

2020-04-03 Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation (5 of 9)

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SPEAKERS

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So good morning and welcome back to our intro to meditation course. And one of the concepts of meditation is settling. The idea that we sit also to allow our system to settle. When we're agitated when we're anxious when we're caught up in things, there can be a lot of upwelling up, lifting kind of energy, tension, the shoulders go up, the tensions in the face, there's kind of contractions that go on. And we're kind of either contracting away or closing down or reaching out or all these ways in which we get activated both physically and mentally. And one of the things that can happen when people sit down to close their eyes and to begin meditating or just check in, is to discover what's actually going on. I think of mindfulness as being a truth teller that we take just enough time to really check in and find out really what's going on. And sometimes what's really going on with us in terms of emotions, feelings, sensations, tensions we carry is very different than what we think is going on if we're just busy and caught up in everything and going along. And as we connect to ourselves, and just sit and do basically do sit quietly, the more active the life has been, the more just sitting quietly and doing kind of nothing allows the system to settle. allows the body to relax the shoulders to relax allows the mind to loosen up a little bit the grip, which by which we're all involved with things can lighten up a little bit. And, and it kind of begins the natural process of, of letting go, a natural process of settling that our system wants to do. If it's left alone. Many years ago, when my kids were young, I would take them to a kind of Exploratorium or Discovery Museum for mostly for kids, all these wonderful science things. And they would have this big bowl, I don't know how wide it was maybe six foot wide, very big. And there would be marbles that you could drop off the edge of it. And you could watch the marble go down one side of the bowl and up the other side and, and, and it would go this way and that way and change directions. And as it went along, it would lose this momentum and we'll go less into them less up the side than before and slowly go slower and slower. There was a little hole about the size a little bit bigger than the marble at the bottom of the bowl. And, and when it passed over that hole with a lot of momentum, it just kept going right over the hole. But when it got slow enough, he would drop through the hole and return home in the sense, you know, back to, you know, that's and so, our minds

are like that. We have a lot of loose marbles in our minds. And they're activated and going, they've been dropped in somehow. And if you lean over the edge of the big museum bowl, and with your finger, push on the marble, it just keeps giving it more momentum and just keeps it going. fast, too fast for it to come to rest and return home in a little bit dropping through the hole. And it even just misses a hole, we don't even see the place of relaxation, we don't even see the place of letting go. But as things go slower, then the we have so what happens with our mind is we have these concerns, these activities, these emotions that come along, and we're a little bit like the kids who lean over the edge of the bowl and push it and add momentum to it. We get involved with it, we try to do things with it, we try to fix it. And oddly enough, even being bothered by something, not liking it, and wanting to get rid of it even wanting to like let go of it if we're too forceful about it. It's just adding more momentum to the marbles. And, and one of the best things we can do to let all these loose marbles in our system. To settle to relax, they get quiet is to not be bothered by them. Many years ago, I received the teaching in my Zen practice, very simple teaching that made a big difference for me. The instruction was, don't be bothered by your thinking. And until I heard that teaching, I hadn't occurred to me that I was bothered by my thinking, or just say it differently that I was bothering my thinking. I was, and I thought the thinking was wrong and bad, and I didn't like it. And I thought it didn't allow me to experience the ideals of meditation, quiet mind and concentrated mind. And so my thinking mind would take over sometimes and I'd be upset. And what I didn't realize is that the very idea of being the very idea of being upset, surprisingly, is just pushing those marbles, giving them more momentum over and over again. So is it reasonable to sit in a quiet way and not be bothered? That's the art of it. That's the question, what does that mean? Or how can we do that to some degree, so there can be this settling. And sometimes it doesn't require much more than just not doing anything. And that's one of the wonderful things about taking some time off to meditate is some of the benefits come not from trying to meditate, not jumping right in and now I'm going to meditate. But the benefits come from just sitting, sitting down and not doing anything and allowing the whole system to settle. And so it can be as simple as the three breath journey that I've been teaching. So I'd like to ask that we do that together, that you would close your eyes in whatever posture you're in and then attune yourself to your breathing and simply count three breaths in a row 123 and as a way of not doing anything, to being really simple and just kind of settling in And then you can open your eyes. And I don't think everyone found that settling. But maybe some of you did. And those of you who didn't, it is a wonderful technique to show how quickly it is to settle or check in. Sometimes the function of it is not to settle or relax. But the function of that three benchpress journey is just to discover what's happening here in a way that maybe we didn't know. One of the wonderful or important aspects of ongoing meditation, whether it's sitting every day and regular basis or doing a day long retreat or longer, where there's a sustained attention over time. Over time we start seeing patterns of what goes on. And, and some of these patterns might be a little bit invisible unless we have their regular observation. What's happening, and some of that has to do with our emotional life. Some people discover through practice that they are persistently anxious, they didn't really know that they didn't know that was a background kind of mood or background of anxiety or fear. That was there kind of, in everything they do. A sense of heightened danger, sense of being alert and paying attention for danger and protecting oneself. And, and that to be have that all the time chronically has a cost. It's tiring, it's stressful, it's, it's interfering with a deeper settling, interfering with the other

