

## Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation: Emotions

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**Gil Fronsdal**

Good evening, everyone. This may be a little bit loud. Let's see now, so how's that? That okay? Okay. We can start maybe a little bit slowly. Because of the weather, some people may still be coming. One way to start slowly is to see if you have any questions. For those of you who were here for the first two weeks did anything come up for you in your meditation practice, or if you tried it at home, or questions from the instructions last week?

Participant 1: We talked about your body and sensations in your body and going towards things that are uncomfortable in your body. I found myself sort of bargaining with myself, like if I pay attention to it long enough and go deep into it, it will dissolve and won't make me feel so miserable anymore. And when that doesn't happen, I find myself not knowing what to do.

Gil: Sometimes that can happen. We go into it and it changes and something relaxes. But to spend too much time wanting that is a distraction from the mindfulness practice because what we want to dissolve is not the pain but our reactivity to the pain.

Participant 1: Right, and it's just so hard to separate that.

Gil: Yeah, so today we'll talk about that and be able to separate that because that has a lot to do with the emotional relationship we have to things. What we do is that we certainly learn how to be present in a kind of calm way with pain and discomfort if that's what happens. That's a life skill that is really good for all kinds of situations you find yourself in in the world which are seemingly unbearably uncomfortable. But now you know how to be with it rather than freaking out or something.

But, at some point, as we learn to stabilize our attention enough on some difficult thing like difficult pain, then we turn the attention around 180 degrees and say, "How am I relating to this?" And then you might discover, "I'm afraid," or "I'm angry, I'm aversive, I hate it." Or "I thought meditation was about being on cloud nine and just kind of like better than going to Cabo and I want the pleasure." So you get to see what your operating principles are that are behind the reactivity. And then you can start questioning it. Or if you want to do mindfulness, it's very interesting to bring mindfulness to that reactivity, which means that you see it clearly without buying into it. Just look at it, like cock your head a little bit, "I see you, my

old friend.”

Sometimes we get to see patterns that we have. You say, ”Oh, I've been doing this for a while. It seems like my go-to is I get bored. That's the way I shut down or how I'm a little bit aversive.” Or “My go-to is to be aversive and blame someone, anyone but me.”

It's easier to find a calm place if we really have seen the reactivity directly and clearly because then we don't necessarily have to unconsciously go along with it, which is what many people do. Is that...?

Participant 1: Yeah, thank you.

Gil: Maybe you need to forgive me, but there was a joke many years ago of an executive who had this problem that when he got nervous giving big speeches, he peed in his pants. That was not a good thing, so the company paid for him to go to a really high-end, very expensive therapist. He did that for a while and came back and said, ”I'm good now.” They said, “Oh, don't tell us. You no longer pee in your pants?” And he said,”No, now I don't care.” So his reactivity went away. That's not exactly what meditation is for.

Anybody else?

Participant 2: I think what I'm having a challenge reconciling is there seems to be this conflict between detachment and desire. For example, in my day-to-day life, I do desire to be the best at what I do and look to achieve. And there seems to be a conflict between that sense of detachment and that pursuit of I don't want to say perfection because that doesn't exist, but pursuit of improvement. So I'm having a tough time reconciling those two.

Gil: Great. Well, the fact that you can ask this question is really good. The fact that you're seeing there's a distinction that you have trouble finding in practice is really a good thing, so you're on the right track. And one of the benefits of mindfulness is not solving our problems, but seeing them more clearly so we can tease apart the different elements of it. And so that we're not caught up in... so as we see the different parts of it, then we can start choosing the parts that are healthy and put aside the ones that are not healthy.

So being good at what you're doing, in my book, that's a good thing to do. But there can be a lot of extra with it. It could be there's a lot of needing to prove yourself to someone and get approval from someone or status in other people's eyes. And those kind of things, that's more complicated. Some of that might not be so healthy and necessary.

It might be that you want to do the best you can at what you do, but you measure it by your

success and who you are as a person – by the results. Since ancient times, a lot of spiritual traditions emphasized don't be so concerned about the results. Just give yourself wholeheartedly to what you're doing.

So there's all these distinctions that can be made. And when you're calm and settled and not caught up in the reactivity and the desires, then you can step back and start seeing the different pieces of it and start sorting out that which is useful and not useful. Does that make some sense for you? Enough sense that you have your work to do?

Thank you. That's a good question. Any more? One more? Any more questions? Because if you don't ask questions, that means we're going to meditate. Hopefully, it's not that bad. Should we do it? Okay.

The way this meditation is going to unfold is we'll start with the breathing, which we did the first week, and then we'll expand out to include the rest of the body. And in this field – we call it a field sometimes – in this container the body is, we'll then start including the emotions that we have. And what you normally, in your vocabulary, might call an emotion might not be occurring. But it's a mood, a mind state, certainly emotions, some generalized feeling that someone says “How are you feeling?” and you say, “Oh, I feel tired or I feel calm.” Some positive states like calm, people don't think of it as an emotion. Some people do. But a mind state, a general state, the state of being of how you are is kind of the territory we're going to go to.

It is going to be very, very simple. It's okay if what you have is very, very subtle. It's okay if it's powerful. For this purpose, we're going to touch in to it just gently and not do a lot with it. But you will get a sense of what it's like to do that on a foundation of settling on the breathing, opening up to the body, and then with the context of having those two as a foundation, becoming aware of emotions. As opposed to many people, they might have strong emotions, but they're just focusing on that entirely by itself and it has no support. There's no container to hold it or be with it, which this practice can provide. Hopefully, that makes sense enough.

