

Chapter 3: Simply Being Present with Feelings/Emotions; Part II

Working with feelings/emotions when they are present (either while we sit or during the day).

In Chapter 3 Part I, we learned some basic information about emotions.

- Emotions are messengers that appear to inform us of what is going on in our lives. In Buddhism, emotions need not be judged good/bad, right/wrong, or positive or negative; they all just simply “*are*.” We meet them with impartiality. All emotions are allowed, even rage. The reason is the intent is to observe them, feel them, meet them in a friendly and welcoming way, and allow them to process and move through us. The intent and commitment is to not act out or react, but to respond.
- Emotions manifest in the body. It is our body that tells us what is going on, and our bodies do not lie. Our bodies do not have an agenda. They simply know, and they automatically respond with sensations.
- Each emotion has a typography which includes body sensations as well as what is going on in our mind at the time. Working with emotions has a lot to do with building awareness around how our body and mind responds to them. As an example, when we feel anger, our body/mind feels this way [this is “anger”]; when we are afraid, our body/mind feels this way [this is “fear”]; when we are full of joy, our body/mind feels this way [this is “joy” or “happy”].
- Working with emotions is not about getting rid of them. It is about being with them in a peaceful way--being peaceful even in times of chaos. Rather than getting rid of emotions, our intention is to embrace and dissolve them. It is here that we can distinguish the difference between the direct experience of an emotion as felt in the body (i.e. the contraction and tension of anger and rage) and the awareness of that direct experience. It is the awareness that can be peaceful and calm.

Chapter 3 Part II helps us take a practical look at how we process or work with emotions when they show up either while we sit in meditation or when they show up during any part of our day.

As a reminder from Chapter 1. Our mind is like a massive warehouse that stores information about everything we’ve ever read and seen and all that we’ve experienced from the day we were born until the present. Our mind stores all this data without preference to it being good or bad; useful or not; it stores it all indiscriminately, it rejects nothing. This warehouse of the mind may be referred to as our “store consciousness.” So much information gets stored here—so much that we forget most of what is there; yet ironically, when some event triggers us, we somehow seem to either consciously or unconsciously access (or remember) what may have been hidden for a very long time.

All of our past experiences still live in our consciousness whether we remember them or not. They are sitting there waiting to be woken up so they can influence what we do or how we act or react as situations arise in our life. We develop habits from what we’ve learned growing up, and much of time

we may not even be aware of those habits. We will learn in this chapter that habits and past conditioning can be powerful, and they can control us if we are not mindful or awake.

As we begin this part of Chapter 3, each of us is bringing with us all the experiences we've ever had so far in our lives. Our store consciousness has a huge section labeled "Feelings/Emotions." Who we are today is a product of our past, and that history can and will influence how we work with emotions. Because our past experiences are different for each of us, we may view working with emotions differently. Because of some of your past experiences, some of you may:

- Not even believe in emotions
- Have learned to ignore your emotions
- Believe it is important to express your emotions
- Believe emotions should be kept inside and kept to yourself
- Have heard growing up, "Big boys don't cry" or "Good girls don't get mad"
- Have heard that to be angry is a sin
- Be frightened of your emotions
- Have been hurt in your life and may now find it difficult to open to your emotions,
- or you typically shut them off
- Live in your head without paying attention to your emotions
- Believe you are a failure if you experience any kind of afflictive emotion (anger/fear)
- Believe that you "should" be able to deal with any emotion; and if you can, then you are
- successful; if not, then you are a failure
- Believe that emotions should be left at home and are not appropriate in the work place
- And this list could go on and on.

What you have stored in your store consciousness and what you presently believe about emotions represents causes and conditions that will either control or guide you in knowing how to either react or respond to your emotions as they arise. And though we all likely have things stored in our store consciousness that we hope could be purged so we never have to deal with them again, our work here is simply to acknowledge emotions as they arise and to not judge them as good/bad, right/wrong, or negative/positive. Though at times it can be helpful to understand our past, Buddhism does not dwell on the past and ask "Why?" or to try to figure things out. Rather, it dwells on what is happening right now in the present, and it asks "how." Looking forward we ask, "What is going on right now?" and/or "How do I work with what is happening right now?"

