otherwise.

The Aftermath of Barry’s Violation of My Personal Vulnerabilities

For about a month after our visit I was at a loss as to what to do in regard to my friendship with Barry. I knew that being superficial and “polite” was not something I was able to or wanted to do, and therefore I did not send Barry an e-mail to thank him and his wife for their hospitality in having us visit, or ask about his knee which he had hurt by playing tennis too long with me (2½ hours in the hot Virginia sun), as he had not played tennis for 4 years and we are both in our late 60’s. But I also knew that expressing my real feelings to Barry, which is what I felt like doing, would backfire big time if I had any hopes of continuing my friendship with him. For I knew that Barry would not take my expression of feelings in any kind of constructive way, but rather would get defensive and argumentative, I would feel criticized even more than I did during our visit, and our friendship would finally end. I was at a standstill and not knowing what to do. But my wife Dorothy was compassionate and helpful to me, and as it turned out, with Dorothy’s encouragement I ended up going on a 5 day meditation and yoga retreat, during which time I read the book To be a Man: A Guide to True Masculine Power (Masters, 2018), I had already been starting to discipline myself in a semi-daily mindfulness meditation practice that I’ll discuss more in the next section, and I gradually started to feel back to myself regarding my self-worth and self-confidence. During this process, it was also helpful to me to discuss my violation of personal vulnerability experience with my creative artists support group, who gave me much needed support and compassion at the time. In addition, I was able to talk about my violation of personal vulnerability experience with some friends of Dorothy who we occasionally both were getting together with at the time, and through the compassion of Dorothy, my creative artists support group, and Dorothy’s friends, as well as through a number of publications of my articles in humanistic and transpersonal psychology journals that were in various stages of being in-print, I could see that I was going to come out of this challenging experience with my self intact.

In the next section I will describe more specifically the theoretical and academic overtones that is related to the story that I have conveyed thus far, involving mindfulness meditation and self-compassion as a healing mechanism for violations of personal vulnerabilities. But to put closure on my story, I will convey that my college buddy Mike, who lives in Pennsylvania and who also has two boys who my son Jeremy periodically played with in his growing up years during our practically every other summer Pennsylvania and Virginia visits, and whom we also recently visited, sent me a number of home movies that he had taken during one of my visits with Jeremy, back in 1988 when Jeremy was nearly 7 years old (he is currently 37). Watching these movies was very emotional for me, and it made me think back to all my visits with Jeremy with both my friends Mike and Barry, and how Mike and Barry are truly like family to me. I had a deep realization that I could not end my friendship with Barry, and I found myself sending Barry a light friendly e-mail, asking him about his knee and thanking him for some advice he gave me about Jeremy’s current chosen lifestyle and acting pursuits that I disclosed to Barry was very difficult for both me and Dorothy.

It usually takes a while for Barry to respond to my e-mails, but within a few hours he wrote back a friendly e-mail, saying it was good to see us, and that he will try to make a trip to visit his brother and us in Maine in 2019. This was followed a few months later with me deciding to send Barry my essay that described my change of perspective on impeachment (Benjamin, 2018d), and Barry responded quickly and reasonably well, all things considered, and included some impressive news about his oldest son’s accomplishments. About a month after that, my friend Mike had sent me a New York Times article about impeachment that I liked and agreed with, and I sent Barry this article and we again had a reasonably constructive e-mail exchange, which has periodically continued over the next few months. This constructive e-mail exchange most recently involved me sending Barry my Integral World article about defeating Trump in 2020 (Benjamin, 2019), in which I advocated for Joe Biden as our best possibility to defeat Trump in 2020 (which Barry agreed with me about), along with Biden’s subsequent passionate declaration against “Trump’s dangerous racism” on the day that Biden announced his candidacy (which happened to be on my birthday). And thus my little saga is ending on a positive note. I am preserving my friendship with my high school buddy Barry, but I have learned an enormous amount about myself in the process of doing so, and in the next section I will tie in my personal learnings to the healing practices and theories of mindfulness meditation and self-compassion, as described by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994, 2005).