So, to assume a meditation posture that gives you a balance between being calm and relaxed and alert with your body. If you're tense coming here, maybe you want to emphasize just settling back in the chair and relaxing. If you're sleepy and tired at the end of the day, you might want to sit up a little straighter than usual so there's a little more alertness in your spine, maybe in your chest.

Then gently closing your eyes and noticing your breathing. We'll do a three-breath journey to begin with, which we talked about in the first class. Just three breaths.

Now, take some long, deep breaths to really connect more fully with your body. And as you exhale, relax your body. Maybe taking breaths that are three-quarters full. It doesn't have to be as full as possible. And if it feels nice, extend the exhale so that the relaxing can be a little more.

Breathing in deeply and maybe beginning the relaxation in the shoulders. Then let a wave of relaxation go down from the shoulders all the way down to your belly, to your sitting bones.

Then letting your breathing return to normal. And continue for a few breaths on the exhale, softening in your body, gentling yourself as you exhale. Also, you might see if your thinking, the thinking mind, there's any tension or agitation associated with it. If it's easy enough, relax the thinking mind as you exhale.

And then a few more breaths – on the exhale, relax from the place in your body where the top of the inhale is in the chest, up near the shoulders maybe, and as you exhale, relax downward. A wave of relaxing down into the stomach, letting the belly become soft. Maybe the belly hangs forward a little bit. On the end of the exhale, relaxing the belly so the weight of your torso settles towards your pelvic area.

Then becoming aware of the breathing in and the breathing out. The rhythm of inhaling and exhaling as it's experienced by the body.

Maybe letting go of your thoughts as you exhale. And letting go into the exhale itself, the physical experience of exhaling.

Feeling the rhythm of breathing in and out in your torso, the rib cage, the chest, the belly. Noticing how some parts of that area expand as you breathe in and contract as you exhale.

Imagine your breathing is kind of in the middle of your body. And as you inhale, let your awareness expand outward throughout your body. Maybe it grows on the inhale, the global experience of the body. And on the exhale, a return to maybe some center within the end of the exhale. Almost as if your breathing is giving your body a massage, where the influence of breathing spreads throughout the body.

Now, as this rhythm of breathing continues, as your awareness spreads through your body, become aware of how you're feeling. What's your emotional state, mood, inner state of being? You don't have to know exactly what it is, but let it be. Leave it alone. Let yourself be as

you are.

And allow it to be in your body as you breathe with it, breathe through it, almost as if your state, your mood, how you're feeling is also being massaged by the expanding and contracting of breathing in and out. As if your breathing in your body is making lots of room for how you feel.

Allowing yourself to feel the way you are without any judgment or reaction, and without any getting involved with it. Just allowing it to be there with the breathing – breathing through it, breathing with it.

Then to end this meditation, you can take a few long, slow, deep breaths, feeling your body more fully. Feeling the contact with your chair, the floor, or your cushion. And when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

[meditation bell rings]

Our emotions are an important part of our life. And there are few places in life, outside of meditation or maybe being alone somewhere, that we give complete permission for us to feel whatever emotions we're having. You might have murderous rage, which we hope you don't act on in the world. But it's okay to sit in meditation and feel it. You might have the most beatific, angelic, wonderful feelings of love and peace. You know, it's just like you're allowed to feel that. Some people have a lot of trouble feeling happiness. One of the things in my role as a meditation teacher, which surprised me the first time I got to do this, is telling someone they had permission to feel joy when they meditated because in some religions that's not really quite okay.

This is a very unique place where we're not trying to repress any emotions. We're not trying to deny any emotions. But we're also not celebrating them. We're also not expressing them. We're neither for them or against them while we're meditating. That's a radical thing to do because in ordinary life, we're for and against our emotions. We have good ones and bad ones. Some that we're ashamed of having. Some that we feel are unacceptable. Some that we think we're supposed to be having, but we're not having them. Some we have and we think, "I have it made. I'll never be depressed again." And that lasts for 10 minutes.

We have this complicated relationship with emotions, some of us. And we have expectations of how we should be feeling. Some of this comes from our society, some of it comes from our family, some of it comes from our life experiences. And some of it is very painful.

When I was a teenager, I expressed some of my emotions to friends, and the way they responded to me was such that I felt something in my heart closed, just boom! “Okay, I’m not going to show that ever again.” It took a few years of meditation to come to a place where that part that was closed would start opening up again. And the whole capacity to feel certain emotions came back over time.

So our emotions are an integral part of what a human being is. And to have a safe place where you can go and really take time to feel and be as you actually are, without any of the extra judgments and ideas that we might have received from growing up in our society or anywhere, is a gift to ourselves. Meditation is meant to be one of those places.

Some people think that Buddhists repress their emotions because they’re just too equanimous. You know, you’re supposed to kind of be calm all the time. There is something to that, that Buddhists tend to be calm and equanimous. But many people find that when they do this meditation, their range of emotions and their familiarity and the way they learn and tap into the wisdom of emotions becomes so much greater. What happens is that this pendulum doesn’t swing as far because if we just like hang on and are ready to celebrate and think, “I’m the best thing since apple pie because I have a little bit of joy,” the excitement will kind of go too far.