As we begin to consciously work with emotions, we will learn how to be with them peacefully, no matter if the emotion is pleasant or unpleasant. Our intention will be to not push the emotion away or to try to resolve it or change it from a so-called unskillful emotion into a skillful one. Our intention will be to receive all emotions and allow them to be just as they are. As part of the process, our intention is not to resolve them, but to dissolve them. A common phrase I use is that we will learn how "to be peaceful even in the midst of chaos," or learn how to be fully joyful in the midst of happy moments. All of this may seem fairly anti-cultural for those of us living in a culture where the norm, if you experience something you would prefer not to be experiencing, is to automatically try to change or fix it by either taking a pill, getting busy, overeating, trying to push the experience away, etc.

Emotions present us with situations and experiences around which there is much to be mindful. They are made up of three components that all seem to happen at the same time:

1. Physical (in the body) – energy level, heat/cold, tension/relaxing, tightening, breathing.

2. Cognitive – narrow thinking/expansive thinking; facts vs thoughts that include assumptions, interpretations, opinions, judgments, beliefs; stories .
3. Intentionality or Motivation– wanting something, pushing something away, striking out.

Emotions are processes. They are not things. As a process they want to move and accomplish something. They show up for a reason. They may be asking us to experience something, telling us something, or trying to alert us to something. For example, if we become angry and our body is constricted and tense, we may be alerted to the fact that something is not right or that something is going against our values.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, a major component of the word emotion is “motion.” Emotions want to move through us. They do not want to get stuck. It is when we work with emotions as they appear in our body (when we receive and allow the typography of those emotions to be as they are) that we give them permission to work and move through us. It is when we do not allow ourselves to experience the emotions in our body, as when we judge them as bad and try to push them away, that the emotion often gets stuck somewhere in us. It then often comes out sideways. For example, if your boss does something that triggers hurt or anger, rather than being upfront and talking about it with your boss, you end up in an unmindful moment yelling at your spouse. You might spontaneously do the yelling without any awareness of what is lurking behind your reaction. By befriending your emotions and allowing them to have space in your body, you are showing them that they have nothing to fear from you (like your judging them as bad or your trying to get rid of them).

In an interview on Krista Tippet’s National Public Radio show, “On Being,” Sharon Salzberg, a meditation teacher at the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, MA, had these comments about emotions (paraphrased): *Emotions are visitors. Our mind is radiant and pure, but visiting forces cause us to suffer. That does not say that visiting forces make us bad people. Invite the visitors in for a meal, but you don’t have to give them run of the house. Actually, you couldn’t stop them from coming in. Feel the pain of it rather than the disgrace of it. We are holding it in a way that the awareness of the visitor is stronger than the visitor.*

Studies show that many emotions, if allowed to be received without resistance will not last long, usually only seconds. But when we try to control them, we keep them alive with the stories and commentaries we build around them. Without the stories (which are typically self-referential), the emotions are not sustainable because when you allow them and feel them in your body, you allow the emotion to move and flow through you.

As was mentioned before, the direct experience of the emotion (how it feels in the body) is different from the awareness of that experience. As one becomes more familiar with being aware of emotions, it is possible to find joy in the awareness itself. And that goes for whether the direct experience is something pleasurable or not.

What options do we have in terms of how to work with emotions?

Emotions typically happen automatically. When an event (or trigger) happens, they just show up without warning. For example, when we get some unexpected good or bad news, we may become instantly happy, sad, or angry. The triggers that evoke our emotions are endless. And the thing is, when that trigger happens, the emotion appears instantly. Most of the time we do not have time to prepare for how to work with or deal with the emotion. When the emotion appears, depending on our training, we typically do one of two things: we either *react* or we *respond*. And how we either react or respond in this moment will influence what we experience in the next moment (or future). This phenomena is known as “karma.”

There are two ways we can react. We can either *suppress* (or *stuff*) the emotion, or we can *act out*.

