

An Introduction
to
Mindfulness Meditation

Week 3
Mindfulness of Emotions



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The Guest House

This being human is a guest-house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
Who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture.
Still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you
out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

by Jelaluddin Rumi
Translated by Coleman Barks with John Moyne



Mindfulness of Emotions

from "The Issue at Hand" by Gil Fronsdal

Bringing awareness to our emotions helps us to have straightforward or uncomplicated emotions. No emotion is inappropriate within the field of our mindfulness practice. We are trying to allow them to exist as they arise, without reactivity, without the additional complications of judgment, evaluation, preferences, aversion, desires, clinging or resistance.

The Buddha once asked a student, "If a person is struck by an arrow is it painful?" The student replied, "It is." The Buddha then asked, "If the person is struck by a second arrow, is that even more painful?" The student replied again, "It is." The Buddha then explained, "In life, we cannot always control the first arrow. However, the second arrow is our reaction to the first. This second arrow is optional."

As long as we are alive we can expect painful experiences — the first arrow. To condemn, judge, criticize, hate, or deny the first arrow is like being struck by a second arrow. Many times the first arrow is out of our control but the arrow of reactivity is not.

Often the significant suffering associated with an emotion is not the emotion itself but the way we relate to it. Do we feel it to be unacceptable? Justified? Do we hate it? Feel pride in it? Are we ashamed of it? Do we tense around it? Are we afraid of how we are feeling?

Mindfulness itself does not condemn our reactions. Rather it is honestly aware of what happens to us and how we react to it. The more cognizant and familiar we are with our reactivity the more easily we can feel, for example, uncomplicated grief or straightforward joy, not mixed up with guilt, anger, remorse, embarrassment, judgment or other reactions. Freedom in [mindfulness] is not freedom from emotions; it is freedom from complicating them.

There are four aspects to mindfulness of emotions: recognition, naming, acceptance and investigation. There is no need to practice with all four each time an emotion is present. You can experiment to find out how they each encourage a non-reactive awareness towards emotions.

Recognition

A basic principle of mindfulness is that we cannot experience freedom and spaciousness unless we recognize what is happening. Recognizing certain emotions as they arise can sometimes be difficult. We have been taught that some emotions are inappropriate, or we are afraid of them, or simply don't like them. For example, when I first started practice, I became angry when my practice on retreat didn't go the way I expected it to. But I had an image of myself as someone who was not angry, so I didn't acknowledge the anger. Not until I recognized the anger could the retreat really begin for me. The more we learn to recognize the range of our emotions, including the subtlest ones, the more familiar and comfortable we become with them. As this happens, their grip on us relaxes.

Naming

A steady and relaxed mental noting, or naming of the emotion of the moment—"joy", "anger", "frustration", "happiness", "boredom", "contentment", "desire" and the like—encourages us to stay present with what is central in our experience. Naming is a powerful way to keep us from identifying with strong emotions. There are many ways that we are caught by emotions: we can feel justified in them, condemn them, feel ashamed of them, or enthralled with them. Naming helps us step outside of the identification to a more neutral point of observation: "It's like this." Folk tales tell of the dragon losing its power when it is named. Likewise, emotions can lose their power over us when they are named.

Acceptance

In mindfulness, we simply allow emotions to be present, whatever they may be. This does not mean condoning or justifying our feelings. Formal meditation practice offers us the extraordinary opportunity to practice unconditional acceptance of our emotions. This does not mean expressing emotion, but letting emotions move through us without inhibitions, resistance, or encouragement. To facilitate acceptance, we can try to see that the emotion has arisen because certain conditions have come together. For example, if you had a flat tire on the way to work, and your boss gave you a new assignment with a tight deadline after you finally arrived, you might feel frustrated or angry. If your boss gave you that same assignment on a morning after you'd had a good night's sleep and heard some great news about your stock options, you might feel excited or challenged. If we can see emotions as arising from a particular set of conditions, we can more easily accept them, and not take them personally.

Investigation

This entails dropping any fixed ideas we have about an emotion and looking at it afresh. Emotions are composite events, made up of bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings, motivations and attitudes. Investigation is not abstract analysis. Instead it is more of a sensory awareness exercise: we feel our way into the present moment experience of the emotions. Particularly useful is the practice of investigating the bodily sensations of an emotion. The correlation between emotions and their physical manifestation is so strong that when we resist or suppress our emotions, we often do the same with sensations in parts of our bodies. Waking up to our body through mindfulness practice also allows us to wake up to our capacity to feel emotions. If we let the body be the container for the emotion, we can more easily disengage from the thoughts around the emotion—the stories, analysis, or attempts to fix the situation—and simply rest with the present moment experience.

Mindfulness of emotions helps us to come to a place where we don't react habitually to our inner urges and emotions. That place is a good foundation from which to look carefully at situations and make wise decisions. The point of [mindfulness] meditation is not to become emotionally neutral. Through it, we can open up to our full capacity to feel emotions and be sensitive to the world around us, and yet not be overwhelmed by what we feel.



RAIN Process

Attributed to Michelle McDonald Smith

Recognize the emotion is present. You can pause for a moment and open to the reality of what is happening. You might gently call it by name ... ah, there's anger ... or ... hmmm, anxiety is here.

Allow the emotion to be present as best you can. Experiment with noticing any struggle to push it away, deny, or control it. As best you can, let go of the struggle to change the emotion. You might experiment with welcoming the emotion. If the struggle is quite intense you might notice and allow the struggle.