emotions that are allowed to come and be there and supportive. Some people find that there's a chronic resentment or even simmering kind of anger or hostility even. It's very subtle. And maybe other people don't even notice it. But it's they're kind of persistent. They are in the quiet corners of the mind. And so as we get still and quiet quieter, and we keep doing the meditation, we start seeing some of the patterns, some of the top tunes that we have. And that can be around our mood, our emotional life, not just what's on the surface that we know and see every day, but what we see deeper and deeper. And so the theme of yesterday and today is mindfulness of emotions. And emotions are a very important part of our life. And, and as I said yesterday, we want to respect them. We want to give them an important place in our lives. Not too important and not dismissive of them. Some people will shut off their emotions, be distracted from them, not think they're important, and you know, they're they're kind of not part of their day to day experience. Not very important. And other people, it's very important some people over prioritize their emotions and everything is about how they are feeling their emotions, and that's the measure of everything. And, and the idea is to some someplace, abide in the middle way. And that different people with the middle way is, is different. For sure some people are naturally more emotional, some people less so. But the middle way, we're not pushing our marbles we're not spinning them and keeping the momentum going because we're involved and actively participating or reacting to them. And to find that middle way of just allowing the emotion to be there. And so there is a four part practice that is helpful with being mindful of emotions and it has the acronym wrap ra FT. And the R stands for recognizing. And it's to have this clear recognition, or this little bit freeing recognition, oh, this is anger. This is fear. This is you know, don't light. And you don't have to say this to yourself. But this is to add that to record, the recognition is meant to demonstrate that there is a kind of stepping back and kind of like, Oh, that's how it is. As opposed to staying in the middle of the emotions and kind of recognizing it's there but kind of being entangled with it. It's kind of opening up or stepping back or getting a bird's eye view out. This is how it is this is what's happening now. So recognition. The A stands for allow And that allowing means we don't. We're not, you know, giving momentum to the marbles. We're not kind of fueling it or adding to it, or reacting to it. every emotion. One of the beautiful things about mindfulness practice is a way that it can respect and allow for any emotions and all the emotions that we have. In the context of meditation. no emotion needs to be censored. no emotion needs to be something shamed for having even feeling shame doesn't have to, you know, to feel shame for it. You don't have to be afraid of anything, of emotions it is to this is a place to open up and let the end really learn the art and the skill of letting the emotions be coursing through us Let it be in our emotion in our bodies, but without getting caught by it or pushed around by it and that kind of freedom. It's kind of like, if you put, you put dams in the river, or things that block the flow of the stream, it blocks it and it acts in funny ways and in and pours over the sides in funny ways maybe causes damage. When we block or interfere or do something with our emotional life, it's generally not so useful for us. But when you remove the dams remove the blockages in the stream, it can flow freely and move and it becomes much safer for everyone. So the same thing with our emotions to not have any blockages and just kind of open. So this allowing of our emotional life, it's not easy to do by any means. None of this is easy at times, but to understand what the basic principles are of the practice, and then we're finding our way and experimenting, discovering what this means for ourselves and then The F of raft stands for feel, so to feel or sense, or let yourself really notice the experience of the

