



Thriving 101: Getting Free of Judging

Lately I've been asked a lot of anguished questions about judging: "How can I stop judging?" "My therapist says I'll always judge other people. Is this really true?" "I'm practicing (NVC, Thriving Consciousness, compassion, mindfulness, etc.), but I'm still judging myself and others, what's wrong (with me)?"

The astonishingly simple, liberating answer I found for myself came several years ago as an unexpected miracle when I was "being a jerk" during a Shared Witnessing¹ session.

In Shared WitnessingTM (SW), we practice having and noticing our experience — body sensations, emotions, thoughts — without judgment, and without trying to figure out, fix, change, avoid, or stop having them. From time to time we also report out loud, in a brief sentence, what we're noticing that we're experiencing.

In this particular SW session, rather than connecting with himself, someone joining the group for the first time was "reporting" by commenting frequently, conversationally, and at length about what the other participants were reporting. I was still pretty new to SW, but I had been loving the deep sense of connection with my own and others' authentic experience that this practice had been providing me.

When I first heard his comments, I noticed the loss of that sense of presence and connection, and I noticed thinking, "Aaah, he didn't quite 'get' the explanation of what we're doing. I'm sure he'll figure it out as we go along and he hears what the rest of us are doing."

But, this didn't happen; the lengthy, other-focused comments continued. And as I continued to hear them, what I started noticing was how annoyed and irritated I was feeling about it.

Fortunately I managed to keep to my practice: I allowed myself to simply FEEL the annoyance and irritation. I noticed the tension in my shoulders. I noticed the thoughts that were arising in me: "Can't he tell what we're doing?" "Is he going to stop?" "This feels awful!" "Isn't the facilitator going to say something??" ... and then I noticed the thoughts: "What a jerk I am!" "I'm supposed to have compassion!" "What's wrong with me?"

Sitting with this sea of judgments was very uncomfortable. But as I stayed with my practice, simply letting myself have my experience and noticing what that felt like, I suddenly noticed these thoughts arising: "***I don't like what he's doing. This doesn't feel good. I don't want to experience this.***" And then more thoughts about "what a jerk I am."

After a lifetime of striving to "be compassionate" towards others without considering or even noticing my own well-being, it was a radical, new act for me to notice my dislike and, even more, to allow myself to REALLY NOT LIKE what someone else was doing.

And it was really hard for me to do; "I'm such a jerk" (for not liking what he's doing) kept coming up every time I did it. But, I kept to my practice; I kept bringing myself back to what I was experiencing, noticing the discomfort in my body and noticing the thoughts continuing to arise: "***I don't like what he's doing. This doesn't feel good. I don't want to experience this.***" I started to notice that it felt good to be able to notice and admit all this to myself, to begin to let it be OK that I didn't like it.

And then a miracle happened ... something so astonishing I could never have anticipated it, that completely changed my life.

I began to feel a profound sense of compassion for myself ... and then I began to feel a deep compassion for him, as well. Not the "deliberate" compassion I'd always strived for, before, that I would choose to feel instead of feeling angry or judging.

This was a compassion that I didn't expect or choose; it arose spontaneously from within me and opened my heart wide. It completely altered my experience of what was happening. I still heard his comments, I still felt the sense of disruption, loss, and frustration that had been there, concealed beneath my more reactive thoughts and feelings. But none of it really bothered me any more; suddenly it wasn't that big a deal.

Then as I continued with my practice I noticed that the frustration had disappeared, and the disruption and loss wasn't so uncomfortable. I discovered I could simply, effortlessly Be With it all ... without judgment towards either myself or him.

This experience changed my life. I'd been offering that other "chosen, deliberate" compassion to others since I was a child; I'd thought it was the only kind of compassion there was. ***Suddenly I felt an unspeakably beautiful, transformational compassion ... and it had arisen out of my "letting myself be a jerk" — allowing myself to feel, acknowledge, and respect my own dislike for what someone else was doing.***

I realized then that, ***as well-intentioned as my "chosen, deliberate" compassion had been, in a terribly important way it had been incomplete and even destructive ... because I had excluded MYSELF from it.***

Paradoxically, a great deal of our judgment of others is created from not having compassion for ourselves.

Now when I notice myself judging, I check in with myself: What don't I like, that I'm not giving myself permission to dislike? Where am I leaving myself out of my compassion and consideration? Is there something I need to do differently in order to respect, honor, and care for my own well-being? What am I afraid I might lose if I speak up, and is that something I need to be willing to risk losing, for the sake of my own well-being?

I notice when I ask myself these questions, ***I feel empowered to care well for myself. And as I feel this empowerment and make authentic choices that genuinely support my well-being, my judgments fall away, my heart opens, and I become more present and available to myself, to Life, and to others in a way that feels deeply beautiful to me.***

Shared Witnessing™ has given me the capacity to simply FEEL and NOTICE my experience without having to figure out, fix, change, avoid, or stop having it. I notice that the more I practice this kind of mindfulness, the more of this "spontaneous compassion" I feel for myself and others, the less I judge and react, and the more I'm able to stay connected to and honor — *in the moment* — what's true for me. Because of all this, I'm more able to Be and create what I value and delight in most, in this world.

And to think the doorway to all this was giving myself permission to "be a jerk" and dislike what someone else was doing.

What an amazing Life this is.

Blessings on us all,

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¹**Shared Witnessing™** (SW) is a type of presence practice or mindfulness meditation that includes elements that have been proven to rewire the brain in positive ways, including helping to heal trauma: noticing present-moment experience, and processing painful experiences within an empathic, resonant group field. SW has been an absolutely essential healing resource in my life, and is the primary source of my capacity to remain present in the midst of my own reactivity. I'm forever grateful to my dear friend Eric Sucher for creating and sharing the Shared Witnessing™ process with me.

If you'd like to learn more about Shared Witnessing™, or if you'd like to experience Shared Witnessing™, visit www.rosecitynvc.org/shared-witnessing.