

# 2016-11-28 Mindfulness of Emotions Raft

Fri, 9/25 9:33PM • 42:02

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

emotion, raft, feel, happening, idea, recognize, life, anger, tease, move, sensation, allowing, body, chest, people, story, mind, wonderful, freedom, meditating

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

So Good evening everyone. Is it the volume loud enough? You can hear me. Okay. So one of the great gifts that this practice has given me that I hadn't learned from the meditation practices I'd done before. Starting Vipassana insight meditation was the gift of learning how to be with emotions. Emotions are important part of our lives. And it's important to know how to be with them in such a way that they don't get the upper hand and that we don't swirl around or drown in them or pushed around by them. important to understand how to be with them so that we can respect them, and let them do what's appropriate for them to do as they move through us as they occur. So learning how to be with emotions is a, I find it's been a great delight. Wonderful part of this practice here. So I want to talk a little bit about mindfulness of emotions today. And I want to do it through an acronym. And the acronym is raft, r a f t. And the R stands for recognize, the A stands for allow, and the F stands for field. And T is for teasing apart. So recognize, allow, feel, and peace apart. And I kind of like it that it becomes a raft because of the times that were out there in that the river of life drowning, when what we're drowning in is our emotions, the ways we're challenged, and we have tremendous grief or anger or sadness or loss, or desire, or these things that kind of can consume us. And so much that some people get lost, we get lost in this or we drown in them. And so and so it's good in those circumstances to have a raft. And what's nice about a raft may be is that it takes us out of danger supposedly pulls us up out of the water, and becomes kind of a life raft, but also becomes a wonderful vehicle for surfing, and traveling on the rivers of life on our emotions. So with the raft on hand aboard the raft, we can often find our way through this life, and is a particularly poignant, kind of metaphor, the idea of a raft in Buddhism, because Buddhism talks about there being a raft that can take us to the other shore. And the shore being the shore, that countryside of suffering, and the other shore being that place where we're free of suffering. So there's this tremendous kind of passage that we can make. And the raft is what carries us across. Interestingly enough, when the, in the Buddhist texts when they talk about the metaphor, the raft, the raft kind of represents Buddhist practice, Buddha's teachings, kind of what we do to get across this, the floods of life to the safe, a safe side, the other side. It says that just like a person, a person wouldn't, and in real life, take a raft across a great, great river. And then when they start walking through the jungle to continue in their journey, they wouldn't pick up the raft and put it on their shoulders and carry them in the jungle. Once the raft is carry you carry you carry you across, you leave it behind, so you can walk unencumbered with the weight of it. And the same way, the idea is we're not supposed to be encumbered by Buddhism, that the Buddhist practice has to serve as a function. But once a sanction function has been fulfilled, then it's best to leave it behind. So I kind of like that idea. So we're not hindered by Buddhism itself. And our journey with any case, so the raft so especially if you kind of keep in mind, the idea of you know, this idea of being lost in emotions or consumed by emotions or drowning in emotions, kind of the motions ever upper hand and we do things and say things like Lady we regret. We weren't quite in charge of our own life because our emotions are so powerful that it's good to have Have something a raft that we can hold on to for safety so we can stay safe.