emotion. And in particular, that means the physical experience. So how is it being experienced in the body? What's the sensations, what's parts of the body are activated. And as I said yesterday, the body has a whole different relationship to our emotions than our beliefs, our thoughts, our our preferences, our biases are predictions our imagination has the body if it allows the emotion to be in the body, and kind of opens and relaxes and no blockage to it and lets the energy in a sense of the emotion flow lets the sensations connected the tensions of the connected to the emotion. Just kind of settle and open. It's remarkable how well the body can be the container, the support, there's a stability you can find in the body, that sometimes it's hard to find the mind around emotions. And one way to get that stability in settling is to identify what parts of the body are most activated. By the particular emotion we have, the more difficult and stronger the emotion, more likely you can find the physical location where that is most activated. And then, and then you can and then but there's much more in the body. Not all of the bodies are usually is activated by the emotion. And so it's possible to get a sense of the wider body that's a little bit more calm and settled perhaps, that's also holding that particular place where there's maybe difficult emotions or strong emotions. So the art of feeling and practicing mindfulness of the body with emotion. And then the last part of Raph, the key is a little bit more complicated. And I'll try to make it simple. The T stands for teasing apart. And that means that looking and seeing that emotions are composite things, and there are different component parts of them. And so, for example, there and I'll make just one example for now, that's probably maybe the most important thing to tease apart. And that is, there's the particular emotion we're having, and then distinct from that emotion. There's a relationship we have to it. If there's fear, there might be fear of the fear. If there's anger, there might be a hostility towards the anger or shame about the anger. or there might be a justification of the anger or there might be The relationship is the other direction that anger is influencing us. Maybe it prompts us to blame people. There might be happiness, and we're, we're so eager to hold on to it. And finally, I have some happiness. And now I'm a good person. Now I'm successful. Now I, you know, we have all these ideas about what this means for me and, and so this relationship we have with it, the desires we have in relationship to it, the reactivity we have in relationship to it, the beliefs, the thoughts, the predictions we have in relationship to the emotion. So, what is the emotion? And how am I relating to it? And sometimes the challenges that people have with emotions are not the emotions themselves, but rather the relationship they have to it. And if they can really see that there's two different things, then there's a possibility of starting to find some freedom So, let's do a meditation. And I'll, and part of this meditation I'll guide you through this raft practice. And I'll do it you know, in the sequence of Ra EFT, but it doesn't have to be in that sequence. It doesn't have to be so lucky, no linear. It could be that at different times different ones of these four practices is the one that is most important. And it doesn't have to be fast either. You can spend a long time with any one of these four different aspects of emotion, a little bit based on what you think is nice and what you enjoy. So, to take a meditative posture, a posture that for you expresses both an alertness But also relaxation, maybe a sense of calm and then taking a few slow, deep breaths and you might as you take a deep breath at the end of the exhale a little bit, linger with the exhale, and let there be half a second of a pause before you breathe in and then breathe in a deep breath and this idea of breathing and deeply exhaling deeply Fully and doing the half second pause sometimes helps center the mind it helps let go of his preoccupations, especially the half second pause in the beginning. It kind of gets the minds attention,

breathing is important. And so kind of like okay, this is something important going on here. And then let your breathing return to normal. And if you feel you can do it in a gentle and caring way, with a natural breathing at the end of the exhale, for three breaths, allow there to be that half second pause, too, so that helps you get gathered or settled. Like this is important here being with the breathing And then you can stop the half second pause and just let yourself breathe in a normal Easy Way, or whatever way it happens to be. And then you might scan through your body to feel where there might be some holding in your body. It would be useful to settle. Maybe there's tension in the face and as you exhale allowing the muscles of the face to relax away from the skull. There might be tension in the shoulders. You might as you exhale, relax the shoulders, allowing the pull of gravity to target them slightly. It can be useful to relax the belly. Sometimes the relaxing the belly, helps the whole area feel fuller to expand and as it does so you might feel a greater stability or foundation for your torso And then for the next five minutes or so, will sit in silence. practicing mindfulness of breathing, practicing not trying to do too much, except continually getting out of your own way to let your whole system settle. Getting out of your own way can mean letting go getting stepping away from your thinking. Now peace out so involved in whatever you're concerned with. And instead to let yourself be simple in attending to each breath as it comes and goes And then we can do a little mindfulness exercise around emotions, feelings. And so continuing with the meditation notice what is your general emotional state now? Are you generally feeling your mood, your mental state in any way you are is allowed. Notice what it is. or notice what the predominant mood is Since we've been meditating for a little while, it could be that it's calm. It could be some contentment, a sense of ease. It could be anything else it could be that you're aware of anxiety or impatience, boredom or it could be that you're happy, relieved to whatever you're feeling and it could be very subtle. So you might not quite know you know, even think of it as an emotional mental state because Because it's kind of quiet and subtle, or it could be allowed. And even if you if you feel nothing went out at all emotionally, it also is a kind of an emotion, kind of a blank Korra lack something so whatever it might be See if you can quietly peacefully recognize it maybe with a mental note calm, happy, afraid irritated whenever it might be And recognize it with or without who words this is calm. This is as a way of kind of opening up to it or stepping back from it. Maybe a little bit of freedom from the emotion and then having recognize it. Then also you can practice allowing it to be there as if it has infinite permission to finally show itself in the light of awareness, like something that's been kept in the dark for a long time, and finally has a chance to stand in the sun. Whatever emotion you have there allow it to be there and be known in awareness and this allowing as a matter of degrees, you don't have to do it 100% but to do it to the degree that you can a little bit of permission or non reactivity. Little bit of stepping away from your preferences of what should be instead of allowing it to be as it is, to allow also means to not be in conflict or not to react to the emotion with our preferences, allowing it to be there and then as you allow it feel in the body If it's not very clear where it is in the body, you might first notice then where clearly it is not in the body. Maybe it's not in your little toe. Maybe it's not in your ankle. Maybe it's not in your hole, anywhere in your legs. And vice calm process of elimination, we might realize, Oh, it's mostly in the chest. It's not very strong, but it's mostly in the belly, or in the face or the throat. Or maybe it's very clear where it is in the body. What's activated the most and then with the same allowing attitude. Feel the physicality, the sensations of the emotion and allow them to be no need to try to change them or do anything with them. Maybe it's the