The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program of Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness meditation, as developed and successfully promoted by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994, 2005) since the 1970’s in the context of his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, is very related to self-acceptance, self-awareness, and self-compassion. As I am focusing specifically on the factor of self-compassion in mindfulness meditation in this essay, the
following description from Kabat-Zinn (2005) is a relevant illustration:

Remember that mindfulness practice is a radical act of love. That means that compassion and self-compassion lie at its root. If we cannot be gentle with and accepting of ourselves and the experiences we are having now, whatever they are, if we are always wanting some other, better experience to convince ourselves or others that we are growing, that we are becoming a better person, then we probably should give up meditating. We will certainly be creating a great deal of stress and pain for ourselves, and then will ultimately blame the meditation for "not working" when it might be more accurate to say that we were unwilling to work with things as they are, as we found them, and accept ourselves as we are. . . . The soil of deep practice requires the fertilizer of deep self-acceptance and self-compassion. For this reason, gentleness is not a luxury, but a critical requirement for coming to our senses. (p. 303)

This passage from Kabat-Zinn on self-compassion speaks volumes about what I am currently in the process of trying to develop. Accepting myself, being aware of my feelings and vulnerabilities, and having compassion for myself are the ingredients of mindfulness meditation that I have found to be enormously healing in regard to recovering from violations of my personal vulnerabilities, and I have effectively applied this to the challenging situation that I recently found myself in regard to my relationship with my friend Barry. When I use the term self-compassion, I am assuming that I have already been engaging in the processes of self-acceptance and self-awareness, and that I am learning to be "gentle" and caring about my own personal vulnerabilities. For me this immediately enters the territory of my masculinity issues, as I have described above, and I have grown in my ability to be compassionate to myself in this way. In regard to masculinity issues, Robert Augustus Masters (2018) conveyed the following about the "shadow" in his book To Be A Man: A Guide to True Masculine Power:

Your shadow is a composite of the elements and qualities within you: that you are disconnected from or out of touch with . . . that you are denying, pushing away, or otherwise disowning . . . that you tend to project onto others (as if they had a particular quality, but you don't) . . . that you are keeping-or trying to keep-out of sight or in the dark . . . that you describe with the expression, "That's not me." A person's shadow is not just some archetypal concept, but an everyday reality that dominates those who are unaware of it-and also plenty of those who have only an intellectual awareness of it. Our shadow is the dimension of us that's occupied by what we can't or won't face about ourselves. . . . Opening to and embodying such qualities is implicit in the shift toward true masculine power. . . . Whenever you find yourself being reactive, caught up in the same old patterns, or shutting down emotionally, you are in your shadow's grip. Whatever in you that you're keeping in the dark, whatever in you is unhealed, doesn't go away or keep quiet just because you don't see or hear or feel it. Wherever we go, our shadow comes along.

Pushing it away or ignoring it does not truly separate us from it. (pp. 45-47)

And for me, my recent challenging interactions with my friend Barry in regard to his pressuring argumentation is very related to my masculinity issues. I was not fully aware of this at the time it was happening, but my body gave me unmistakable signs that I was quite shaken up, and what was below the surface was being exposed in a way that made me feel helpless and powerless. But over time, through my mindfulness meditation practice, my 5 day meditation and yoga retreat, my helpful spiritual/psychological readings, my professional essay publications, and the support I received from my wife, her friends, and my creative artists support group, I felt like I was starting to come out of this in a way that was making me authentically stronger. As Masters (2018) explained:

As you cultivate intimacy with your shadow, you will inevitably find yourself in various situations that activate it, but you'll be far more likely to handle things with greater skill when this happens. . . . Whatever happens, you'll be better able to take the situation as an opportunity to see your shadow more clearly and to make wise use of it. (p. 52)

I believe that this kind of working on one's deep shadow issues with self-acceptance, self-awareness, and self-compassion is the key to healing wounds from violations of personal vulnerabilities, whatever the nature of these personal vulnerabilities are. In regard to healing via the process of mindfulness meditation, Kabat-Zinn (2005) said the following:

Healing is a process; one that involves the recognition of our wholeness, and a steadfast refusal to allow ourselves to be fragmented, even when we are terrified, or broken apart by life. Ultimately, healing is a coming to terms with things as they are, rather than struggling to force them to be as they once were, or as we would like them to be to feel secure, or to have what we sometimes think of as our own way . . . . Healing is a matter of knowing that we can be shattered and yet we are still whole [the last line of this quote is by Saki Santorelli]. (pp. 336-337)

And for Kabat-Zinn, one should engage in a mindfulness meditation practice "as if your life, depends upon it," and in terms of the quality of your life, I believe that it does, as Kabat-Zinn (2005) conveyed:

I urge those who practice with me to practice as if their lives depended on it. Only if you know or even suspect that it actually does will you have sufficient energy to sit whether you feel like it or not, and really inhabit and make maximal use of that infinitude of timeless moments available to you in sitting, however long it is by the clock, without doing anything. . . . And above all, to make your life, into the real practice so that it is not merely a matter of making a regular time for formal practice, but a willingness to bring mindfulness to every moment, no matter what you are doing or what is going on, so that it feels after a while that the practice is doing you rather than you are doing the practice . . . . The ardor, the passion to engage in this radical act, so unusual for our time-pressure, driven way of life and the sea of distractions
and demands we are so much a prey to, is vital if we are to maintain and even deepen our momentum and commitment to liberation from unawareness and the suffering it inevitably brings in its wake. (pp. 305-306, original emphasis)

I find Kabat-Zinn’s (2005) description of the healing capacities of mindfulness meditation, focusing specifically on his form of mindfulness-based stress reduction, to be extremely beneficial, and I try my best to practice for short meditation periods at least a few times a week. The following passage from Kabat-Zinn (2005) is one that I find especially inspiring:

Life responds to wise attention in remarkable ways, perhaps in part because of the deep plasticity of the nervous system. But wise attention requires that, when faced with great life challenges, especially those that bring with them enormous suffering and grief, we be willing, in the face of all our pain and turmoil and even feelings of despair, to do a certain kind of work on and with ourselves, a work that no one on the planet can do for us, no matter how much they would want to, no matter how much love they have for us, no matter how badly they feel for us, no matter how much they are helping us in the ways that they can help. . . . It is your very life that hangs in the balance, and for that reason alone, the work is profoundly satisfying in addition to being so challenging. We discover that it is indeed intrinsically fulfilling to be fully present, to attend non-reactively, non-judgmentally, even when, especially, what we might be attending to is fear, or loneliness, confusion, and the psychic pain that accompanies such mind states. We discover that such mind states and body states are indeed workable, and that means, ultimately, profoundly healable. (p. 386)

However, along with the above well-deserved praise that I have given to Jon Kabat-Zinn and his MBSR mindfulness meditation program, it is important to keep the following in mind. While having a "teacher" in a mindfulness meditation program can be extremely beneficial, and I feel quite comfortable that Jon Kabat-Zinn in his promotion and development of mindfulness meditation in the context of MBSR is a teacher who is both genuine and ethical, and has been enormously helpful to a great number of people, there are undoubtedly dangers in following a teacher on the path of mindfulness meditation who is actually an unethical "guru" in a religious organization with significant cult dangers, as I have experienced in the Shambhala organization (Benjamin, 2017, 2018e, 2018f).

My Current Mindfulness Meditation Practice

In addition to my current individual mindfulness meditation practice, my wife Dorothy and I are now engaged in practicing mindfulness meditation as part of group that meets one evening every other week, for about an hour and a half, at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Bangor, Maine.¹⁰ My initial and short-lived involvement with Unitarianism actually started in the late 1970’s (Benjamin, 2018a). Although I did not continue my involvement with Unitarianism after I moved to Maine in 1985, I still had basically good feelings about Unitarianism (Benjamin, 2018a). As it turned out, my wife Dorothy also had basically good feelings and some involvement with Unitarianism a number of years ago, and thus when we found out about a meditation group available at the Unitarian Society in Bangor, Maine, we decided to check it out. We have now been to about a dozen meditation group meetings at the Unitarian Universalist Society in Bangor, and we have very good feelings about the mindfulness meditation that we have experienced there. There is no doubt in my mind that there are no unethical guru influences here, as the minister of the church who leads the meditation group is forthright, sensitive, caring, and I believe is completely trustworthy and ethical. Dorothy and I have gained much value from participating in these meditation group meetings, and it truly appears to be a stimulating and beneficial community atmosphere for us (though small, as thus far no more than five participants have attended the meetings).

In regard to my individual mindfulness meditation practice, I generally practice in the mornings for short 10 or 15 minute periods, about 3 or 4 times a week. I always get in touch with what is going for me in my deepest core, and I feel refreshed and know what I need to embark on for the day, which is a signal to me that I am ready to end my meditation practice that morning. It still amazes me that such a short natural practice can be as beneficial as it is for me, but this is entirely consistent with what Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994, 2005) has conveyed in his writings about MBSR, as I have described above. I have also noticed that when I let more than a few days go by without practicing, I eventually become less calm and more reactive and stressed as the political news of the world continually impacts me. Thus my practice has become a way of life for me, and I know that it has enabled me to make significant progress to heal from my experience of violation of my personal vulnerabilities through condescending argumentation from my friend Barry. However, this way of life is delicate, as I also know that I need to make it a priority to continue my discipline of engaging in my practice on a regular basis, in my own way.