So the first of these practices in relationship to emotions is to recognize what's happening. And it might seem like a pretty minor insignificant thing just to recognize, but it's actually quite powerful to have a clear recognition of what's happening to ourselves as it's happening. Sometimes, just the act of recognition creates a little gap, little pause, in our experience, so that we're not being kind of driven by thoughts, the feelings, the ideas that are moving through us. And we step back in a sense, and we get kind of a bigger picture of that this is what's happening, oh, it's like this. And getting this kind of bigger picture or stepping back and seeing what's happening, does create a little, little pause. And we're kind of for a moment up on a raft out of the, you know, a strong current in recognition is also very important, because it's the beginning of a process of seeing clearly what's actually going on. And one of the things we're doing in mindfulness practice is we're shifting our, or shifting how we are in the world, from being caught or involved or identifying with things, to seeing things. And they often said that a big part of mindfulness practice is not having new experiences, but rather seeing our experiences in a new way. So this idea of recognizing, seeing, this is what's happening. And I suspect that a number of you have had the experience of having some kind of emotion that is going on some mood or state that you're in, and maybe you're involved very much with what you're doing, you don't even recognize what you're happy, what's going on. And perhaps a friend comes along and says, Wow, you're really grumpy today, or you seem really sad, or, or something, and, and only when someone calls it out for you. So yeah, that's what's going on. I've been trying to avoid it all day, the fact that I'm feeling this way, or I'm keeping myself busy, or I'm busy, and I haven't really noticed that how I'm feeling. And sometimes having someone else pointed out to can make a world of difference. Sometimes it can make a difference, if we do it for ourselves, oh, that's how it is. Sometimes a simple act of recognition is a is a moment of freeing ourselves, because in an act of pure recognition, or clean recognition, we are no longer identified with the experience, we're no longer attached to it, we're no longer kind of involved in the experience, the experience can be what it is, but we're not in getting entangled in it. And then disentanglement can make a world of difference. I remember many years ago, I didn't know what I was feeling, except I felt kind of off. It's kind of like nuts kind of off my get exactly how it was. But and so I've thought it was kind of interesting to not know how I was feeling and feeling kind of off. So I lay down on a couch, the middle of the day, and just laid there with how I was feeling. And I could feel my body was kind of tight. And I could feel that my breathing was not full and relaxed. In fact, my chest held felt I couldn't exhale all the way. And so as I breathe, I could feel the way I kind of as I exhale, my chest wouldn't let go all the way and take the next in breath. So that was kind of like the physical center of what was going on. And so I just stayed with that sensation in my chest. And then and then at some point, the mind had recognized what was going on. And it said, Oh, I'm depressed. And as soon as I saw I was depressed, the chest released. There's something about the recognizing, knowing what's happening, kind of freed something up in the chest released and, you know, was fairly mild state I was in and I don't remember if then it all got better ever after. But But I remember I was so impressed by this kind of release in the chest that happened at that moment of recognition. So and some people do not have a very big emotional vocabulary. And sometimes it's useful to develop a bigger vocabulary of emotions. There's Uh, I don't know if I can go through all the all the English words, maybe you can help me if the word anger is kind of like the umbrella term that covers a lot of different states. Then we have the model side of it all we have annoyance or irritation and then it gets it gets stronger after that, I guess it would be you know, there's things like anger and wrath and fury and what else what other good words for the anger family do we have rage?

Oh sorry. agitation might be in that family frustration we exhausted impotent maybe? What? animosity apathy apathy, a kind of an anger thanks is more like fear so I'm not sure that the with Buddhists will often put fear into the because a certain lists don't have fear in it they find where fear fits in this list of the hindrances and they'll put it in in with aversion. And aversion is often associated with anger fury