Investigate. Bring your attention to the body and notice where you feel the emotion in the body. You might say to yourself "This is what anger feels like". Gently maintain your attention on the sensations elicited by the emotion. If the sensations are quite intense you can move your attention to a place in the body that you do not feel the emotion and return to where you feel the emotion after settling yourself a bit. Also notice related thoughts and patterns related to the experience. Notice the pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feeling tone and meet it with mindful attention. Also notice the story, beliefs and patterns.

Non-Identify. We can stop taking the experience so personally by asking ourselves, "is this who I really am?" Also remind yourself that you are not alone in suffering ... that suffering is part of being human. We all suffer ... so you are not alone. Truly understanding that the experience of suffering is natural for all beings can help us feel less alone and more connected. Also, when we choose to focus on the body, the story and drama in the mind are minimized and we can begin to let the emotion move through us instead of getting caught up in the story.

With each part of this process, practice gentleness and patience.



Common Mind-States, Moods, and Attitudes

Agitated	Enlarged	Patient
Amused	Equanimous	Peaceful
Angry	Excited	Persevering
Anxious	Expanded	Relaxed
Averse	Fearful	Released
Appreciative	Foggy	Spacious
Calm	Friendly	Resigned
Cheerful	Generous	Resistant
Clear	Grateful	Restless
Clinging	Happy	Restricted
Confused	Insecure	Sad
Contracted	Irritable	Scattered
Compassionate	Light-hearted	Self-critical
Concentrated	Kindly	Shrunken
Confident	Lethargic	Sinking
Depressed	Lonely	Tense
Distracted	Low-energy	Tight
Determined	Loving	Wanting
Eager	Mindful	
Energetic	Passionate	



Support Quotes

Week 3 – Mindfulness of Emotions

"The problem is that the desire to change is fundamentally a form of aggression toward yourself." - Pema Chodron

"If you had a person in your life treating you the way you treat yourself, you would have gotten rid of them a long time ago." - Cheri Huber

"Feelings, whether of compassion or irritation, should be welcomed, recognized, and treated on an absolutely equal basis; because both are ourselves." ~ Thich Nhat Hahn

"Whatever arises, train again and again in looking at it and seeing it for what it is without calling it names, without hurling rocks, without averting your eyes. Let all those stories go. The innermost essence of mind is without bias. Things arise and things dissolve forever and ever. That's just the way it is." - Pema Chodron

"It's seeing our emotions and thoughts just as they are right now, in this very moment, in this very room, on this very seat. It's about not trying to make them go away, not trying to become better than we are, but just seeing clearly with precision and gentleness." - Pema Chodron

"Everything we accept is available to us to see, to use, to learn from, to let go." - Cheri Huber

"Don't turn away. Keep your gaze on the bandaged place. That's where the light enters you." - Jelaluddin Rumi

"One's suffering disappears when one lets oneself go, when one yields - even to sadness." - Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Southern Mail, 1929, translated from French by Curtis Cate

Unconditional

Willing to experience aloneness,
I discover connection everywhere;
Turning to face my fear,
I meet the warrior who lives within;
Opening to my loss,
I gain the embrace of the universe;
Surrendering into emptiness,
I find fullness without end.
Each condition I flee from pursues me,
Each condition I welcome transforms me
And becomes itself transformed
Into its radiant jewel-like essence.
I bow to the one who has made it so,
Who has crafted this Master Game;
To play it is purest delight -
To honor its form, true devotion.

by Jennifer Welwood



Assignments for Week 3

□ Reading Assignments

1. **The Guest House**
2. **"Mindfulness of Emotions" (From "The Issue at Hand" – Full text available online)**
3. **RAIN**
4. **Support Quotes**

□ Mindfulness of Emotions in Daily Life

1. At least once during the week "ride out an emotion." Sometime during the week when you are feeling a strong desire, aversion, fear, or other emotion, don't act on the feeling. Rather, bring your mindfulness to the feeling and observe the changes it undergoes while you are watching it. You might choose to sit, stand or walk around quietly while you do this study. Things to notice are the various body sensations and tensions, the changes in the feeling's intensity, the various attitudes and beliefs that you have concerning the presence of the emotion, and perhaps any more primary emotion triggering the feeling. If after a time the emotion goes away, spend some time noticing what its absence feels like.
2. Spend part of a day making a concentrated effort to notice feelings of happiness, contentment, well-being, joy, pleasure, and ease. Even if your day is primarily characterized by the opposite of these, see if you can identify even subtle and seemingly insignificant moments of these positive states. It can be as simple as appreciating the texture of a doorknob or a flash of ease in your eyes as you notice the blue sky after the fog has burned off. This is not an exercise for manufacturing positive states but rather discovering that these may be much more a part of your life than your preoccupations allow you to notice.
3. Spend part of another day noticing which feelings tend to pull you into a state of preoccupation. Sometimes there are patterns in the kinds of feelings that lead to becoming lost in thoughts. Common sources for distraction are desire, aversion, restlessness, fear, and doubt. Are any of these more common for you than the others? What is your relationship to these feelings when they appear? As you notice the patterns, does that change how easily you get pulled into their orbit? By clearly noticing their presence, can you overcome any of the ways in which these interfere with, or inhibit, whatever activities you need to do?