If we have some fear, some people are afraid of their fear, and then they get more afraid, and that produces even more fear. And so they’re reacting to it. And the fear pendulum goes really far. The anger pendulum, the shame pendulum goes really far. And so some of the great range that some people have is not actually so healthy for them.

So, as we do this practice, I would say our capacity to have emotions grows, but we don’t swing so far with them. It looks like maybe we’re calmer with it all, but it’s richer. It can be richer. Emotions are actually a very important part of Buddhist practice. And growing on this path of Buddhism is to have an emotionally rich life.

But what happens with practice, with mindfulness, is that mindfulness tends to dissipate the reactive emotions. It dissipates the unnecessary swings. It dissipates the emotions that are somehow or other connected to attachment, to clinging.

The emotions that have no attachment part of them, those that are not part of reactivity, those grow. And the ones that are not connected to attachment and clinging are things like love, happiness, compassion, generosity, calm, peace, all these wonderful things.

So, as we make room to feel and give permission for us to feel as we actually are, no matter

what it is, we start having a better and better understanding of what's happening, and we begin to shift what we are feeding. We're no longer feeding, supporting, or participating in the kind of emotional reactions that are actually harmful for us. And we learn how to feed in a nice way those which are beneficial.

But to make that distinction between harmful and beneficial emotions is not meant to push the harmful ones away when you meditate, or feel shame, or think that if you're a good Buddhist you're not supposed to ever be angry again. Mindfulness meditation is the safe place to be who you are with what's happening. And it might seem strange to say this as a place, but it's radical to have this ability.

And one of the benefits, as I'm kind of repeating myself, is it gives us a chance to see it much more clearly. And as we see it more clearly, wisdom is born. As we see it more clearly, we understand better how to relate to it, how to be with it. We can find the wisdom, we can find the way forward in a much better way than if we just kind of live in it all.

So, this meditation we did just now, starting with breathing, feeling the body, and then opening to the emotions in some way or other – how was that for some of you? Do you find that interesting or a different way to be with it? Anybody willing to say a few words?

Participant 1: When I was kind of opening to emotionally what was happening, to kind of get a sense of that, I found that I was going to physical sensation, I was going to thoughts, to kind of assemble emotion. And I'm kind of sharing that experience. I'm curious if that's a helpful way to kind of approach getting in touch with emotion and opening to emotion.

Gil: Was it helpful for you to do it that way?

Participant 1: I think maybe I got caught up in the second layer of trying to figure out if that was a good approach or not.

Gil: Okay, yeah, so that's the second layer, you were thinking. That's next week. You're a little bit of a prodigy. You're ahead of us. And so what I'm going to try to convey today is to be aware of emotions without thinking much about them – before the thinking, the analyzing, the predictions, the stories that are connected to them. So, to keep it really simple. And some people find it to be such a relief to be with their emotions without having to evaluate them, believe them, solve them, or figure them out. So just keep it really simple.

Anybody else?

Participant 2: It may be pretty much the same thing she was saying, but I guess I don't know

how to separate thinking from feeling. I'm trying to feel, but I'm trying to find where the feeling is.

Gil: Yes. Yeah, this is hard, but we'll do that next week, the thinking. But for some people, "I think therefore I am." It's almost like who we are is our thoughts. And for some people, thinking and emotions are inseparable. They can't really tease them apart. They come together. There's a very strong connection to thinking and certain kinds of emotions. That'll become clear as what we're doing here continues to deepen. I think just the fact that you see that is great. That's kind of the beginning to understanding what's happening.

Participant 3: I kind of notice in myself that maybe the pattern goes the other way, rather than the thinking causing the emotion, the emotion causes thinking. For me, it seems to be this underlying current of fear or anxiety or something that drives a lot of the "Have I thought about this? Did I do that thing? I got to plan this." And so I noticed a lot of the thoughts seem to come from this underlying thing, feeling. And sometimes I'm able to identify that feeling and kind of meditate with it, put my attention on it and hold it as a feeling rather than as a thought. And then other times I'm thinking about stuff. But in terms of feelings, that seems to be the one that comes up for me most of the time when I'm sitting.

Gil: That's considered a very important understanding to get to. For some people, when they meditate regularly it starts dawning upon them, "Wow, the fear is pervasive. I had no idea." But you need to be quiet enough and still enough so you're not distracted from yourself. Most people live distracted from themselves.

I don't know if this represents you accurately, but if fear triggers a lot of thoughts, the thought train can be really long. And we're so involved in the thoughts and the ideas that we've lost touch with the fear, and so we're distracted from what's really happening.

There's one way of understanding the connection between thoughts and emotions. Sometimes emotions are first. Sometimes thoughts are first. But one interesting way of understanding it is that thoughts are just the messenger. Don't spend a lot of time with the messenger. Get the message – the message is the emotions.

The emotions are the factory for a lot of thinking. And so we want to learn how to be, in a useful way, mindful of the emotions before or instead of spinning out in the stories of it all. And that's what we'll talk a little bit more about now.

Maybe one more here. Was that a clear enough response? Okay.



Participant 4: I think I'm actually a week behind. I can't remember if it's a sympathetic or parasympathetic reaction, but I found just in meditating, I came in with a tightness in my back, and being able to meditate, I don't know if I let go of something or if it just... I feel a hell of a lot better.