irritation indignant outrage. resentful. Thank you. Just ballistic, I've gone ballistic. Yeah. Okay, so anyways, you get a sense of all these different words. And I think I suspect that most of those words have nuance of differences. And sometimes to have a sense of how to identify or recognize the differences can help with this freeing movement is stepping back because you see it more clearly, or this is how it is. So the second aspect is the raft is allowing, and some teachers will talk about acceptance. And I'm kind of a little bit reluctant to use the word acceptance, it's probably a good word for some people the way they think of it. But for me, the word acceptance seems to be too close to a kind of condoning kind of certain kind of, kind of, kind of saying it's okay. Some things are not okay. And, and, but allowance, if in my mind, maybe different people have different words, what they mean, means you don't necessarily accept it, you might actually feel this shouldn't you know, better, better there wasn't involved in this kind of whatever action, whatever feeling I have. But allowance means we make space in the field of awareness in the mind, the mind has space for it to be there. Our actions might not approve of it. But our judgments might not prove it a certain way. But we have lots of space in the heart. So it can allow it to be there. While we are mindful of it as we look at it, as we kind of are mindful of it present for it. So the idea of allowing it to be there so we can take a better look. We allow it to be there, so we're not interfering with it. But allowing this radical form of allowing also means that we're not involved in it, we're not kind of continuing it or feeding it, we kind of make space in an open to it breathing room for it to be there. So we can kind of kind of give it a certain kind of freedom, but not the freedom to push us around or freedom to make us say things and do things we'd later regret. But rather the freedom to just let it course through us to move through the body and the mind. So we can both see what it is, but also allow it to unfold the way it wants to unfold. For me, it's been very meaningful to think of the word emotion in its Latin roots, that the word motion in emotion means motion. And the E in Latin means out. So it kind of the Latin root apparently means something like to move out. All emotions are processes. All emotions are our flow of activity that's moving through us unless we freeze around it unless we hold on to it or resist it. And so things like resentment is I think resentment is frozen anger. Anger can move through us but we hold it it gets frozen. Certainly Kinda grief gets frozen. And so it doesn't move through us. And so to put the motion back in emotion is very healing, because emotions in being processes tend with the right conditions and one of those conditions is kind of an open awareness of them, they tend to move towards health move towards healthy states, rather than unhealthy states. And part of the reason is that some of the more painful afflictive emotions that we have come occur and are fed and continue. Because of attachments because of the stories we tell because of the way we validate them the way we kind of participate in them. And if we don't participate them or validate them, or tell stories of them are attached to what's going on, the fuel for them begins to fall away. Some of the more beneficial emotions we have the most beneficial ones tend to grow in the presence of non attachment tend to grow in the presence of not being involved in them, they kind of operate in different principles within us that they come they operate more out of freedom than the out of out of attachment. So this idea of allowing changes to interior ecology, and it tends to move us towards kind of greater psychological health, this general movement it goes. One of the aspects of allowing that's important is as we allow the emotion, the feelings of the emotion to move through us and be there.

It's, I think it's best to have a lot of respect for it. And I think it's one of the hallmarks for mindfulness meditation is to have tremendous respect for what our inner life is, like the emotional life is like, and what's wonderful about meditation practice, and there are a few other places in life where this can be similar, where it's one of the places in life where you can allow yourself to feel any emotion you have, there's no emotions, which is inappropriate for sitting in meditation. So you don't have to have a policy you don't have to take with you from your, your, your whatever background you have, that's told you that certain emotions are okay and some are not okay, and you're supposed to squash them or pretending that they're or avoid them, or when you sit and meditate, mostly partly because, you know,

you're kind of committed for the duration not to move. So you're unlikely you're going to punch anyone out, or say anything you regret, you know, it's like, it's kind of a safe place to let it kind of move through you, whatever is going on. And so this idea of respecting whatever is there and letting it kind of step back. For some people, it's a radical thing, they have no place in their life, where they can give that kind of freedom to their inner life, that is not being censored by societal norms, or whatever they picked up. And it can be quite, you know, quite a wonderful ride, to sit there and close your eyes and not move and let the word rage you got the interesting, you know, it's kind of, you know, reaction here, when that was evoked earlier. So, to sit there, you know, in rage, and move, and can just feel the energy of it and coursing through us and what's happening with it and just feel it fully what's going on. The other thing about allowing the allowing the emotion to be there is, it's very important to distinguish between identifying with the emotion versus identifying with the awareness that knows it. The awareness that recognizes what's happening. Some people have, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconscious, strong identifications with their emotions. And so that there can be strong emotions moving through us. And the way that emotions move through us the freedom, the ease, or the kind of pulling through us the energy of it. So Oh, that's good, that's great. But where they don't feel is a subtle meaning into subtle attachment to the emotion, as if we're validating the emotion validating the freedom of it moving through us, that that's what's important. In it, it's important to allow it to do so. But that's not what's really important. What's important is not the freedom of the emotion, but the freedom of the awareness, the freedom of the mind, in relationship to the emotions. So in giving freedom to emotions, the idea is not so much to identify or focus on the emotion, but rather to learn this wonderful ability for the mind or the heart, to be free. In the presence of the emotion, because as the mind or the heart becomes free, then we have more freedom, we have more choice, we have more independence from what's actually happening in the moment, if we're subtly validating the emotion, so Oh, yeah, so in letting emotion just flow through me freely, that's what it should be about, they'll find, then we're actually subtly feeding it, and we're involved, we're not so independent. So if servers recognizing the emotion that's there, and then allowing it, allowing us also it takes a little bit of time to allow, in a sense, you know, you have to kind of, you know, you know, you're not just kind of, it's not like a checklist approach to, you know, okay, a lot for that, that's one gone to the next thing. It's kind of like you take, you take some time to allow it to be there. And that's an extent that can be an extended pause, compared to the moment of recognition. And a pause can be very powerful for finding freedom, especially with strong emotions, that are driving us to pause and wait and just allow it to be there and not act is a great thing.