Suppressing an emotion is typically compulsive and habitual, and it typically happens with the mind on auto pilot. The emotion is triggered by some circumstance or situation where someone says something to us or some event has not gone the way we wanted it to. Then, based on past conditioning (what we learned growing up from our parents, schools, churches; what is stored in our store consciousness), stuffing just happens. It is often with little or no awareness that that is what we are doing because it has become a habit. Stuffing requires little, if any, awareness of what is going on in the body. The mind and our past conditioning is in control. We are caught by the emotion—and we likely don’t even know it. This can happen for both afflictive emotions such as anger or fear as well as for emotions such as joy or happiness. In most cases suppressing an emotion is unskillful.

Acting out an emotion is also compulsive and habitual. It is also typically triggered by a situation or event, and here as well, the mind is on auto pilot. There is little, if any, consciousness in the body. Acting out is typically characterized by having a strong desire for or against something. An easy example to demonstrate this is the acting out that is done around a presidential election. And again, when we act out at a situation, we often are not aware that that is what we are doing. It seems to just happen with the mind being out of control (or in control). We are again *caught* by the emotion. Because acting out is so automatic with so little awareness, we have little agency or choice. And again, acting out can be done for afflictive emotions as well as for joy and happiness. In most cases, acting out, is unskillful. Acting out can be physical, and most often verbal, and many times it will be abusive.

Responding to an emotion requires a heart-felt, mind-body awareness. It does not rely on past conditioning. It is generally characterized by the mind being quiet and awake (likely because of the use of the pause) and a keen awareness of what is happening in the body. It is not compulsive or habitual. When our minds are quiet and when we are present in our body, we are more likely to access our inner, innate wisdom which will help us know how to respond (what to say or how to act or what to do next) in a way that respects both ourselves and the other. Being present in the body and knowing what is going on in our mind is critical here. Responding is skillful. It is here that we have freedom of choice. It is what we mean when we offer the phrase, “May you be free,” or “May you be free to choose.”

A practical example:

The illustration below is a visual view of what was presented on Page 4, and the pages that follow show a practical example of what happens when the emotion of anger is triggered. The example shows the differences between *reacting* (*suppressing* or *acting out*) and when the method of working with it is *responding*.

ANGER

React		Respond
Suppress (Stuff)	Act Out	
When we suppress or act out, there is little awareness of what is going on in the body or in the mind. The mind is actively engaged, but with little awareness that this is happening Our habits and past conditioning are in control. What takes place typically happens quickly and automatically. Here, we are <u>caught</u> by the emotion. We are not free. <u>We don't have much choice</u>. Most often what we do is unskillful. There is little freedom here. These actions typically lead to more suffering.		Responding requires a keen awareness of what is happening both in the body and in the mind. The mind is engaged, and it is conscious. We may be aware of past conditioning, but with awareness, we are in control. Responding may slow down the process of working with the emotion. The pause can be a powerful tool here. Because of the consciousness, it is more deliberative. This is the path to <u>freedom from being caught</u> by the emotion; <u>it provides choice</u>, and it is considered skillful. This path potentially leads to the end of suffering.

The following illustrates how what we do (our actions) and what we say impacts what we experience from those actions and words – the consequences. This cause-effect relationship is also known as karma—*what I do in this moment influences what I experience in the next moment(s)*. The first illustration shows the cause-effect relationship of reacting by suppressing the emotion.

SUPPRESS (Stuff or Stifle)

Cause

Actions (Causes) to Suppress Anger:

- Actions happen automatically out of habit or past conditioning
- Pretend not to be angry; but still simmering inside
- Think of something else; divert attention—TV, food, or other addictive behavior
- Physical activity (i.e. work out the anger)
- Stuff it; bite your tongue and be good
- Give yourself messages like, “I shouldn’t be angry” or “To be angry is a sin”
- Smile on the outside; cry on the inside
- Turn to some pleasant memory or plan something in the future where you can control the situation
- Build yourself up to prove how good you are
- Think about something else or try to not think about whatever happened in the hope that it will go away
- Make the situation less than it is (i.e. “Why is this such a big deal?” or trying to convince yourself that you shouldn’t be so upset)
- Use sarcasm
- Turn away/leave

What is happening in the body and mind?