Gil: Fantastic. So, feeling "a hell of a lot better," that's a feeling. How did that feel not in your mind, but how did it feel in your body, not just in that place where you relaxed? That's a strong statement to say, "a hell of a lot better." How actually did that feel in your body? Did you feel lighter or glowing or kind of happy?

Participant 4: Well, like I let go of something, and the tightness that was there was released.

Gil: But that release you seemed to appreciate it. That appreciation, did it bore you up a little bit or inspire you or did you feel kind of...

Participant 4: I felt, I mean, I feel just maybe lighter, maybe I feel better.

Gil: Fantastic. You feel better, you feel lighter. One of the things we do in mindfulness practice is we allow ourselves to feel those feelings better. Some people can feel better, but we have all these things to worry about, important things to think about, like, "Okay, I don't have time to feel that. Let's go off and worry about the next thing." And then the back tightens up again.

One of the things we do with mindfulness, we stop and really stay present for things. And so when something like that is healthy, take time to let that register, how you feel good from it and what just shifts. It might be very subtle, but it's good to let it register deeply. That's one of the things we're doing in mindfulness is taking the time to really let it register – how we are, what's happening – even when what we're feeling doesn't feel good, because there's something about the deeper connection to it that allows something to shift.

One of the interesting things about the English word "emotion" is it has the word "motion" in it. And the prefix "e" in Latin means out. It turns out that all emotions are in movement. They're processes that are moving along. And they mostly want to work themselves out or spread out, but we tend to block it. We tend to lock them up. We tend to lock onto them or push them or get tight around them or get afraid of them or something. And sometimes these emotions get kind of stuck in us for a long time.

Part of what mindfulness does is it begins to unstuck us. We're making room for it so that it can start moving. And it's fascinating to watch how emotions start to move and change and

shift. That's what they want to do if we can give them space to do it.

In that meditation we did, I was trying to give you a little feeling for what it's like to have your emotions with more space for them in your body and more kind of not being caught in them because you are breathing with them. If you give your awareness over to the breathing and breathe with it, there's less mind space available to be thinking about it, to be reacting to it.

And so, think of awareness as space. If that space is filled with thoughts, very little awareness is available to really feel and be present for other things. One of the reasons to quiet the mind is so you can be more aware of what's happening to you without drowning out or dominating all the space, filling all the space with everything. So, as the thinking mind quiets down or as our priorities shift in the mind, we become more interested in staying with the breathing, then awareness no longer is caught up in the mind. And then we can start feeling other things more fully. I hope this makes some sense to you.

Emotions – one of the reasons why we do this in the third week is that if we just started the first week with feel your emotions, we'd probably all be a mess right away because we don't have the capacity, we haven't studied, learned how to be with them in a wise way. But the breathing is calming.

It's a very well-known technique that people who are stressed can relax if they just breathe and hang out with the breathing, tune into the breathing. Part of the reason for that – if all the mental space is filled by thinking and the thinking is stressful, that's going to stress out the body. But if the mental space is not only filled with thoughts, but now we're starting to fill it with breathing and the body, then there's less energy going to the stressful thoughts. And the stressful thoughts have tentacles that reach into our muscles and get us all tight. So, we're kind of shifting.

To start breathing, especially with difficult emotions – to breathe through them, breathe with them – is a way of not being caught in them. It's a way of doing something different with the mind space, with the mind awareness, that doesn't feed them, doesn't react to them, but at the same time doesn't ignore them.

Some people, if they're really stressed out around their emotions, will distract themselves – eat, watch TV, do all kinds of things. We don't want to distract ourselves, but we want to create a different way of being with them so we're not caught in their grip. And so, the breathing is one of the ways – to breathe with it, to breathe through it. Shifts a little bit. It makes things

a little more relaxed.

If in addition to that, we are stabilized in the body, we feel like, "Oh, I'm really here in my body"... There's a lot of people in our culture who are not in their bodies. They spend much of the day from the neck up and kind of spinning in their thoughts, thinking about things. And again, if the mind space is filled with just thoughts, there's very little room to really feel the body.

The body is a delicate instrument. I'm pretty confident that this body of ours is much more sensitive and has a lot more fascinating instruments in it than your smartphone. It's an amazing thing, and it works so much better if you're present for it. If you're not present for it because you're on your smartphone all the time, you're really shortchanging yourself dramatically by the intelligence, the information, the sensitivity, the possibilities that are here in this body.

So, to slow down and be mindful and start being aware of your body, then you start creating space and room to feel your emotions, being with them with something different than just being with them with your thoughts. And if all we're doing to be with emotions was for our thinking – thinking about them, telling stories over and over again, and trying to... – it's a very limited human thing to do.

If we want to expand out to much more of the greater capacities we have as human beings, the range of intelligence we have that operates within us, you have to bring online all these apps that you have that have been turned off. We're full of apps and they're really good, but they have to be turned on.

And so, if the mind space is filled with thoughts, you can't really feel what's going on here. But as you start feeling your body getting more embodied, then it's a lot easier to feel emotions. The stability, the steadiness of the body, the strength that the body provides makes it easier to feel what's going on. Maybe not automatically and not quickly, but that's the direction the practice goes.