So the third practice and raft, is to feel and feeling is to sense with your body to kind of sense and experience what it's actually the, the, the, what is experience actually feel like in the body and the mind, what's the tactile experience of it, what's the physical sensations connected to it. And so this is getting closer and more intimate to the emotions, it's kind of really kind of taking it in more fully registering what this is really like in the body. And that for many people, that can be a shift from knowing or being involved or recognize the emotion only in an intellectual or mental way, only being involved in the emotion in the storyline of the emotion. Some of the more difficult emotions, people have challenging emotions, tend to have a story connected to them. Some ideas, some evaluations, some judge some judgment that's involved. And so that involvement in story and judgment and commentary often keep people separated from their, their direct, immediate felt sense experience of the, of the emotion. And so to take time, to feel and sense what it's like, makes it richer, makes it Fuller, what's happening. But also, more importantly, it's a way of stepping away from the stories and the judgments, and letting the emotion move through us in the simplicity of how it is just the emotion by itself. What does it feel like, it's kind of like making more even more space for the emotion to be there. It's also tapping into the wisdom of the body, our physical body, kind of knows how to process our emotions better than our minds, our conscious minds. And so one of the great things to learn to trust is your body holding the emotion or processing that whatever emotion is there. If you're trying to figure out what to do with your emotions, and the causes and the solutions and everything, with your mind, it's possible your mind



doesn't have the full capacity to really do that well and quickly. But it's remarkable, that's something which, like the physical body, you know, it has, you know, you know, has all these nerves and hormones and muscles that are operating in connection to the emotions, that something begins to shift and happen shift and move, the more we kind of open up and relax into our body as we feel what's there. So that also takes time. So recognizing takes a teeny bit of time, allowing take some time. And feeling can take a lot of time and can be quite delicious and quite wonderful to feel in your body. And depending on the emotion, it's it feels in the body different ways. I've had restlessness. I was sitting and meditating. And I thought it was kind of fun. Because I imagined it was a ping pong ball inside of me. And it was like bouncing off the walls in there. And I just kind of watch this and all this energy was moving around and you know, and that was kind of interesting. sit there and watch them that or there can be a pit in the stomach. Or there can be fire in the chest or tightness in the chest or there's all the different Different ways in which the physicality of emotions express themselves in the face and the eyes and jaws. Some people feel a lot of a lot of things in their hands. I've sat and meditated, and the strongest sensation was in my legs, and my legs just felt like they wanted to bolt got to get out of here. And so I'd sit there and feel what it's like for the legs to wander, escape. And that was interesting too. So to sit and feel what's there. And one of the usefulness is about feeling is when they're unfair when they're uncomfortable feelings in the body connected to the emotion. Sometimes our reactivity to the emotion is because of the discomfort, we're trying to want to react, we're reacting against it, we want to fix it, we want to push it away, we want to get, you know, get rid of it. And so sometimes there's unhealthy actions, activity, we haven't tried to escape. But in meditation, we learn this wonderful skill of not needing to escape, but rather to be present for, for the experience. And I'd like to, you know, suggest that one of the ways to being present for any emotion, whatever it might be difficult or not difficult, is to do it with lots of respect. And to do it with compassion, compassion for yourself compassion for the emotion, we don't have to have an adversarial relationship with any emotion when we do this mindfulness practice.