allowing them lets them settle. Or allowing them lets the physical feelings change. Unfold a ball. trusting that if you feel it in your body, whatever way it unfolds is okay. If it gets stronger, it might need some time to be stronger. If he becomes a weaker, it might need to kind of dissipate and relax. And if it stays the same, it might need time just to be feeling it in your body. allowing it to be in your body. And then recognizing, if you can, your relationship to whatever emotion that's present now, whatever mood you have that might involve you recognizing your preferences the ways you lead to boards are pulled away from contract or are opened up to it might be that it has to do with beliefs of what is right and wrong, what should happen and shouldn't happen. Or it might be have to do with beliefs about what this emotion says about who you are, how do you use it to define yourself to there's many, many different kinds of ways which we relate liking, not liking and if you could see if you can tease apart. Distinguish between the emotion, the mood, the mind state you have and how you're relating to it. Not to condemn any one of them. Not to see any of them is wrong. But to see them as distinct and in a sense to free your emotion from the involvement of how you react and relate to it it's Oh okay to feel whatever is here. And then to come back to your breathing, perhaps with a sense that your breathing is in the middle of all things in the middle of your emotional, emotional life and they could be you do a three breath journey or a series of three breath journeys. Or it could be you just settle in, settle down into the, into the experience of the body breathing And then to end this sitting. Take a few bigger breaths, perhaps by taking bigger breaths, to do it in a way that's caring for yourself carrying breaths and then as you prepare to open your eyes, maybe have a little bit of a caring attitude for yourself into what's around you and for others And then as you hear the bell, you can open your eyes. So it's been my experience, that mindfulness of our lives, including and very much, including mindfulness of our emotions, has made life much richer, much more much more Fuller, that certainly some of the extremes of emotions have quieted down. And in both directions. But the instead of the extremes, I feel like my emotional life has become much richer, much more varied and much more in tune with the world around me and responsive to it in a very nice way. And there's greater empathy and greater feeling with others. What's going on? I said earlier that sometimes people meditate, they are surprised to see that what they thought was going on, was not actually what's going on that, that they were, you know, underlying current of emotions that's always there. And surprised to see it. Some people get surprised to discover that, that it's their pride, they prioritize certain emotions, that they're oriented towards certain emotions as being important and so They pick them up as soon as they appear they get involved with them, they fuel them, they, they give them importance. And there's others which, when they arise, they ignore. They haven't it has no importance, it has no value. And then so there's no paying attention to them at all. And, and to not prioritize one emotion or not assume that one that there might be one that's maybe kind of strong. And then people prioritize it and kind of define themselves by it. And missing the fact that actually in addition to that predominant emotion or what we're prioritizing, there might be many different, smaller emotional responses happening all the time. And there's a kind of a dance in the flow of subtle movements, a kaleidoscope of different emotions that come into play. I used to have fun with that many years ago, when I would drive my car on the freeway, I would do emotion, mindfulness. And it was a little bit of a game. But I would tune into the emotions of subtle emotions that come into play as I was driving because I was driving. So instead of the overarching mood that I had that day, I would pay attention to all the subtle shifts based on what