What we're trying to do here in mindfulness is to learn a very simple – but simple doesn't mean easy – a very simple capacity to know we're having an emotion when we're having it. As opposed to know we're having it and be upset, know we're having it and be afraid, know we're having it and "That jerk deserves everything I'm going to do to him." We're involved, we're kind of caught in it. As opposed to, "Oh, they're saying I'm angry. Let me feel the anger." "No, no, no. You have to kind of give the person a piece of your mind. He deserves it." "Wait

a minute, slow down, take a deep breath, relax. Just feel what's happening. Oh, anger. My stomach is in a knot. My jaw is tight.” “But I have to kind of... he deserves to be...” “No, no, later, that can be for later. Now, just be here, feel it, be with it.”

And then something begins relaxing. You're breathing with it. The tension in the belly begins to soften as you breathe with it. You notice when you start going into those thoughts – “But he deserves it” – that the belly gets all tight again. And then you relax.

And then you start seeing that every time you go to your head and your thoughts, some other kinds of tension begin. Then you come back. And then slowly the anger maybe dissipates. And you find out after a while that, lo and behold, underneath the anger, you're afraid. The genesis, the source of the anger, is how afraid you are, how threatened you feel. And now you're in a different world. Now you can kind of maybe feel that. Maybe that's what really needs your attention.

So what we're trying to do in mindfulness is we're not actually trying to figure out how to be as we are, as if we can accept ourselves as we are. We're trying to be *with* ourselves. And the difference between being as you are versus being with yourself is a difference between... It's like if you're really having a hard time in your life and you're upset, maybe you're angry, you're afraid, you're grieving, who knows what's happening to you, and you know this person, a friend, who whenever you're with them, they like to go for a walk with you and accompany you and they'll sit on a park bench with you. And they're not going to fix you, they're not going to judge you. They're just going to be with you and listen. And it's so good to be with that person who has that ability. A lot of friends don't have that ability. This person just seems to care and listens well. You feel like this person's not judging you, not condemning you, this person's not participating. “I need to express how angry I am at that guy, but I go with some friends and they get angry too. They get more angry than I am. That's not so useful.”

But this one person just sits, the person's with me, and I feel like I'm being held, I feel like I'm cared for. I feel like there's this calm presence and something inside of me begins to relax because the person is with me, not for me, not participating, but also not judging. This is a basic good friendship kind of skill to have, and so we're doing that for ourselves. We're trying to be with how we are as opposed to being... So we're trying to be with the anger, not be the anger. To be with the fear, but not be the fear. And that's a huge step to take.

It's a very respectful thing to do. It's much more respectful for your emotions to be with them than to be them. And some of the more difficult emotions we have, some of the reasons people feel shame is because they think they are the emotion. “I have so much anger, I feel

so ashamed of myself. I shouldn't do that. I'm not supposed to be angry." We're defining ourselves by the anger. But if we're not the anger, there's anger, but now we're going to be with the anger as opposed to be the angry person. Does that make some sense?

And so mindfulness is this capacity just to see and be present with what's happening, without being pulled into it, without being caught by it. Just allowing it to be there and seeing it more clearly. Breathing with it, feeling it in the body.

So, to be with your emotions. Don't be your emotions. I keep repeating this so that you can try to experiment on your own, to see what's the difference when you're in your emotions versus when you're with them. And if you're with them, how can you be with them as a good friend, the one who listens? The one who really makes space, who doesn't judge, doesn't have to fix right away. And just feel what's going on.

There is an acronym that we use here at IMC sometimes, which hopefully isn't too much teaching. It's a four-word acronym that has four different elements of how we are mindful of emotions. The acronym is RAFT. One of the teachers here who has really specialized in developing this RAFT simile is Tanya Wiser, who teaches usually on Thursday nights. She loves the simile and the acronym. She teaches RAFT a lot. She has a little different way of doing it than I do.

RAFT. The first step is recognize. When you have an emotion, take the time to recognize what it is. It might be obvious or it might not be, but something happens with our emotional life if it's clearly recognized. It's kind of like when something is named, something can relax. I've been upset and angry and didn't know it, and some friend has come up to me and said, "Gil, you seem to be angry." And "Oh, yeah, I didn't know." Or "Gil, you seem to be stressed." "Oh, yes, I think I am now that you tell me." Someone names it for me.

There's something powerful that happens when we recognize, just recognize, "Oh, that's what's happening." It's part of the beginning of stepping far enough away from the emotion so that when we come back we can be with it. If we're in it, we're not with it. And so, "Oh, I'm sad." Maybe you need to say it a few times to yourself, "This is sadness." And you feel yourself collapsing into it or collapsing. "No, sit up. This is sadness." And so, just recognize it.

If you don't know what it is, start by just recognizing it as something, a feeling. "I have a feeling." I remember once I had a feeling that the best I could do was, "This is yucky," and I started there. And then as I just breathed with it and felt the sensations of it in the body

and just kind of was with the yuckiness, at some point, something in my chest relaxed and I immediately knew what it was, “Oh, depression.” But then the depression kind of lifted at the same time. There was something about recognizing it that really made a big difference. So first is to recognize.

The second step is to allow it to be there. This is very respectful for emotions. I mean, if you're angry and doing interesting things with your middle finger to the other drivers and, “Oh, at IMC I was taught to allow my anger,” this is not what I mean. I mean allow like in meditation, allow with some stillness. Allow it to be without acting on it. Allow the anger to be there, don't act on it. Just allow it to make space. It's very respectful. It's like your friend sitting on a park bench with you really respects you. They care for you. They're with you.

Now, if your friend is sitting on a park bench with you and you're telling them how sad you feel, and your friend is sitting next to you like this, “Ohhhhhhhh,” you probably think there's no hope. “I've really done my friend in.” That's not going to help you.

