

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

I offer three readings or quotes to begin this chapter. Hopefully they offer a perspective on the reasoning for working with emotions in the manner presented in the three parts of Chapter 3.

The following is a quote from *The Third Noble Truth* from the ***The Four Noble Truths*** by Ajahn Sumedho, an e-book available through buddhanet.net's_book library for free download and distribution for dharma students.

Before you can let things go, you have to admit them into full consciousness. In meditation, our aim is to skillfully allow the subconscious to arise into consciousness. All the despair, fears, anguish, suppression and anger is allowed to become conscious. There is a tendency in people to hold to very high-minded ideals. We can become very disappointed in ourselves because sometimes we feel we are not as good as we should be or we should not feel angry—all the shoulds and shouldn'ts. Then we create desire to get rid of bad things—and this desire has a righteous quality. It seems right to get rid of bad thoughts, anger and jealousy because a good person 'should not be like that.' Thus, we create guilt.

Cessation is easy to understand on an intellectual level, but to realize it may be quite difficult because this entails abiding with what we think we cannot bear. For example, when I first started meditating, I had the idea that meditation would make me kinder and happier and I was expecting to experience blissful mind states. But during the first two months, I never felt so much hatred and anger in my life. I thought, 'This is terrible: meditation has made me worse.' But then I contemplated why was there so much hatred and aversion coming up, and I realized that much of my life had been an attempt to run away from all that. I used to be a compulsive reader. I would have to take books with me wherever I went. Anytime fear or aversion started creeping in, I would whip out my book and read; or I would smoke or munch on snacks. I had an image of myself as being a kind person that did not hate people, so any kind of aversion or hatred was repressed.

This is why during the first few months as a monk, I was so desperate to find things to do. I was trying to seek something to distract myself with because I had started to remember in meditation all the things I deliberately tried to forget. Memories from childhood and adolescence kept coming up in my mind; then this anger and hatred became so conscious it just seemed to overwhelm me. But something in me began to recognize that I had to bear with this, so I did stick it out. All the hatred and anger that had been suppressed in thirty years of living rose to its peak at this time, and it burned itself out and ceased through meditation. It was a process of purification.

From ***"The Philosophical Tree"*** by Carl Jung, 1945

"There is no coming to consciousness without pain. People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing the Soul. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making darkness conscious."

Poem from Rumi – ***The Guest House***

*This being human is like a guest house
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture.*

*Still treat each guest honorable
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

Working with feelings/emotions; simply being present with them

In Parts I and II of this chapter we learned that feelings/emotions manifest themselves in our bodies as body sensations as well as with the thinking that occurs in our mind. We learned that when an emotion appears, it most often appears without warning and that we often do not have time to prepare for how to work with it. Based on habit and past conditioning, the untrained mind often reacts by either suppressing or acting out either in words or actions. Reacting requires little awareness of what is going on in the body as well as little knowledge of the thoughts that are going on in our mind. We have little choice because we are acting automatically; it just happens. We also learned that if we are mindful and present with what is happening in the body, as well as the thoughts that are going through our mind, that we can consciously choose to respond. Whether we react or respond, we will be the heirs of the karma we put in motion. Part III of Chapter 3 presents the tool of “RRAIN” to help us work with and respond to emotions. The chapter also offers three additional teachings--a teaching of “the three characteristics,” a discussion about how we access the innate wisdom that can help us know how to respond, and a discussion of how we process change and grow in the skill by using mindfulness techniques.

To begin, here are some reminders of what we have already discussed in Chapter 3 Parts I and II on how to work skillfully with emotions:

- Working with feelings/emotions during meditation (or throughout the day) is not about getting rid of them. It is about being with them in a peaceful way.
- Emotions are processes. They are not things. They typically arise because they have some message for us. When we acknowledge and allow ourselves to feel the emotions as they are in our bodies, we allow them to move through us rather than their getting stuck and coming out sideways. By mindfully allowing them to be as they are, we befriend them and give them permission to process. Some process quickly; others not. At times it can be helpful to have a confidant or counselor to help us be with them. As emotions process, they may change. We simply notice and allow them to change and dissolve on their own timetable.
- In Buddhism all emotions are allowed and need not be judged—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 move through us. The intent and commitment is to not act out or react, but to respond.
- As we process emotions, here are some things to notice:

Feeling tones (liking and wanting things to stay as they are; not liking and wanting to push things away, or neither liking or disliking).