- Mind becomes constricted and small; narrow focus; you don’t know what your options are
- Self judgment/shame
- Lots of shoulds and shouldn’ts
- Thoughts of being powerless
- Feeling invisible, discounted
- Feeling closed down, disconnected, isolated, hopeless
- Irrationality
- Resentment
- Blaming
- Little or no awareness that “stuffing” is happening or that this may be habitual
- Low energy in the body, listless, tension. Awareness of the body is minimal and possibly not at all.

Karmic Effect

Suppressing anger leads to:

- Passive aggressive behavior (trying to maintain power by being powerless)
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- Depression
- Resentment
- Bitterness
- Violence (to self and other)
- Frustration
- Dullness, lack of aliveness
- Disease (i.e. ulcers; high blood pressure)
- Indifference
- Energy blocks in the body
- Sleeplessness
- Destruction of relationships
- Getting angry at the wrong people

Note: When we suppress an experience, it does not go away.

How does suppressing anger impact the total violence in the world?

- Suppressing anger increases violence in the world. Much of the violence is directed to yourself, and it then impacts others as well.

This second illustration shows the cause-effect relationship of reacting to the emotion by acting out.

ACT OUT

Cause

How does one “act out” anger?

- Actions happen automatically out of habit or past conditioning
- Energy of your emotions goes into action—physical/verbal violence and/or abuse
- Use harsh words said in mindlessness
- Acts of retaliation/revenge
- Force confrontation where each participant is trying to prove him/herself right
- Blame the other
- Throw things
- Raise voice; shouting
- Use silent treatment
- Cry
- Use sarcasm

What is happening in the body and mind?

- Agitation that comes from the world of thought (assumptions, opinions, interpretations, judgments, beliefs);

confusing thoughts for facts.

- Mind becomes constricted and small; narrow focus; cannot see multiple resolutions; fixated on an outcome
- Strong aversion or desire
- Tied to a view, and knowing you are “right”
- Dualistic thinking: right/wrong; good/bad; positive/negative
- Lots of judgment
- Separation; I/you statements in the mind; seeing things only from your perspectives
- Focus on past or future (stories in the mind, and going over and over them); reliving the scene; little or no awareness of what is happening right now
- Discursive thinking trying to prove that you are right or justified; little, and maybe no awareness of assumptions, interpretations, beliefs, opinions, facts, wants/needs
- Little awareness of possible underlying causes of the anger—like emotions of hurt or fear
- A conditioned reflex that happens automatically and fast
- Mind is in control and there is little awareness of what is going on in your body--your tense and constricted muscles, rising blood pressure, intensified breathing, etc.

Karmic Effect

Reacting to anger leads to:

- Seeing the other as separate or different; places stress on relationships; may lead to temporary or more permanent breakdown in relationship
- Sometimes temporarily (but only temporarily) reduces feelings of fear or hurt
- Making “war” on ourselves or the other escalating fear, reactivity, and suffering; violence gives birth to fear (and possibly more violence)
- Assumptions, strategies reasonably defended, arguments and accusations of blame that may make you feel righteous, but do not bring you lasting peace.
- Cuts you off from your heart

How does reacting out in anger impact the total violence in the world?

- It definitely increases it.

The third illustration shows the cause-effect relationship of responding to the emotion.

RESPOND

Cause

How does one receive and allow anger when it is present?

- This is more than simply knowing that you are angry or thinking about your anger

- Fully experiencing (allowing) your anger; a felt experience in your body; giving the anger complete permission to fully exist; allowing it to be in your body without pushing it away or trying to get rid of it
- Heightened awareness of what is going on in your body and mind
- Not making the anger more than it is or making it less
- Not judging that being angry is something that is bad
- Seeing anger as a friendly messenger; it is telling you that something is not right; possibly investigating what this is about or what is going on (not questioning “Why?” but asking “How do I work with it?”)
- Not seeing the anger as a punishment to experience, but seen as a voyage to growth
- Using “Power of the Pause”
- Note: Anger is an emotion that never comes alone; there’s always an underlying emotion—typically either fear, hurt, or loss. Anger typically does not subside until the underlying emotion is recognized and felt.