But if your friend sits upright, has a little bit of kind, upright maturity in their posture and they're there, and then you feel, “Oh, there's someone here who's stable. There's a grown-up in the room. There's someone who's not overwhelmed by what I'm talking about.” So can we do the same thing for ourselves?

This allowing is powerful, but since we're trying to be with the emotion – allow it and be with it – can you not collapse? Can you not pull away? Can you not push away out of anger? Can you just, “Okay, I'm going to show up here.”

This is why meditation is such a fascinating place to do all this because you want to take a dignified posture when you meditate. And then don't move for your emotions. Don't give in to them. We don't collapse no matter how upset we are. We don't make a fist no matter how angry we are. We don't run away no matter how afraid we are. We just have this posture, “Okay.” And then we can be a good friend for ourselves. Then we can be with it and allow it. “Okay, I'm allowing this.”

It's easier said than done. But this is what the practice is – to learn how to do this. And it can be learned for sure.

The F of RAFT is to feel. Those of you who were here last week, remember we did the hand exercise? So find out where the emotion is being expressed in the body. Is it a tightness in the belly? Is it some kind of rumbling in the chest, in the heart area? Is it in the shoulders? Is it in the face? Where is it most expressed? What part of your body is most activated by the

emotion that you have?

Some emotions are more diffuse and they kind of spread through much of the body. Some people say it's everywhere, and then you say, "Is it in your little toe?" This happens to me often enough. People say it's everywhere, and I say, "Is it in your little toe?" And as soon as I say that, they'll say, "Oh, no, no, it's here in the torso." Now it's not everywhere, it's there.

Then I'll ask, "Is it mostly in the front of the torso or the back of the torso?" "Oh, it's in the front of the torso." So again, it's not everywhere. It takes a while for people to find where it is. And then in the front of the torso, where is it the strongest? "Oh, right here." And so they need help to kind of find where it's most active.

And then, like we did with the hand last week, the idea is to feel the physical sensations associated with the emotion. Part of the advantage of this is that you're with it by feeling it. But also the physical sensations are not the story. The physical sensations are not the ideas we're spinning and telling ourselves about it. We're trying to step away from the stories to just feel the simplicity of the emotion in the moment.

All emotions, believe it or not, they want to process themselves. They want to move out. They want to complete themselves, if we can allow them to. But if we're participating in telling the story and why we're so angry and how we were wronged over and over and over and over again, or if we keep telling ourselves, "Boy, am I a jerk. Boy, am I just a lousy, no good, lousy person. Boy, I'm just like a failure as a human being. Boy, I'm just..." If you keep saying those stories over and over again, it's debilitating. It sucks the life out of us to live in those stories over and over and over again.

So part of mindfulness, to be present for the physical sensations, is to learn to shift the center of gravity from the thoughts we're spinning to just feel the emotions. And for me, I don't know if this will work for you, but it's a very powerful gesture for how to feel, how to be with the sensations, and that is to cup your hands together like this and just come from underneath wherever you're feeling the emotions in your body, and just hold them there as if they can be there forever. Just gently, calmly, "Okay, fear, here you are."

With fear, it's much easier to say than to do, but I think it can be quite powerful to hear this. When we're afraid, we bring mindfulness to our fear. We're with it. We're helping our fear feel safe. It's not the same thing as making yourself feel safe, because then you've identified with the fear. But help that place that's inside to feel safe. "It's okay."

But if you're there poking at it and telling it, "You're lousy, and you shouldn't be there, and

I'm going to fix you, and we're going to figure out how to make you go away," then it's not going to feel safe. Just like you wouldn't be if I came up to you and was clearly looking at you and talking to you like, "How am I going to get rid of you?" You wouldn't feel good. I promise I won't do that. But it just wouldn't feel good, right? So the same thing for your inner life.

Your fear needs your respect, needs your care. You want to help it feel safe so that your fear can move along. Everything moves along if it's given the chance.

So, the idea is first recognize (R), then allow (A), and then feel (F). The fourth one is a little bit more complicated to understand. It's to tease apart (T). Emotions are often seen as one big hunk of stuff, junk, one big ball of something. And it's very hard to get our handle on it because it's just one thing.

But emotions are composites. They're made up of different things. And there's a strong connection to the story-making mind. So, if we can separate out the story from the immediacy of how we're feeling physically, that makes a world of difference. If we can tease apart the emotion and how we're reacting to it, how we're... "Oh, look at that. I'm feeling afraid, but now I'm embarrassed that I'm afraid. I hope no one sees me. I better hide it. I better put on an extra jacket so no one sees how tense I am."

This means that we have a relationship to it that we're embarrassed. So we tease apart the fear and the embarrassment. Tease apart the liking from the experience and the not liking from the experience. Tease apart the aversion. Tease apart the attachment, "Oh, this is good. I don't want to let go of this."

So, over time, we're seeing all the extra things we're doing. And we're allowing things to be simpler and simpler, so each of the parts can be seen for itself rather than seen as one big stew. And people say, "I'm stewing," but we don't want to stew. We want to respect everything, see everything distinctly for what it is.

This is probably a lot of ideas, a lot to say, but it's meant to be simple. Maybe this idea of RAFT you can experiment with it – recognize, allow, feel, and tease apart. Let's do a little bit of it now in meditation. I'll do another guided meditation like we just did. And then I'll introduce the RAFT steps in the middle of it and see how that works for you.