Thoughts that arise; a mind that is spacious and inclusive or constricted and narrow.

Resistance to what is present, as well as, any resistance to the resistance. At times you may need to own and feel the resistance before you will be able to feel what is going on in your body regarding the emotion.

And if you are not sure what is going on or what you are feeling in your body, that is perfectly okay. Simply be with “not knowing” mind. You might even ask yourself an inquiring question like, “What is going on here?” Then wait and see if an answer arises, and at the same time, not be tied to whether an answer arises or not.

And we notice all without trying to change or fix anything. We simply notice. From Tara Brach, “Peace is this moment where we are not in contention with the reality of what is present.”

- When meditating, if you typically use the breath as an anchor, and if an emotion really grabs your attention, it is okay to temporarily abandon the breath as your anchor and use the emotion (as it appears in your body) as your anchor. Do this until the emotion no longer grabs your attention at which time you can return to your breath as your anchor. If you like to “note” during your meditation, you might note words like, “sad,” “glad,” “joy,” “anger,” “hurt,” “fear,” etc. If referring to a body sensation, you might note, “tight,” “constricted,” “relaxed,” “thumping,” etc. If referring to your mind, you might note, “constricted,” “open,” “spacious.” And if you do not know what is going on, you may simply note, “don’t know.”
- We are training ourselves to be centered in our bodies and not so caught up in our mind. Mindfulness helps us see what is really happening without the commentary. We live in

attention rather than live in thoughts. The awareness can be stronger than the emotion. The awareness, itself, can become a refuge and a source of joy.

- Mindfulness is meant to be simple. In meditation we work with and are present with what experience shows up. Meditation is about what is obvious; it is not looking for what is not obvious. Some people experience emotions during meditation; others do not. You do not have to have a lot of emotions to meditate, but when they are there, then you work with them. For those who do not experience many emotions while they sit, the usefulness of Chapter 3 will present itself when emotions show up throughout your day. Working with an emotion during the day can be a meditative experience.
- It is important to take care of yourself. If an emotion is really strong, too strong for you to handle at any moment, it is okay to mindfully acknowledge that and back off and return to your breath. You are the sole judge of what you either want to or are able to process at any given moment. Trust that there will come a time when you will be able to be with the emotion.
- We do not work through an emotion by walking around the issue or skirting the issue. The shortest route to working through an emotion is through it – even though that may not seem the easiest at the time.
- When an emotion shows up, think of being with the felt experience in the body and the knowing of it as being like you were just served a cup of very hot tea—tea that if you drank it, it would burn your lips and tongue. Let the tea cool just a bit before you start to sip and drink it. Pausing (Power of the Pause) and being with the felt sense of an emotion in the body is like letting a cup of tea cool. Being with it allows your emotion to cool so you can respond skillfully rather than react without consciousness possibly burning not only yourself, but others.

Using the process of RRAIN to help you work through and allow an emotion

An effective template or process that many meditators use to help them work with emotions either while sitting or throughout the day is called **RAIN**. **RAIN** is an acronym that stands for **R**ecognize, **A**llow, **I**nvestigate, and **N**urture. I like to use the acronym, **RRAIN** because it adds an extra letter at the beginning to mean, “**R**elax.” Relaxing, or softening around the emotion as best as one can, always makes this work easier. To explain how RRAIN works, here is a personal example to show you how I used RRAIN to work with the emotion of fear.

The situation: For years I taught a meditation class in person in a classroom setting each spring and fall. In 2020 during the COVID Pandemic, I was not able to do that. I decided to offer the class online using Zoom. I liked the idea, but not being tech savvy, I had some trepidations. The night before I sent out my class announcement to my mailing list, I had a sleepless night. I had not yet had time to learn how to use Zoom, so Zoom was a mystery to me. All I could think of was all the possibilities of what could technically go wrong in a session. The bottom line was that my mind was in a state of anxiety and fear about my ability to use the Zoom software. I was caught by the emotion, and I was fearful enough that I almost did not send out the class announcement.

