

Emotions (5 of 5) Release Is Peace

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

let go

Gil Fronsdal

This is the fifth talk on mindfulness of emotions. We will talk about release in relation to emotions.

I think I said at the beginning that some emotions are a product or arise together with stress and tension. Some emotions flow with a lack of tension and stress. Generally, unwholesome emotions – the ones that are afflictive, that are painful to have, or that motivate harmful activity in the world – those come with stress. As we release stress, tension, and tightness, the afflictive, unwholesome emotions tend to have less energy, juice, or nourishment to keep going.

The emotions – the sense of well-being – that we can have when there is no stress or tension tend to support and make room for wholesome movements. So the absence of stress tends not to result in more afflictive emotions, but rather beneficial, supportive, and nourishing emotions, such as love, joy, delight, happiness, care, compassion, contentment, gladness, tranquility, and calm – a whole slew of things like this.

To really learn how to release and let go doesn't leave us kind of emotionally neutral or blank. It might seem that way initially for a little while as a transition. If people are really used to swirling in fear, anxiety, anger, resentments, desires, ambition – they are comfortable with that. When they let go of that, the energy, motivation, and charge that they've been living their life on is lacking, and nothing has replaced it yet, so they can feel blank for a while. It's like giving up coffee – it takes a few days of adjusting before a kind of natural vitality comes back.

It's the same when we switch from spending a lot of time – maybe a lifetime – with afflictive, difficult emotions. There's a transition. But as that transition unfolds and a lack of tension and stress is there, that makes room for beneficial emotions.

I find it kind of humorous or delightful that as beneficial emotions arise, any movement to cling to them – to resist them or want to hold on to them – is stressful. Clinging to beneficial emotions moves us in the opposite direction from what they're all about. Clinging to them is like petting a cat in a way that makes its fur rise and bunch up rather than lay flat. Or it's like sanding against the grain of the wood.

The tendency to want to hold on to beneficial emotions is there, but at the same time, you know you can't do that. It doesn't make sense to do it. It's not appropriate to do it, so I find it kind of humorous to be in that position. "Oh, I can't do anything with it. I can't hold onto it. I have to let go. I can't make it mine. I can't be in charge of it in a certain way or claim it." There can be freedom in relation to beneficial emotions.

But some people don't understand or haven't been told or learned that as the practice matures and letting go deepens, the connection to their inner life – to life – deepens. There's also joy, well-being, and happiness. This doesn't have to be dramatic – sometimes it has a quiet feeling to it – but we avail ourselves of that; we make room for that.

Release is not only about what we let go of, it's also about what we make room for. And in that making room, there is a lot of peace. I think the two concepts that the Buddha most commonly used to describe how someone is when there's been a deep letting go – a deep release – are peace and happiness.

Peaceful happiness, happy peace, peace and happiness – I don't think we can go too wrong with those in the forefront. They are the very conditions that allow for our deepest or fullest forms of care for the world to operate because nothing interferes with them. There are no blocks to them.

So, to let go deeply in relationship to emotions. To let go of the stories we have about it. To let go of the preferences we have about our emotional life. To be able to tease apart all the different component parts of what's happening when we have emotions and find a place of holding.

Sometimes the clinging and the holding are not in the emotion itself, but in the way in which we relate to the emotion: the knowing, the directedness of attention, the attitude we have about it, the ways we're thinking about it. Sometimes we have to kind of turn away from the emotion per se and look more at the attitude, the directness of mind, or the engagement of the mind in the emotion to find a place where something can let go and relax.

To let go, to relax, to release, and to appreciate every moment of release, so that becomes a positive reinforcement for release. We start recognizing that release – letting go – is a healthy thing.

To learn to let go enough so we learn the skill of letting go. We learn when it's appropriate to let go. We learn how to let go appropriately. One of the things I had to learn was if I let go and was kind of emotionally neutral, that would come back and bite me. I hadn't really let go. To really have let go in a healthy way, there had to be some degree of joy or lightness that came in the wake of it.

So to release, let go – you might try it. You might try when you have emotions of all kinds, especially when they're strong or you're in the grip of them. You might have to pull yourself away from the situation you're in – go for a walk or sit down. Maybe go through the five R's. Some people like going through a systematic process that keeps them engaged and focused. Relax, recognize, respect, restore, and release – those are all forms of letting go or involve some degree of letting go.

In my practice life, one of the byproducts of release – letting go, releasing the stress – is profound gratitude. I think it's been one of the great gifts of this practice. Sometimes I feel grateful for particular things: the practice, the Buddha, the community I'm practicing with, many things. But the one that I find the most meaningful, satisfying, profound, and joyful is the gratitude that is just grateful for no reason. Just a feeling of gratitude, gratefulness.

So we've done a week on emotions. I hope that this has given you a new perspective on how to live and practice with emotions and appreciate emotions. I hope that it supports you and brings you a greater sense of well-being, and maybe even some gratitude for your life. Thank you all very much.