was happening in the traffic, what kind of cars were passing me by and someone cut me off suddenly, and I feel some irritation or anger, then there'd be a police car that would pull up behind me, and I'd feel afraid and then the police car would go off and I'd feel relief or there'd be a very nice car driving by and I could feel the light and looking at the beautiful color or, or you know, or the shape or I would feel the desire or that's the kind of car I would like and then you know someone who's driving slow and in front of me and then I'd feel a little bit irritated and so and it was just kind of like nothing stuck. Because they were kind of subtle, and the traffic was changing all the time, but it was so much fun to watch the kind of the flow and movement of it all. And that kind of was fun because I didn't identify with it. I didn't define myself by those emotions that were happening I just let them kind of wash through and watch the change and all that. But in a sense, that driving became much richer. And you know, I think I was still driving safely. And so, to allow emotions to let the marble settle is not supposed to make us emotion free. But actually I find it actually is frees up emotion. There's a story that my my life when I spent about three years in a Buddhist monastery and doing a lot of intensive practice and when I left that place, so one of the first things I did was the first days after I was I went to see the movie Gandhi, Ben Kingsley, I think that had just come out back then. And, and several times during the movie, I cried. And I usually don't cry at movies. So it was kind of a new thing. And as I was leaving the theater, the thought went through my mind. And I say it that way, the thought went through my mind, because I knew enough not to identify the thought not to think oh, that's me thinking that thought and I have to believe it or react to it or use that thought as a way of defining myself as being right or wrong or something. I noticed this thought going through and the thought said, the thought said the thought was three years of monastic training and it's failed because Have it failed with because you know, I was crying. The next thought I had was no, three years of monastic life and it worked. That now the emotions were much freer to move through me. So I find that a wonderful adventure, a wonderful process of discovery, to include this. When we sit and meditate kind of in a simple way, in mindfulness practice, we don't prioritize our emotions, the instructions I'm giving now, you know, it's not like oh, now this is what I'm going to do. The basic idea is to sit down to meditate with the breathing. And then and, and use the breath is kind of like the home base, the home where you come to where you settle, and that's comfortable to be and maybe hopefully over time, you'll get more comfortable with it. And, but this is the place to get focused to settle To get, get concentrated, to cultivate mindfulness of breathing, but if something else is more compelling than the breath, like if it's strong sensations in the body, or some compelling emotion, that's when you can go and meditation and let go of the breathing and do mindfulness of the emotion. recognize it, allow it, feel it. And then if you make sense to you, you can tease apart the emotion from your relationship to the emotion and that that that that gap or that distinction might give you a little more freedom. And if you learn to do this, in meditation, some of it might rub off into daily life, and you'll find maybe an effective way to be with your emotions. A little bit more balanced a little bit more free with your emotions, as they occur in your daily life as well. The And then so in meditation, once you've done that for a few times, then I know you've been with your emotions and noticed it. If it's no longer compelling or it feels right, then you can come back to your breathing, and settle on your breathing again. So next time we meet, which is on Monday, I'll talk about mindfulness of thinking. And some people are, treat their thoughts as the enemy of meditation because it often takes them away from the present moment. But there's an art to include everything as

part of our life, with mindfulness meditation, so that our thinking life is also can be included actually can be a very important place to have this special form of awareness that we're cultivating awareness of mindfulness, mindful awareness, to have that in relationship to thinking. And there also we can discover how to become free. Have some have some freedom from our thinking. So we're not glued to our thoughts are caught in our thoughts and caught up in our thoughts. And the so we'll do that. And in the meantime, if you find yourself thinking a lot, then just recognize it to see if you can just simply clearly recognize it, oh, this is thinking and just come back to your breathing or come back to the emotion or what you're doing. I'd encourage you to continue meditating at least 20 minutes each day. While you're doing this course. I think what I'm teaching, will you have a better reference point for it? If what you do is you know, practicing and experimenting with it. And then as I have already emphasized maybe twice, I would like to emphasize it because so important. Please be very careful with your any judgments and ideas you have about how your meditation is going. Especially don't get to no need to think that's not working. If you're doing mindfulness meditation, it's always working. And one way or the other. And, and so here's one way of seeing this, for example, one of the things that makes meditation hard is if you get lost in your thoughts, but if you're really lost in your thoughts, you don't have a problem. Because you're so lost. You don't know that you are meditating. Once you recognize you're lost in your thoughts, you're already back. You're already the mindful, oh, I'm caught up in my thoughts. You don't have to at that point, decide, oh, I'm doing it wrong. I'm bad and then jerk your mind back or something. You're already back as soon as you recognize your last name, thank you thinking. So either you're so lost, you don't have a problem, or you recognize it's happening. And you're here. So if that distinction makes sense to you, it's a way of kind of deterring to find out how to be more economists, or less reactive to what happens as you move through meditation and what goes on. Just assume that whatever way you're meditating is right for you. And just keep doing it sincerely. And then we'll meet again here on Monday. So I appreciate very much to share this with you and I, you know, and it is a little strange to carry on this long monologue without people here in the room. But hopefully, this format works for you and certainly I'm enjoying being able to share this and share something it's so important for me so thank you very much