So then to feel. So recognize, allow and feel. And then the fourth one is to tease apart. And there's a variety of ways we can tease it apart, but to tease apart the different elements that make up the emotion. So there might be, for example, the difference between the story we're telling ourselves, and what's actually happening in the moment we tease apart in the moment, the story is no longer, you know, here at events not here anymore. I've had anger, sitting, meditating that of things that happened 30 or 40 years ago, you know, mostly things that happen in high school. It was a great, you know, you know, how could she, and what was her name. And, but somehow, you know, so we kind of tease apart Oh, I'm here, you know, and I don't even remember her name, but, you know, but And so that kind of kind of creates a little bit space that not so caught in the story is a tease apart. It's also this teasing apart between the story and the body, the physical manifestation of the emotion, to feel that it's something distinct. One of the great things to tease apart is the emotion that we're having, and our relationship to it, oh, the sound outside cut off, and that the magic puts back on again. And then you didn't do anything is good. So the last thing about emotions is about this teasing apart is to, to distinguish the emotion, from our, with our, from our relationship to the emotion. So we can have an emotion, that can be happiness. And then we can want to hold on to that happiness, the holding on is different than the happiness, we can feel happy, and we feel maybe kind of proud about how happy we are. And we want to make sure everyone sees that we're happy finally. And so it's kind of a certain kind of conceit, the rug being happy, that conceit is different than the happiness same to kind of the can be conceived around the A being being sad kind of a negative conceit, or I'm such a sad person. So this idea, this decision that I'm a sad person, is different than just a sadness. And that's an added kind of layer that's added on top of it. So teasing apart is beginning to kind of begin feel our way or recognizing some of the different aspects of going on, that had become entangled and kind of treated as being seen kind of as one or kind of not distinguished between them. A lot of emotions, not all by any means, but the good number emotions that people feel are connected to our self identity and so to To begin to

tease apart the emotion and the identity that maybes underlying it. So for example, I, you know, I could feel joy, but it makes it a bit different, it's very different if the joy arises, because, you know, out in nature and out enjoying the trees and the hike, whatever I'm doing, versus someone praising me, or, you know, winning the California Lottery, you know, there's that, you know, someone praises me, it kind of might feed my conceit, how great I am, how wonderful I am. And the joy of that is kind of fragile. It's not really a very deep seated or valuable joy, the joy of you know, of conceit.

There might be if I'm angry, the anger might be because my sense of self has been criticized. And so if, you know, I might have concede certain identity that is kind of silly to have, you know, maybe anybody else wouldn't, right mind would never be attached to those kind of identity. But for me is really important that I be seen this way. And so somehow, that's I'm criticized, and so I get really angry. The guilt can be very strongly connected to our self identity. So a lot of these emotions that are so to tease apart to see what's going on, generally, in when we're sitting and meditating, it's useful not to spend a lot of time analyzing or probing are kind of trying to try to figure out the details of it. But rather, just just a simple question is How am I relating to this is enough to begin to kind of see there's two different things going on, there's the emotion, and my reaction in relationship to it. And that can create a lot of freedom, because if the reaction relationship is too entangled, then it perpetuates a recording it. But if we can separate those out, then the emotion does can might not be so powerful in terms of, you know, grabbing us around the throat, or pulling us around the nose or something. So to recognize, to allow, to feel and do tease apart is the wrath that can put us up out of the mud floods, the currents of life, so that we can maybe navigate more freely on top of the floods, and find our way as we go along. It's not meant to be a way of denying our emotions or avoiding emotions or, or somehow disconnecting from them. But it is a way of learning how to be independent of them. And finding in the independence of them, that actually they can operate much more freely. As we're more aware, as we're more independent and not identified with them are wonderful capacity for emotions has a certain wisdom to it. All emotions are there for reasons. We don't always know the reasons. But if we deny them or push them away, or, or don't take time to get to know them, we don't really give space for the underlying reasons. They're there. What's how they're moving through us what's there, even difficult emotions, even, maybe even afflictive emotions are there for reasons that it's good to connect to Good to see you good to understand. I like to think that all reasons, all emotions are doorways into a deeper connection to ourselves. And so to hit take the time, to really be present for them and wake up to them has been one of the great gifts certainly of my life and I hope for you. So we have a few minutes. And if anyone would like to ask any questions or comments or about what I've said, you're more than welcome, like to hear.