It's often good to think of setting yourself up for meditation, kind of doing preparatory steps. Over time, you'll learn what the beginning steps work for you. Again, I recommend that you just start really simple and do a three-breath journey. Just stay with three full breaths. Keep it that simple, but give yourself to those three.



Then maybe taking a few long, slow, deep breaths. Could be another three, but this time deep breaths, relaxing on the exhale.

And then returning to a natural breathing, just as you are. And maybe another three breaths, but continue to do this relaxing on the exhale.

Then letting yourself just breathe. Center yourself on the body breathing. And so that you're not so much up in the control tower of the head, see if you can notice more how your body experiences the breathing.

As you come to the end of the exhale, feel the weight of your body touching your chair or the floor. To feel the stability of what supports your body, as if you have a foundation that holds you up. Maybe as you exhale, relaxing into that foundation so you feel more grounded.

And so you don't fill your awareness with thinking, so there's more space in awareness to be aware of the body, see if you can quiet your thinking. Soften. Maybe even slow your thinking down. Maybe thinking from a deeper place within. Or maybe letting go of your thoughts as you exhale.

And then riding on the rhythm, breathing in and breathing out, for a little while here in silence.

Now, notice how you're feeling – anything at all. Could be you're tired. Could be that you're calm. Could be you're agitated. Could be sad or happy. Irritated or content. Worried. Or feeling safe. Maybe it's very subtle. Maybe it's just hints of something. Whatever you're feeling, see if you can recognize it in some way. It doesn't have to be exact recognition, but recognize that it's there, where the act of recognition allows you to step away from it so you can be with it rather than be in it. You can say, "Hi, sadness." "Hi, joy." "Calm." Whatever it is.

And to be with it as a good friend, allow yourself to feel whatever you're feeling. It's only going to be for a few minutes, so for these few minutes, allow yourself to be. But the allowing is being with how you're feeling. You're not being what you're feeling.

Maybe it's easier to allow if you're breathing with your emotion, breathing with the state that you have, breathing through it.

And then whatever you're feeling, notice where in the body that feeling is most pronounced. And feel the sensations or the activation in your body associated with the emotion, your mental state, or your mood. Maybe imagining you're cupping your hands of awareness and holding it gently in your hands. You're being with it as you feel it.

Then teasing apart. Noticing how the physical sensations of the emotion are different from the thoughts, the stories, different than how you're relating to it. There's the emotion, your state, and the reaction to it – the judgment of it, preferences, interpretations, predictions of where this is going. There's the emotion and then how you define yourself by it. This means “I'm this kind of person.” Tease those apart so that you can be with the basic emotion by itself. So you can better recognize it, allow it, and feel it.

And when you feel like that's enough, then begin again with your breathing. Return to breathing and just practice mindfulness of breathing.

To end this sitting, take some long, slow, deep breaths. Feel your body. Get yourself ready to end it. And when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

[meditation bell rings]

There are a lot of instructions and ideas that were presented today. It's always the default – if you have a choice, always choose the simpler choice in this practice – simply being aware. So the basic idea is to use breathing if it works for you well enough. Let that be the center of gravity for the meditation, just kind of be with your breath. Some days you can be with your breath a lot, and it's really nice. Some days you can hardly be with it. But be with your breathing until something else becomes more compelling, and that'll happen sooner or later.

We don't only stay with the breath because then you set up a tension between the other thing that's happening that's compelling and your effort to stay with the breath. So you can just let go of the breathing and then bring your mindfulness to this other thing that's happening.

So, if your neighbor is really loud, then rather than struggling and judging that and being upset with it, you can go and just notice hearing, being mindful of listening, the noise, and just kind of see... Some people get really relaxed just listening to sound.

But what's really happening is not the noise from the neighbor. You've talked to them 999 times before about how they make too much noise, and here they are disrespecting you one more time. What's really happening is you're angry. But you're meditating. “Okay, this is the chance to be mindful of anger.” That's what's the big thing. That's stronger than the breath. So, “Okay, no doubt about it. This is anger.” You recognize it. You say that to yourself, “Oh, anger.”

“Oh, but Gil said to be with it, but not in it.” So just step back, “How do I say anger to recognize it where I'm not glued to it? What does that mean not...?” So then, “Anger, anger. Oh, okay.

Now I'm a little bit apart from it.”

Once you're apart from it, it's a gift because now you can come towards it as a friend. If you're like this, you can't do anything to it. You offer respect by being separate and come together, “Oh, anger, I see you.” And then allow it.

“No, this is terrible. It shouldn't be. It's my neighbor's fault. I've got to do something. I'm going to write a letter to the owners of the apartment building.”

”No, no. That's later. Now, just allow. Just allow. Calm down. Calm down. Just allow. Just feel it. ‘Oh, anger. This is what anger is like.’ ” You feel the heat. You feel the tension. “Oh, okay.” So allow it. Allow it.

And then feel it. “I don't want to feel it. This doesn't feel good. Life is about feeling good.”

“Just calm down. Just feel it. Just feel it.”

“I don't want to.”

”Okay, let's shift gears then. What's really happening is you don't want to. The resistance. Feel that. Resistance. Feel that. ‘Oh, resistance.’ ”

Recognize it. Allow it. Feel it. Don't make resistance bad, just fold it into the mindfulness. And then after a while, the resistance dissipates and guess what? Now you're left with just the anger. Now it's easier. Anger without resistance. So, you hold it and feel it.