Assimilation and Conclusion

It has now been over 8 months since my challenging experience of having been violated of my personal vulnerabilities in the context of condescending argumentation from my friend Barry. I made my decision to continue my friendship with Barry, and I have found a workable balance between keeping up my self-protection guards and communicating with him about how I feel about relevant political issues. And engaging in my practice of mindfulness meditation, primarily on my own though with periodic reinforcements from the Unitarian Society of Bangor, Maine, has been extremely helpful to me in this process. Getting in touch with my deep feelings and taking time for myself to just "be" on a regular basis has been instrumental in the healing process for me, and this is all about having compassion for myself; having compassion for my feelings, for my vulnerabilities, and also for my strengths. This self-healing meditation process is becoming a way of life for me that is proving to be extremely beneficial in enabling me to effectively deal with periodic challenges in a number of relationships that I have, including issues that occasionally come up with my wife Dorothy¹¹ and issues that persistently come up with my son Jeremy (Benjamin, 2018g). And this self-healing meditation process has also been extremely beneficial to me in the context of my political/professional activities in regard to the Resisting Trump movement, as I recently gave presentations at the March, 2019 Society for Humanistic Psychology conference¹².

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about my work in the Resisting Trump movement and the relationship of my Resisting Trump work to humanistic psychology (Benjamin, 2018/2019, in press). As I have described above, I know that my regular mindfulness meditation practice is an essential ingredient in my being able to remain centered and relatively calm in the midst of what I experience as an ongoing overwhelming political nightmare that can wreak havoc on The United States and the world.⁴ In this context, Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005) made the following impactful statement about how mindfulness meditation can be beneficial in “healing the body politic”:

We are sitting atop a unique moment in history unfolding, a majority tipping point. This time we are in provides singular opportunities that can be seized and made use of with every breath. There is only one way to do that. It is to embody, in our lives as they are unfolding here and now, our deepest values and our understanding of what is most important and share it with each other, trusting that such embodied actions, on even the smallest of scales, will entrain the world over time into greater wisdom and health and sanity. (p. 512)

And in regard to my deep concern about the destruction and dangers of our President Trump, I find Kabat-Zinn’s wise advice based upon the martial art of aikido, written over a decade before the reality of the present political Trump-related continuous crisis in the United States and the world, to be comforting (notwithstanding Kabat-Zinn’s unfortunate generic use of the masculine personal pronoun):

I am reminded of a description of the martial art of aikido I came across a long time ago but have never forgotten. Paraphrasing: If someone attacks you, he is already out of his mind in a certain way, has already surrendered his own point of independence and balance by the very irrationality of that aggressive act. If you do not succumb to fear and lose your own equanimity and clarity, but rather, enter into and blend with the attacking energy while maintaining your own balance and center, you can use the attacker’s intrinsically unbalanced energy and momentum against himself with an economy of effort, doing the least harm and the greatest good. You blend with the opponent, guiding him back around your own center and neutralizing his attack. . . Imagine utilizing our power in such conscious ways in the face of aggression and challenges of all kinds, at all levels in our world predicated on the recognition that an attacker or potential attackers have already demonstrated a huge weakness and imbalance by the aggressive and therefore irrational or deluded nature of their very act or intention. (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, pp. 531-533)

And just as mindfulness meditation can be applied to healing one’s self, for Kabat-Zinn it can also be applied to healing a society and a nation:

That doesn’t mean that mindfulness itself is some kind of magical elixir or cure. Nor does it mean that mindfulness is the answer to all life’s problems. But cultivating intimacy with how things actually are is the first step on the path of healing, whether we are talking about a person or a nation, or all nations and all beings . . . If we allow ourselves to follow a path of evolving consciousness as individuals, in response perhaps to some deep and inchoate yearning for peace and happiness and for a greater freedom from the afflictions of disconnection and distress and disease, sooner or later it will have a profound impact on our relationships with each other and on the society and world we inhabit. It has to. . . Since the potential for wisdom and emotional states such as kindness, compassion, empathy, devotion, joy, and love are already folded into our deepest nature as beings, their conscious development and deployment may make the difference between peace and perpetual war, between true security and perpetual insecurity, between rampant disease and true liberation of human society from its own self-destructive tendencies. (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, pp. 545, 552, 554)

And for me, the wisdom of Kabat-Zinn’s mindfulness meditation teachings has gone full-circle, as practicing self-compassion through mindfulness meditation helped me heal from the violations of my personal vulnerabilities through condescending argumentation from my friend Barry, which was brought to the surface through my political Trump-related overwhelming concerns, and I now understand that I need to regularly practice mindfulness meditation to be able to effectively handle what I experience as a horrific political Trump-related continual crisis that the United States is presently in the midst of. As Kabat-Zinn (2005) poetically and poignantely conveyed:

Mindfulness can be a natural catalyst in deepening and broadening democracy, a democracy in which liberty is embodied not only in our rhetoric and in our laws and institutions and how they are implemented in practice, as important as that is, but also in our hard-earned wisdom as individual citizens, stemming from looking deeply into and feeling from inside our true nature, a wisdom that is embodied in our hearts and in our love for the interior landscapes of the mind and the heart. The more we become intimate with that landscape, the more we can participate effectively in society, in the appreciation of the beauty and unique potential of all of us. The more people come to know this terrain, the more we will all benefit from sharing in a distributive wisdom and goodwill of mutual regard that can translate into healthier communities and a healthier society, and a nation that knows its priorities and lives them in the world with authentic and unwavering reverence and respect. . . Meditation is a way to restore a degree of balance and clarity at the interface between the inner and outer worlds. It shows us how we might embody a degree of wisdom and at least a modicum of compassion right here and now; how we might embody freedom from affliction and emotional turmoil right in the midst of affliction and emotional turmoil. It has the capacity to calm the heart and focus and clarify the mind in any season of a life, even in the midst of the most horrific and tempestuous storms, without in the slightest disregarding the anguish and the enormity of the suffering that may be involved and the need to go on in the face of huge and painful uncertainties. And where do that wisdom and compassion come from?

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They come from inside you—they are part of your makeup, which you can come to embody in greater measure if you care to, just by keeping up the practice. (pp. 566-568)

Thus in conclusion, I now understand that the violation of my personal vulnerabilities through condescending argumentation that I experienced from my friend Barry have truly been a blessing in disguise for me, as it has resulted in my developing a regular mindfulness meditation practice and an appreciation for being compassionate to myself, which taken together is helping me to deal effectively with various challenges in my personal relationships, as well as with the current state of political reality in The United States.

Notes
2. My essay On Continuity and Identity is an essay in my unpublished book Natural Dimension; see Benjamin, 2018h for some of my essays in Natural Dimension.
3. See Benjamin, 2018a, 2018g for excerpts from some of the chapters in my unpublished semi-autobiographical novel The Maturation of Walter Goldman.
4. See Benjamin, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, and my earlier Trump-related articles referenced in these articles, as well as my Trump-related articles on the Integral World website at www.integralworld.net
5. See Benjamin, 2018d for my more recent views on impeachment, which I am currently in the process of reevaluating, given the present continual flagrant “obstructions of justice” by President Trump in the aftermath of the (redacted) Mueller report.
6. See the Free Speech for People website at www.freespeechforpeople.org and the Need to Impeach website at www.needtoimpeach.com
7. My meditation and yoga retreat was at Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health; see www.kripalu.org for a description of Kripalu, and see Benjamin, 2018a for my analysis of Kripalu as a beneficial spiritual organization.
8. See Benjamin, 2018g, 2018h.
11. See Paul, J. & Paul (2002a, 2002b) for a description of the Inner Bonding process, described as a “personal source of spiritual guidance,” in relation to working on one’s inner self in the context of an intimate relationship, which I find to be very consistent with the inner self processes engaged through mindfulness meditation.
12. See the Society for Humanistic Psychology website at www.apa.org/about/division/div32.aspx. I will also be giving a similar Resisting Trump/humanistic psychology workshop in London, and possibly Chicago, this year.

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**Bio for Elliot Benjamin**

Elliot Benjamin has a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Maine, and a Ph.D. in psychology from Saybrook University with a concentration in Consciousness and Spirituality. Elliot is currently a psychology mentor/Ph.D committee chair at Capella University (www.capella.edu), and was previously a mathematics professor for 21 years. He has published four books and over 180 articles in the fields of humanistic and transpersonal psychology; philosophy/spirituality and awareness of cult dangers; parapsychology; the creative artist, mental disturbance, and mental health; progressive politics; pure mathematics; and mathematics enrichment. His books *Life after Death: An Experiential Exploration with Mediums by an Agnostic Investigator*; *Modern Religions: An Experiential Analysis and Exposé*; *The Creative Artist, Mental Disturbance, and Mental Health*; and *Numberama: Recreational Number Theory in the School System* are currently available at www.amazon.com. Elliot lives in Maine with his wife Dorothy, and their dog and cat, and enjoys playing the piano, tennis, and ballroom dancing, and has an author’s website that can be viewed at www.benjamin-philosopher.com

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