

Guided Meditation: Mindfulness of Emotions

Gil Fronsdal

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Good morning and welcome. And for this week, offering the most basic Insight Meditation instructions that I have here at IMC, kind of in brief. Today, the topic is emotions. And it's helpful to, very helpful in being mindful of emotions to ground the attention in the body, in the physical expression of an emotion, the physical components of it. And part of the reason for that is that a big part of the life of an emotion is related to how stories evoke them, feed them, keep them going. And stories can be wonderful and not to be dismissed.

However, stories can keep things going longer than they need to if what the purpose of our practice is to be present, fully present to the present moment, and the advantages that come from that. So to be aware of the emotions in the body, how they're expressed in the body, to ground the experience of emotionality in something that's here and now, something present, something which is not the story. And thereby have a kind of a grounding in the emotion that leaves the emotion alone, doesn't feed it or react to it as much. And also the body has a lot of, I call it intelligence, a lot of... Body is not just a chunk of meat. It's actually an extension of the mind.

The body, the nervous system and the hormonal systems of the body work much better if we're aware of it, if we hold it in an open, attentive, non-reactive way. And that helps a lot with emotions. The funny thing is, or the odd thing is, that the more difficult emotions, the more kind of unhelpful emotions, tend to diminish with mindfulness. And the most healthy ones can grow and expand with mindfulness. And mindfulness of the body is key to this. So I'll offer you a little bit of mindfulness of the body exercise as a stepping stone to being mindful of emotions in your body.

So to assume a meditation posture and to maybe sway back and forth, forward and back, getting centered here, and maybe kind of lifting your shoulders up to your ears and let them

drop, maybe shake them a little bit, rotate them a little bit. And then with your hands well positioned to let the shoulders be at ease, to gently close your eyes. And as the ritual connection to this whole body, taking some fuller breaths, maybe enjoying how you take those breaths, and relaxing, settling on the exhale, letting your breathing return to normal. And as part of this exercise of mindfulness of the body, sitting here quietly, your eyes closed, bring your attention to one of your hands and explore the different sensations in different parts of the hand in a relaxed, open manner, putting aside your stories, interpretations of the hand and the sensations in favor of feeling how the hand experiences itself.

If there's a tension there, the back of the hand, the palm of the hand, the fingers, maybe feeling the contact of the hand against some surface. The temperature of the hand may be different on the different parts of the hand. And as you feel the sensations of the hand, feel how they vibrate, oscillate, how the attention naturally kind of moves, floats between different parts of the sensations, different places where they occur. In a relaxed way, feel the hand. Tingling, buzzing, pleasant and unpleasant sensations. Minor feelings of tension or relaxation in the hand.

Weight and pressure. Lightness and kind of openness to the air. And then notice also how you're attending to the hand. Are you straining? Are you trying to figure it out, to analyze it? Is there a story about how well you're doing?

Is there resistance, boredom? Experiment a little bit to see how simply, lightly, and fully your attention can be within the hand itself, maybe as if you've never gotten to know your hand before. And this now is a time to know it in a new way. If it helps you stay present for the hand, you might breathe through the hand or breathe with the hand, as if breathing supports you to stay connected, imagining your breathing through or with the hand. If the eyes are closed, there's a way in which the shape of the hand, the mind's picture of the hand, fades away, and it's as if the sensations of the hand buzz and arise and tingle without the shape, without boundaries and edges of the hand. Sensations floating in space allow to be there with the mind neither for or against the sensations.

Just attending. And now, finding the place in your body where it's most engaging, comforting, beneficial to feel the body's experience of breathing. And in that area of the body, do the same exercise as we did with a hand. Simply feel the sensations that are alive, active, active in the part of the body where you experience breathing the most clearly or the most enjoyably. When attention awareness is filled with thoughts, we can't be very aware of things, but if you let your thinking mind become quiet and still, perhaps you notice how much more you can feel and sense of your breathing.

And now shifting to notice what is the clearest emotion, mood, mental state that's present for you. Calm or agitated, interested, curious, or averse, irritated, more on the side of happiness or the side of unhappiness, more on the side of anger, ill will, or more on the side of care and goodwill. Whatever the, how you're, whatever way you're feeling emotionally, mood-wise, can you find a place where that is, a place in your body that's activated or active in expressing how you feel? In the face, in the chest, in the hands, in the belly. It could be anywhere in the body. Notice where it's most expressed physically, how you feel.

And feel what that expression is in the body. It might be tension or pressure, vibration, constriction, openness, a kind of buzzing, humming, glow, many ways. And feel it in the body as you did with the exercise with the hand. Allow the sensations of the emotion to be felt and known. Allow them to be there. Give them permission to be just as they are.

And you simply explore, sense, feel the physicality of it. If it helps you stay present, you can breathe with it, breathe through it, putting your mental energy into the sensing physically, and not into any stories or judgments, reactions, quieting the story mind to be in the present with the physicality of the emotion. And then gently begin again with your breathing, centering yourself in the middle of where breathing is most easy, to track, to feel. And if an emotion or mood, mental states become strong, bring your attention to the physicality of that, recognizing what's happening, maybe feeling it for three breaths, and then returning to the breathing. And then as we come to the end of the sitting, to feel emotionally, physically, any ways in which there's a feeling of well-being or pleasure, however small, in your body, heart, or mind.

And if there is such feelings, take a few moments to feel it as you did the hand. Allow yourself to feel whatever good feelings there might be, calm, settledness, quiet, inner warmth, feeling of safety, or... Breathe with it as a way of letting that goodness be registered in your body and mind. And with the connection to however you feel, whatever goodness you feel right now, consider or aspire that this practice of meditation, practice of Buddhism, can be done in such a way that it benefits the world, it benefits others. May it be that cultivating mindfulness, subtleness, inner stability, serves so you can act for the welfare and happiness of others in ways that are nourishing and meaningful for you. Not an obligation, but an inspiration.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be free. And may each of us individually and collectively spread the goodness, the benefits coming from this practice. May we spread it and share it out into the world.

May all beings be happy. Thank you.