What is happening in the body and mind?

- Mind is more expansive and open to ideas and different views and possible resolution
- Awareness of dialogue in the mind and facts vs thoughts (assumptions, interpretations, beliefs, opinions, judgments) as well as feelings, wants and needs
- You do not identify with the anger. Inner dialogue might be: “This is anger,” or “Anger is arising,” (which says you are a person experiencing anger vs “I am so f---ing angry” (identifying you as an angry person which is reactive)
- The ability to wait when anger arises in the mind teaches us about anger. We might realize the other person’s words/actions are not about us, but about their reality which has intersected with ourselves
- As the awareness grows and mind becomes more quiet, we notice in the body that it relaxes. We begin to breathe more easily—and we know it. We are aware of the awareness. The awareness of the anger and the direct experience of the anger as known in the body and mind are two different things.

Karmic Effect

Receiving, allowing and responding to anger leads to:

- An active stance, (not passive at all!) Does not mean shrugging off and not looking to improve our behavior, nor does it mean putting up with something until it goes away. We proceed with what to do next coming from wisdom. Wisdom often shows itself during stopping and pausing
- Self empowerment
- Respect for self and other
- More peaceful mind that sees the cause of suffering; creating the conditions for peace and calm to arise
- Leads to compassion

How does receiving and allowing anger, then responding, impact the total violence in the world?

- It definitely lowers it! And this impacts others and the world greatly. We change the world by changing ourselves

We can see from the above examples that there are consequences to what we say and do or to what we don't say and don't do. All actions have a cause and effect relationship. What we do in one moment influences what we experience in the next moment. We are all heirs to our own karma! That is true whether our actions are done with conscious awareness of what we are doing (responding) or if they are done automatically and mindlessly out of past conditioning (suppressing or acting out).

One of the more important points of these illustrations is shown in the last line under the heading, "Receiving, allowing and responding to anger leads to". It says that responding to anger leads to compassion. Here is a personal example to illustrate this:

A week prior to attending a week-long meditation retreat at the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, I had a hernia operation. For some undiagnosed reason (possibly an allergy to the anesthesia) I developed hives and my body was very itchy all over. The day prior to traveling to Barre I was prescribed a medication to resolve the issue; which it did. What the doctor did not tell me was that a side effect of the medication was insomnia. I arrived in Barre only to discover that although on Days 1 thru 4 I could rest peacefully, I could not sleep. Needless to say, I became very tired, and I felt like a numb zombie (an interesting state in which to meditate).

My sleeping room was right across the bathroom with showers. IMS has rules/guidelines about when one can shower and when respectfully one should not. On Day 5 I was resting peacefully (not sleeping) at 4 a.m. (not a designated time to shower) when suddenly someone started taking a noisy shower. I instantly became righteously angry—very pissed, to put it mildly. And though this state of mind may have arisen because of sleep deprivation, I shouted inside myself, "How can this person do this? This person is interrupting my sleeping (resting)!" I was definitely in react mode.

After just a few seconds, this thought entered my mind: "David, practice what you've been told; practice what you preach. Pause, take some breaths and go to the body." So, I took several mindful breaths and then focused my attention on what sensations were going on in my body in this state of anger. My muscles felt rigid. I felt all the nuances in my shoulders and shoulder blades, all the way down my back and in my belly. The tension in my face, especially around my eyes, was striking. Though I was in bed, I was tired. Amazingly, in only about 20 seconds, this thought entered my mind, "Here I am; it is 4 a.m., and I cannot sleep. There in the shower is someone else who is not sleeping. I wonder what his story is." My focus was no longer on my righteous, reactive self. My mind had turned to be more expansive and inclusive. With that thought my body relaxed almost instantly, and though I did not go back to sleep, my body was calm, and I returned to resting. This is an example of how I took some intellectual or cognitive knowledge that I had been told, and through experience turned it into experiential knowledge. I saw how pausing and allowing the emotion of anger and feeling it in my body led to being compassionate. Though my body was feeling all the nuances of anger, my awareness of what I was experiencing was calm and at ease. It is a perfect example of the power of the "stop and pause."

