

# Compassion Fatigue

-A Buddhist Perspective

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## What is Compassion Fatigue?

- The "negative" aspects of helping
  - constant exposure to death
  - constant neediness of some patients and families
  - exposure to sadness of young children losing loved ones
  - exposure to patients coming from environments where they were not loved or cared for properly
  - realization of many painful realities that we may be powerless to change or effect

## Am I suffering from CF?

- Excessive blaming
- Bottled up emotions
- Isolation from others
- Voices excessive complaints
- Substance abuse
- Compulsive behaviors (spending, eating, gambling, sex)
- Poor self-hygiene
- Chronic physical ailments

## Cont.

- Recurrent dreams about work
- Loss of pleasure
- Difficulty concentrating
- Mentally & physically tired
- IN DENIAL OF ABOVE!

## Measuring....

- Professional Quality of Life Scale
  - 30 item self report measuring the positive and negative aspects of caring
  - Measures compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction with subscales of burnout and secondary trauma
  - Most widely used instrument in the world for this

## Is CF normal?

- Probably
- Care givers choose to do so!
- Most caregivers strongly identify with helpless, suffering or traumatized people or animals
- They are by nature, OTHER-directed in their care giving
- They often lack authentic,ongoing self-care practices
- If you sense that you are suffering from CF, you probably are!

## Buddhism & Compassion

- Compassion is defined as “wanting others to be free of suffering”
- In order to generate compassion for another, one must realize that oneself is suffering.
- Every human being has the same potential for compassion
- The goal of all Buddhist practitioners is to develop genuine compassion for all beings

## How can one develop compassion for all?

- Embrace ones own suffering. Use it in a way to become more compassionate to others
- Recognize why we suffer: attachment and non-acceptance of what is
- Understand the universal nature of suffering
- The Four Noble Truths

## The Four Noble Truths

1. There is always suffering
2. Attachment, anger, and ignorance are the primary causes of suffering
3. There can be an end to suffering
4. The Eightfold Noble Path

## Eight-Fold Noble Path

- Correct thought
- Correct speech
- Correct actions
- Correct livelihood
- Correct concentration
- Correct mindfulness
- Correct effort
- Correct understanding

## Buddhism & CF

- We can learn to “practice”compassion everywhere: at the grocery store, at Chik fil et, at red lights, waiting in line, wandering around Home Depot trying to find something small, with Northerners, with Democrats, walking to and from our cars.....literally anywhere, with anyone.
- Practice makes perfect!

## Buddhism & CF- Tonglen Practice

- Breathe in negativity, breathe out positivity. This is quite contrary to our usual practice. Better to breathe out the good stuff!

## Buddhism & CF-Meditation

- The practice of quieting the mind, essentially emptying the mind, is very helpful in renewal of compassion
- Focus on the breath and quiet the “monkey mind”

## Buddhism & Mantras

- Choose a short meaningful statement and say it to yourself (or out loud). Repeat whenever faced with death or suffering.  
“May my mind and the mind of God be one”  
“May you be at peace”  
“May I (you) be filled with lovingkindness”

## Coping with CF

- Care for your self first!
- Recognize and be ever aware of your vulnerability to CF
- Regularly exercise, eat healthy, and get plenty of sleep
- Practice compassion every day (in tiny ways)
- Take a little time every day (even if only a minute or two) to breathe and be still
- Create a mantra and use it ferociously!
- Remember to laugh & breathe (it enhances your biochemistry)!

## References

- B. Hudnall Stamm, 2009 Professional Quality of Life
- Sogyal Rinpoche, The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying 1994

“All the peace and happiness of the whole globe,  
the peace and happiness of societies,  
the peace and happiness of family,  
the peace and happiness in the individual person’s life, and  
the peace and happiness of even the animals and so forth,  
all depends on having loving kindness toward each other”

Lama Zopa Rinpoche