

Dharmette: Introduction o Mindfulness (3 of 5) Emotions.

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So hello and welcome to this third talk that is an introduction to mindfulness meditation. That is the core instructions given here at IMC, especially by me. And I like to think of this as a foundational teaching for us, from which, when we know it well, can be a basis to expand the instructions or specialize the instructions as needed and as useful for people as they grow and develop their practice or as their circumstances of the life changes. And for each of these areas that we, for this foundational teaching, it's really good to make them a study for a while, really practice them for a while, to learn them well. So to learn about mindfulness of breathing, how to do that in a way that's supportive and inspiring, where the word inspiring has the Latin word breath within it, and to do so with our body. That kind of a hard divide between the mind and the body that maybe our technology supports these days, spending a lot of time on a monitor or getting signals from an electronic device, that somehow it all too easily leaves the body out to become full, wonderfully complete through becoming complete in our body.

And then today the topic is emotions. When I did my early years of Buddhist practice, certainly in Zen, there was very little emphasis on emotions or almost none. There was no sense of practicing with emotions and how to be with them wisely. And when I was introduced to insight meditation in Thailand and Burma, it was the bringing attention to emotions was certainly taught, but it was more like a sideshow. It's more like just recognize it, but there wasn't too much said about it and how to do it wisely and completely. It was when I came back to the United States and was introduced to how the Western teachers taught mindfulness, that I began to see how useful it was to have a really good grounding, understanding of how to bring mindfulness to emotions.

That emotions are composites. They're made up of many different component parts. And there's a strong tendency to either kind of be caught or trapped or influenced by the total

picture of the emotion that's kind of amorphous and not so clear exactly what it is. And it's a little bit hard then to address or see or recognize except through the story-making mind, the mind that reacts or is a... reacts to it or the mind that has thoughts about it, for and against it, that makes meaning out of it, assigns purpose to it. But there's a way of learning how to be with the different component parts of emotions so that we find more freedom to it and so that we're not reinforcing it, we're not making the situation worse, but rather we're learning to be wise, learning to allow some deeper processing, some deeper freeing, some deeper opening in relationship to emotions to unfold, so that we can become wise in how we are with emotions.

We become more sensitive to emotions, become more free and available to the rich world of emotions, which is a very important part of the information system that human beings are constructed to have. It's almost as if emotions are messages, and if we somehow only pay attention to the messenger, we miss what the message is. And so emotions are important, but a very important part of human life and understanding and processing what goes on in the world. They're very important messengers about something going on with us, whether it's something psychologically healthy or not so healthy. And so we want to kind of be able to stop and know how to take a good look at them and be with them. Not so much to solve and not so much to analyze or fix ourselves or as a self-improvement project, but ultimately when we do mindfulness practice so that we can free attention, free our awareness, free our hearts from a preoccupation with them, from letting them influence us, from being for and against them, from being identified and defining ourselves by the emotions we have.

And as that freedom occurs, in some kind of wonderful way, it doesn't really matter what emotion we have, because we're not going to be influenced by it. We're not going to be defined by it. It's not going to push us around. We're not going to succumb to the weight of it. We can just see it clearly because we know how to see. We know what parts of it to see rather than some vague kind of gestalt of it, all the component parts. So emotions are included as part of mindfulness practice. And it's easier to be with emotions if you know how to practice mindfulness of the body. It's easier to practice mindfulness body if you know something about how to use breathing as a stabilizer, as a settler, as something that keeps you out of the world of thoughts.

So for many people, then the sequence of breath, body, and emotions works relatively well. Some people it doesn't. So when an emotion is compelling, when it is strong or predominant, and there's a tension between staying with breathing and the emotion, then the instructions is it's fine to stop paying attention to breathing and shift the attention to the emotion. And

sometimes an important thing to do is simply to recognize we're having it. There was a time in my life where even learning to recognize I had an emotion was a big deal. I just somehow had blinders on. And so to learn to recognize, and sometimes it's enough, just to, oh, that's what's happening. I'm angry, I'm sad. Something just, there's sometimes in a clear recognition, that's all that's needed. And then we can leave it alone and we can go back to the breathing.

Sometimes more is needed. Sometimes more is wonderful to do. And sometimes then we step forward to really be present for it, make it the subject of the mindfulness and the attention. And in doing so, one of the important things to do is to learn the art of leaving it alone. Learn the art of allowing it to be there, to give permission to have your emotions, and with the idea that sitting in meditation posture is a safe place to let whatever is there to be there. And that's the art, the beautiful, wonderful art that we're learning. Even if it's rage, even if it's great grief, or even if it's great joy, there's an art to learning how to open to it, allow it to be there, without succumbing to it or collapsing under the weight of it or getting attached to it or resisting it.

