

## COMMENTS AOD ASSIGNMENT #2

Dear --, I loved your essay, including its title. "Wakefulness" is such a wonderful concept, with its implication that we sleepwalk through much of our lives, to our own loss. I must admit that I am also a (sometime, informal) student of Buddhism (Zen, Tibetan, Vipassana), which disposed me very favorably to your observations! I will say that, in my opinion, Buddhism does the best job I have encountered anywhere (including in psychology!) of examining and understanding suffering, including how to obtain "freedom" from suffering. As you note, a common misconception is that "freedom from" means "lack of." In a world of duality, there will always be suffering. Our task is not to add unnecessarily to the suffering that already exists; but also to learn not to be so afraid of unavoidable suffering, but to be present with it, become familiar with it. I am sure you know the concepts of impermanence and groundlessness. We cling to the illusion of a predictable, stable world, whereas the reality is that things change. When we do not resist change, but accept it, we find freedom.

I very much valued your self-searching remarks about how you can create unnecessary suffering for yourself by strategies of shaming and blaming. You know, many high achievers (including yours truly) spend years "using the whip" to spur us on in pursuit of greater success, accomplishment, and perfection. As you've realized, when we don't extend compassion to ourselves, it is very hard to extend it to others. You are also certainly familiar with metta meditation, the practice of sending loving kindness to others - and importantly also to self.

Finally, it sounds like congratulations are in order for forthcoming baby X :-). You know, any spiritual practice ultimately is all about how its wisdom can be brought to bear on ordinary life. As one of my teachers, -- --, expressed it, "After the ecstasy, the laundry." You are at the beginning of the journey of parenthood, which includes plenty of ecstasy... and plenty of laundry (literally!). How wonderful that from the very start your intention is to bring presence, calmness, trust, and gratefulness into your and your baby's lives. And if the occasional yelp or grimace enters into the process :-), remember not to judge yourself too harshly for not being a perfect bodhisattva, but maintain curiosity, compassion - and breath! :-).

Best wishes, Dr. Shapiro