And as you feel it, then the letter T of RAFT, you can tease it apart. “Oh, yeah, there's this story. I tell myself this story every time. Nine hundred and ninety-nine times now, I tell the story that my neighbor disrespects me. My neighbor hates me. The lame neighbor is trying to ruin my life.” What you don't know is your neighbor has gone almost deaf. They're desperately trying to hear something. They crank up the music, and they feel so bereft. But you don't know that, so you think they're out for you.

And so you start separating out the story from the actual experience. Some of your stories are true stories, so then tell yourself, “Yeah, I think it's a true story.” But this is not the time for the story. Let the story be for later, after meditation. Or let it be later, so I can just be with my own experience, so that I can take responsibility for my part of it all. Really see what's going on. So there's teasing apart.

So, when we did that in the meditation, was that something some of you could follow along with? Was it interesting? Anybody want to say a few short words? We're almost ready to stop

here, but I'd love to hear some comments.

Participant 1: This commonly happens to me. I'm feeling really cold in this room. It's very uncomfortable, and so I can't stop thinking about it. And I'm trying to like... "Why isn't anybody else...?" I feel it in my bones. And so I'm like... Then I can't stop thinking about it, but then I try. But then I tense up because I'm cold. This happens to me with the weather, in general, when it's hot and when it's cold. So I found myself trying to soothe myself by rocking a little bit. And then I'm like, "No, I'm not supposed to be moving."

Gil: This is an example of how... You don't have to do what I'm about to say. Usually, a lot of times, meditators have shawls they put on. They try to stay warm. But what you can do, if you want – when I was studying in a Zen monastery in Japan, where it was pretty cold some times of the year and really hot in others, I was told, "When cold, just be cold. When warm, just be warm. When hot, just be hot."

I've done a lot of that where, "Yes, this is uncomfortable, but I'll just be cold." And I take the cold as the object of mindfulness. I just feel the cold and be with the cold, try to relax with the cold. The same thing with hot. It's possible to shiver and be at peace. But it's also possible to have such a strong reaction to it. We're fighting it, we're upset with it, it has to be different. And we're kind of getting all activated around it, which sounds like what you've been doing.

Participant 1: Yeah, I do it all the time. And I try, I'm like, "No, just be with the cold." "No, I can't. It's cold. I don't like this at all." So it's something I need to work on for sure.

Gil: Yeah. One of the things that I like to teach here at IMC, and maybe I said this before in this class, is that Buddhism is about learning how to be free in the midst of everything. But if you're only free when you're comfortable, you're not really free. So what does it mean to be free when things are uncomfortable? We'll try to turn up the heat next week. But this might be a very interesting area for you to explore, but don't explore it when it's most difficult.

Participant 1: No, I'll try to be warmer. I always think I'm going to be warm enough.

Gil: We'll try to keep it warmer for you. But try to find some situation where you're mildly cold, where it's safer to experiment, and see if you can experiment with the RAFT.

Participant 1: And judging it, like "I shouldn't be so upset about how I'm cold, right?" You know, like the whole story that then goes along with that. Like I should be able to just be with the cold.

Gil: You're allowed to be a cold person, a cold person without being a bad person being cold. You didn't say bad, but... Yeah, you're allowed to be someone who... no shame. Just be cold. Make it simple. But if it's easy enough, put on a blanket or something. This is not supposed to be forceful asceticism here.

Maybe one more and then we'll stop.

Participant 2: When I'm doing a meditation, I'm not getting too many emotions or anything like that, unless there's a distraction. So, I'm not able to practice being with that emotion, or even analyzing, or getting into the emotion from a disembodied way. But in reality, in real life, let's say my boss is screaming at me or something like that. I'm having fear and worry and all of that. What do you do then? Is it that the technique should help you try and extract yourself from those fears?

Gil: You could do that. At work, you have to take care of the work. But if you can take a five-minute time out – say your boss did something and you're really angry, and then you say, "Excuse me, I need to go to the bathroom." You don't have to tell them what you're doing in the bathroom. Usually no one asks. But what you're doing is going to sit on the toilet and just breathe and practice this with your anger for five minutes. And then you practice there.

And so, if you don't have much emotions when you meditate, that's fine. You don't have to have emotions. But if you can stay with the breathing, stay present, come back over and over again from your thoughts, you're building a capacity to be able to be with emotions later. Don't worry about it if you don't have it here. But take the opportunity at work if you can to step away for five minutes and see what happens.

Participant 2: Okay. Thanks.

Gil: Okay. So I want to say that to open the arena of emotions, sometimes it's opening Pandora's box. Emotions are difficult, very difficult for some people. And so it's possible that this has been tender for some of you to do this. Take care of yourself when you go home and be careful with yourself.

I'll stay up here a little bit if you have questions or anything you want to ask. Tom is sitting right there. He's available. Nena in the back is a wise woman, and you can check with her as well. And Nancy here, you can talk to her. There are people here you can check in with and I'll be here.

Thank you. I hope that this coming week that you'll somehow explore a little bit more your

emotional life in a way that you maybe haven't before. If you want to get a little bit of extra kind of momentum in this, explore your emotions and find a nice friend that you trust who maybe you can sit on a park bench with or something, and tell them what you're learning. Tell them how this has been and maybe have a little conversation about it. Great. Thank you.