Not so that we give into the drives, the demands of the emotion, but we learn how to just be open to it and feel it and stay autonomous, stay free in the midst of whatever we're feeling. Not to be disrespectful, but the opposite. It's something very respectful to just know the emotion for itself without getting entangled with it, without getting involved in it, and certainly without defining ourselves, using whatever we're feeling emotionally as evidence to come to some conclusion about oneself, that I'm a bad person, a good person, or whatever. Just be very, very simple. Okay? And then one of the things that's useful, which stop, recognize, allow, is then to feel it in the body and to the physicality of it.

And one of the reasons why that's so useful is that the body is not just the body. The body is, whatever we feel and sense in the body, the sensations, is the working of the nerves, nervous system of the body and the neurons that are firing. And the mind includes the whole body, wherever the nerve endings are. And the nerve endings then send signals to all over other places in the body. And it's a complicated ecology of many things operating. And so if we can be present in the body and feel the sensations of an emotion in the body, we're beginning to allow this wider intelligence to operate and move.

And some things helps to free up the emotions from the reactivity, the picking the wound that the mind does. And allows for healing, allows for the heart. The heart knows how to heal. The heart knows how to process at its own time in its own way. So we're allowing the body to kind of do, support us, to allow it to do what it does. And sometimes it's quite subtle

in the body, sometimes it's quite strong. Fear might be in the belly, anger might be in the belly, fear might be in the chest. Joy and love might be in the chest, in the heart area. Maybe a sadness, depression might be a kind of weight in the shoulders, a sinking feeling, maybe, maybe a kind of pulling in of the muscles on the face, a tiredness in the body somewhere.

So the idea is to feel it, to be with it, and to start monitoring and managing oneself with it. If being present for an emotion, like fear, produces more and more of the same, then something else is needed. You don't want to keep kind of letting something that feels maybe even dangerous for you to grow and develop under the gaze of mindfulness. Right? But there is a way of maybe backing up, feeling the emotion quite broadly and widely, as opposed to narrowly, that can maybe mitigate this chance that certain emotions that are maybe difficult for us grow. Right.

And sometimes to really feel the emotion with respect and be there without reacting, without the story operating, with the story receding, maybe even letting go of the story making mind. It's a way of not... picking the wound, it's a way of not feeding it. It's a way of trusting and what's happening there, trusting what's all. I like to think that all emotions, grief, joy, love, even anger, is really precious. It's kind of sacred if we don't give in to acting on that which is harmful. If we don't pick it up. But we respect it. We look at it again. We let the body hold it. We make space for it.

And so many of the emotions we have grow because of the stories, how we're feeding it with reactivity. And so to learn not to react. So feel it in the body. Maybe that's where you can breathe with it. Breathe, which you stay present. And sometimes it's helpful not to stay too long. So I recommend that we begin by, if there's a strong emotion, mood, mental state, to go and give your attention to it as fully as you can, the way I'm talking about, for three breaths, five breaths, and then come back to the breathing.

And maybe do that a few times. And that coming back to the breathing kind of as a protection from the subtle ways or not so subtle ways in which we're involved with it and fueling it and reacting to it. Come back to the simplicity of your breathing and then go back to the emotion. Kind of go back and forth a little bit and you might help free you from the reactivity, the thinking mind that thinks about what's happening and just keep it really simple. Yeah. And then at some point you might just stay longer with it and really give it permission to be there and feel very gently as you feel the physicality of it, how it begins to shift and change. And inevitably it'll change in some ways and become curious by an intimate sensing of the physicality of emotions they're noticing how that physicality, those sensations begin to shift and change and move and maybe creates a better state.

So for today, as you go about your day, well, today I'd recommend, again, to add five more minutes to your daily meditation, the extra meditation that you do. And Monday I suggest attend, yesterday 15, and today I suggest you find a way today before you go to sleep, some point in the day, to meditate for 20 minutes. And do a bit of this mindfulness of emotions during that time. Explore it, kind of like it's a practice run. You're trying to learn, practice with it. And then throughout the day, periodically, check in with yourself. At least once an hour in some quality way, maybe put a timer on, where you check in to really recognize how you're feeling emotionally, mood-wise, the feelings you have, and then for maybe only a minute, breathe with them, feel them, stop, be with them.

And maybe it's only five breaths, count to five, and see what difference that makes in your day. So I hope that some of you will do this homework. A lot of the benefits that come from this practice come from doing the practice. So please try to do it during the day, and then we'll continue tomorrow with mindfulness of thinking. Thank you.