So, what happened here? Initially when I was in the throws and fits of anger, the thoughts in my mind represented the *content* (or *story line*) of this situation; I was caught. When I switched my attention to my body, my concentration went to the *process* of what was happening in my body in this situation. It stopped the story line. Had I not gone to my body, my mind would have stayed in spin mode. From experience I have found that my attention cannot focus on the story line in my mind and focus on being in my body at the same time. When the mind becomes quiet and when we are present in the body,

something magical seems to happen. We seem to be able to tap into an inner innate wisdom (more on this in Chapter 4) that is there waiting to help us out. That's when the thought came of wondering what was going on for the other person. My thoughts were no longer self-referential. They were much more open and expansive. They had concern for the other, and they had a tone of compassion. Receiving and allowing the anger rather than pushing it away turned the anger into *compassion*.

Once I allowed myself to experience my anger in my body, it did not escalate. When I went to my body, I simply allowed my anger to be as it was; I did not judge it as something bad or something to be resolved. I welcomed it with kindness. And in being kind to myself, my body relaxed, and then, so did my mind. That is when my mind became more expansive and opened up to an entirely different reality, one that was not possible or available when I was reacting.

This process works for other feelings as well. When we respond to hurt (receive and allow and be with it in our bodies), it often leads to *forgiveness*. When we respond to fear, it will often lead to *courage*. When we respond to greed/grasping without pushing it away, it will often lead to *generosity*. Responding, instead of reacting, to an emotion is skillful, and it typically leads to a wholesome way of being. It has the potential of creating the conditions for turning suffering into peace, calm, and happiness.

When I was growing up the church I was born into insinuated that to be angry was a sin. And though the approach above does not encourage anger, it approaches working with it in a more positive way. It basically says that anger is a valid emotion, and that the arising of anger often tells us that something is not right. What we do with that anger determines whether we are acting in a wholesome or unwholesome way. If I believe that anger is a sin, I might tend to suppress it or really beat myself up when any anger arises. Worse yet, the potential is there for me to believe I caused it and then to get into states of shame and/or guilt (more on this in Chapter 4). Doing that, I would not benefit from all I would experience by simply respecting it, allowing it and responding to it. Our relationship to an emotion is as, if not more important, than the emotion itself.

I don't remember where I read this statement, but it really impacts how I now work with emotions: The quote is "*The mindfulness or awareness of anger is not angry.*" It can be transcribed to work for other feelings as well, for example – "The mindfulness or awareness of fear is not afraid." When we are present with an emotion such as anger or fear, we are with it, and we experience it directly as it is in our bodies. It is pure awareness, and that awareness is not judgmental. We are not pushing it away nor are we engaging in it. Anger arises and passes in awareness. It just happens, and it is not adopted, rejected, reacted to or filled with blame. If we were to put in words what we were experiencing, we message ourselves, "This is anger" or "Anger is arising." That's very different than saying "I am so f----- angry!" The big difference in those words is the word, "I." In the latter phrase we are saying "I am anger." It is a way that we identify with it. "This is anger," says I am a person experiencing anger in this moment; it does not define me; I am not identified or attached to it. And to paraphrase the quote from Sharon Salzberg, we are holding anger in a way that the awareness of the anger is stronger than the anger itself.

The bottom line is that if we can be awake, if we can be mindful and present and embrace emotions as they present themselves, we have the choice to stuff, act out or respond. What we say and what we do influences what we experience after the fact. When Buddhism talks about being free, it is talking about the freedom to choose to respond rather than to get caught and automatically react out of past

conditioning. Initially this may not always be easy. With persistence, patience, and mindfulness your ability to choose and to respond will grow.