So as I was listening to you talk about teasing apart the emotion how we relate to it. One thing that came to mind is that it'll be very easy to fall into the story. And I had to deal with this over Thanksgiving. So I thought it might be interesting to hear your Yeah, so store, I mean, that's part of the teasing apart is to see the role of story making has in our minds, and to see that the story is one thing and the emotion, something else. Sometimes we can sometimes it's very evident that the more we tell ourselves a story, the more we're, you know, fueling the flames of whatever's going on. And then to see a story is a story and develop wisdom about how, what a story is, and why why, you know, what it means to be involved in the story and, and the value of storytelling and, or the lack of value. And to learn how to be free of the storytelling mind is, you know, one of the important steps towards freedom that begins by teasing apart the emotion and the story.

That makes sense that so it seems to me, Gil, that in the raft analogy, or example, the feeling, you know, the felt sense, what, what is that experience? Like? And I, I've been doing playing with it a little bit recently. And I'm finding I don't, I can't feel it. I mean, there's a part of me that just so in my head,

that even when I'm, that's my object of attention, what's the felt sense of this right now. And it's just like, I'm amazing. Yeah, it can be amazing, you know, that the disconnect we have in different parts of our body, we don't feel fully. And that's also been, I think, one of the gifts for me, and this practice is kind of waking up with the body, you know, more and more of the body becomes more sensitive and more aware. And the more we're aware, in our whole body, the more all this stuff can move through us in a free way, a nicer way. There's a few things is interesting to do. circumstances like that. One is that even though there's might not be any sensations in parts of our body, like below the neck, it can be well, that's what he was saying. So hit the hit. And, yeah, and sometimes it's interesting to, to kind of bring the, to kind of direct the attention to that part of the body that's offline. And just feel it, even though there's nothing there and spend some time just feeling the absence of feeling. And sometimes, what seems like absence begins to kind of show itself and shows not completely absent, there's actually something there little bit, little state something and, and then you kind of stay in your field explored. So a lot of patients with feeling that absence and see what happens, sometimes it's interesting to, like you said, you know, if everything's from the hip from the neck up, because there were a lot in the head and all that there could be a lot of sensations in the head. And so the energy of thinking, the agitation, the swirl of it, the pressure that's there, and so to feel that it can be helpful, the physicality of what's what's above the neck. And then the other thing that's interesting to do is something occasionally, is to put your attention right at the juncture between where there's sensation, and where there isn't right at that kind of boundary, and kind of just hover there and see what happens and something begins to move or spread from there and wake up. And then the other thing to do, especially when you're in terms of mindfulness meditation, you know, doing this and you feel a part of the part of your body doesn't feel or is numb, is don't worry about it. Don't be concerned, you know, you know, the meditation is the place where just like your i said earlier meditation, you're allowed to any emotion at all to be there in meditation is one of the great places you're allowed to be numb. You know, you're allowed to be. And so we get with part of mindfulness is used to be as you are, and then get to know that and to trust over time learning. It's actually quite powerful. To kind of trust the process, be with how you are and be present for that however it might be and that begins kind of to begin kind of The process of movements, the process of showing itself a revelation of something begins to happen. And, but it does take patience. And it does help if you can appreciate that the practice has more wisdom than you do. The practice knows what you should be experiencing better than you do sometimes. So if you're sitting there thinking, I'm not supposed to be happy, that's not supposed to be happening, I'm supposed to be further along, or I supposed to be whatever. Those are more story making mine, it's living, you know, ideas, the body of the practice that the heart kind of knows what needs to happen. And if you're numb and disconnected, there's wisdom to that there's not a mistake, it's, it's not that you don't have to feel like it's wrong or bad. There might be very, very, might be very appropriate at certain stages of life to be that way. But if you kind of then meet it with kindness and awareness, and just hold it with patience and be with it, what needs to happen generally will begin to happen in its own time, in its own way. And it's best not to be in a hurry. And so just feel that and be with it. And let this inner process unfold as it does is part of the benefit of it all.

So it is nine o'clock. And if I don't stop at nine then you'll have other emotions are set with impatience and so but you're welcome to Ask me afterwards if you'd like. So, thank you, and I hope that having a raft can guide you or support you in times of that are challenging and in times of great delight and happiness. Thank you