Is there ever a time when suppressing an emotion may be an appropriate response? The answer is, “Yes!” Working with emotions is not always easy. It requires a lot of integrity, and even more so, courage to be with emotions that are difficult. This work never requires anyone to work with experiences that they are either not ready or not able to work with. We each decide whether the timing is right for us to work on any issue. For example, in the case of trauma or abuse, suppressing may be a valid response; it could be a survival technique. Only when the person is ready to deal with the issue is it wise to proceed—and only that person can know when the timing is right.

I might also add that when doing this work you might begin to notice that as you begin to be more mindful of what is really happening in your life, that you might begin to experience an appreciation or happiness about simply being mindful—of being aware of awareness, of knowing that you are living and being more aware of your reality, of the happiness that comes from experiencing something difficult and not being caught by it. There can be satisfaction in simply knowing that you are aware and being present with difficulty.

Here’s a few interesting comments and quotes regarding working with the emotion of anger.

- Quote taken from an article in the Lion’s Roar magazine--“The Buddha’s Love” by Sylvia Boorstein. *“I once heard His Holiness the Dalai Lama respond to a question about anger by saying, ‘Of course anger arises in me. When something happens and it isn’t what I wanted anger arises.’ He paused, giggled, and then said, ‘But it does not need to be a problem.’ Then he paused, and giggled again. He went on to explain that not making anger a problem did not mean ignoring it. It meant addressing the issue through helpful action.”*
- From Jill Shepherd
“Feeling emotions will not kill you; numbing them will.”
“Pain does not kill; numbing pain often will.”
- From *True Refuge* by Tara Brach
“Peace is this moment without judgment. That is all. This moment in the heart space where everything that is is welcome.” Much of the peace that comes with doing this work comes from not being in contention with what we are experiencing. Everything is welcome.

A final thought –

What would life be like if emotions did not have to be judged good/bad , right/wrong, or negative/positive? What if emotions can be seen as messengers that typically have something to tell us? In times of quiet, those insights may come to light. What if we understood that we do not cause emotions? They just show up because of whatever causes and conditions (whether known or not known) exist? What if we don't have to figure out why an emotion arises? What if it was okay to simply be where you are and embrace that welcoming and being present with the emotion, honoring its presence, allowing it to stay as long as it wants and for it to dissolve on its own time frame? What if we didn't have to control emotions? What would life be like?

Homework

1. Sit (Experiential Knowledge)

Aim to meditate 6 out of 7 days for whatever amount of time works for you. As best you can, flow with what you are experiencing—breath, body sensations, sounds, and now, feelings/emotions (if they show up).

2. Study (Intellectual/Cognitive Knowledge)

Read/Review Chapter 3, Part II (including Appendix A , Excerpt from “*The Five Invitations*” by Frank Ostaseski) as it meets your needs

Read Chapter 3, Part III which will be sent to you electronically this week.

3. Integrate (Living Mindfully) (Experiential Knowledge)

Some options: Pick and choose the ones that intuitively feel right for you to do

1. Every Day – Continue to **STOP** and **PAUSE** as many times as you remember.

“Check in” with yourself. See what the reality of this moment is for you—meeting it with impartiality without trying to change or fix how you are. What body sensations are present? What is your mood? What is going on in your mind? What is your general state of well-being (or not well-being?)

And now, also include awareness around noticing if an emotion is present. If so, name it, feel it in your body, be with it as it is without pushing it away. And if you sense you are “caught” by an emotion, simply notice that—what is going on in your mind? If there is a story present, as best you can, stay in your body. No need to change or fix it; simply notice and receive and allow – “Sit, Stay, Hold.” Next week I will share a personal example along with a template that will help you see the practicality of working with emotions in this way. There, we will work with the emotion of fear.

There are three things to be mindful of when working with emotions:

- a. Know what is happening (feel it in the body)
- b. Know how you are relating to it – (trying to fix or change it or welcoming and working with it)
- c. Know and appreciate what is supporting you – mindfulness

2. Look for opportunities to take personal responsibility for your feelings and to express them.

3. Important! Many of the examples of emotions given in this chapter were painful emotions such as anger, hurt and fear. All the concepts presented in this chapter work for happy emotions too. They, too, can be stuffed, reacted to or responded to. Feel in your body the satisfaction you get from simply being aware and present when you are experiencing gratitude, generosity, compassion, contentment, and the receiving of good news. **Open up to the willingness to feel happy emotions and to feel pleasure.** Notice your relationship to them—do you push them away or welcome and feel them fully with open arms.

4. Continue being mindful of facts and thoughts (assumptions, interpretations, opinions, judgments, beliefs)--in self talk as well as in conversation with others. Know when you are in a story line.

5. Continue awareness around 1st and 2nd arrows

Appendix A Taken from “The Five Invitations” by Frank Ostaseski, Pages 151 – 153

... We generally feel we have two options with difficult emotions “*repress*” or “*express*.” We repress because an experience seems threatening, upsetting, or somehow inappropriate. Repression can be a choice to defend against, as when we become conscious of a feeling or an experience and then push it below the surface of our awareness. Or the repression may be so powerful that it completely prohibits an experience, and we block it from ever coming to the light of day.

When we repress an experience, it does not go away. It still lurks below the surface, encapsulated in its original form with all its associated energy. When we bury feelings or bypass them, the material is not available to us. We can’t understand it. We can’t use it in a constructive way. Repressed anger easily turns to depression, resentment, or fear. Repression generates mental reactivity and skews our perceptions. It leads to what in Buddhism we call *papanca mind*, which refers to a proliferation of thoughts and reactions. We re-enact the play as we have scripted it, plot our response, and act out compulsive, mechanical behaviors. Physically, repression can manifest in symptoms like tension, dullness, and a lack of aliveness, and can even become a contributing factor to serious illness.

Emotional expression can be positive and healthy. Sharing our stories is often how we discover the meaning and value of a particular experience. Expressing grief over our mothers’ deaths and letting the tears flow can help us metabolize the loss. On the other hand, emotional reactivity usually means that our response is out of proportion to a given stimulus. Unconscious or unresolved feelings get triggered and erupt with an intensity that overwhelms us. Frequently, we act out on others. We kick the cat, rage at being stuck in traffic, or otherwise try to displace these uncomfortable feelings because we are caught by the desire to discharge them.

There is a third option: *contain* the emotion. This is a more balanced and creative response. We hold the emotions and the related material in a caring way. We accept the reality of their presence, regardless of whether we like them or not. We bring them forward with respectful interest. We get curious about our experience. Maybe we explore the tightness in our chest, or sense the heavy weight of our arms or the feeling of longing without attaching any of it to a story. Reminding ourselves to instead gently hold in steadiness apparently differing experiences and perspectives.

With equanimity, we can regulate, reflect, and reappraise. Breathing, sensing, and bringing mindfulness to the physical experience stabilizes our attention and allows the body to become a safe container in which emotions can be embodied and regulated. Then we can reflect on the possible consequences of acting out the emotion or unnecessarily dwelling on it, the potential impact of hurting ourselves or others. We can re-evaluate the automatic negative response and possibly even reinterpret our perceptions of events to discover a new meaning that helps us relate to our emotions in a constructive way. We realize that we have a choice to turn in a healthy direction, or at least to bring patience and kindness to our reactivity.

Processing what we've learned in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 (Part I and II)

Using only words and/or phrases, take a few moment to respond to these questions. We will use this for check-in at the beginning of class.

1. What was your experience of sitting at home last week? What issues came up for you in terms of integrating mindfulness of the breath, body sensations, sounds, and feelings/emotions into your meditation?

2. What was your experience, and what insights did you gain from the integration practice suggested for this week:
 - Stop and Pause
 - Awareness of and working with emotions
 - Taking responsibility for your feelings and for expressing them
 - Awareness of happy emotions and the satisfaction that comes from being mindful
 - Awareness of fact vs thoughts
 - Awareness of 1st and 2nd arrows

3. What questions, in general, do you have about any of the material we've covered in Chapters 1, 2, 3 (Parts I and II).