In this dilemma I turned to my trusted friend, RRAIN. I played with this process feeling fear in my body even while still in bed and for much of the next day. My anxiety eventually lifted. I trusted the process, and even with the anxiety present, I sent out the class announcement. I have learned over the years to not let past conditioning control me! It was interesting to watch as the anxiety began to lift and how my mind opened up at the same time. I began to get ideas of how to get help and of how I could learn Zoom and what I needed to do to prepare for the class, and I began doing it! It didn't take long, and I was wondering what all the fear was about. It certainly challenged the identity that I carried of not being tech savvy. Following is an illustration of how I processed the situation using RRAIN. By being with the fear in my body and not pushing it away, the fear was not resolved; it was dissolved. I present this as if all happened in linear fashion. In reality, the steps of RRAIN are not necessarily linear.

An Example of using the RRAIN process to work through the emotion of fear.

Relax	Take some deep breaths in, breathing out slowly inviting relaxation—softening the body. I started doing this in bed when I could not sleep. To help relax I also did a slow and deliberate body scan which helped take me out of my head and away from the story line. I continued to take mindful breaths throughout the next day. Just knowing that I was conscious of what was going on helped me relax. I reminded myself that “this will not last.” It is not permanent. “Impermanence” is a major Buddhist concept. It also helped that I trusted and had faith in the process. Relaxing and Recognizing are typically done in conjunction with one another.
Recognize	Recognizing is about pausing and knowing what is going on. STOP and PAUSE. Breathe and know what is present in the body. Name what is going on, “This is fear.” As soon as I recognized that what was going on was fear and could note, “this is fear,” I knew I had a choice to either feel the fear in my body and become aware of the thoughts in my mind or I could repress it (which would only keep me in the state of anxiety and to continued suffering). Emotions come with two parts 1. Content – happens in the mind (the story). Typically this is about the past or future and is often self referential. The more energy I give the story, the more exaggerated it becomes. 2. Process – happens in the body. Body sensations occur in the present moment, and they can be trusted as real. Placing emphasis on the process helps us move away from the content.

	I became focused on process and not content. I heightened my awareness around the internal messages I was sending to myself. “This is fear” or “Fear is arising” (does not identify me with the fear). “I am afraid” (identifies me with the fear). I reminded myself that emotions are natural and normal (1st Noble Truth) so I didn’t have to beat myself up for experiencing fear. I was not the cause of the fear nor was I a bad person because the fear was present. There was no need for shame. Emotions are messengers; a gift. Knowing this I knew there would be things I would need to do to learn Zoom. This gave me the energy to start thinking about that. Being with this emotion did not mean I had to like it. Denying an emotion is a form of “resistance.” I didn’t make the emotion more than it was, nor did I make it less. I didn’t discount it. It was just fear.
Allow	Allowing is often done in concert with the Recognize Phase. Focus attention on <i>process</i>, not on <i>content</i>. <i>Allow</i> (rather than <i>Accept</i>) awareness in the body. <i>Allow</i> is a softer word than <i>accept</i>. It takes us beyond the concept of accepting or rejecting all together. It releases us from the idea of comparison or preference for or against. <i>Allow</i> offers more freedom without bias. <i>Accept</i> often carries a tone of aversion with it. (i.e. as long as I can’t change it, I will try to <i>accept</i> things as they are). Welcome. Do Not Push Away. I had to feel the churning stomach, breathing that was more tight and labored, and a body that felt constricted—my shoulders and neck were tense and my jaw was more locked, etc. My mind was also constricted with narrow vision that did not see options or a way out. Say “yes” to what is here and allow it to stay as long as it wants. Do not try to change, fix or resolve it. Simply allow it to be. Saying “yes” to what is here gives us more of our real life in the moment. And if resistance shows itself, own that and allow that too. Often if resistance is present, we have to feel that first before we are able to feel the other. Often when we release the resistance, the effect is to relax.

	This is <i>allowing</i> the direct experience of the emotion “as is” in the body. Be a soft and sturdy home where everything can land. Some may refer to this process as “turning toward your pain or suffering.” Being with our emotions is a way of being intimate with our life as it is, which may be different from how we would like it to be. This is learning to touch with mercy and tenderness what we see as pleasant or unpleasant. I played with the above for a period of hours, all in the midst of my work day. I simply walked with it and focused on it as best I could as I went about my day. Sometimes <i>allowing</i> takes more (or less) time.
Investigate	Investigation is often done in concert with the Allow Phase. This is <u>not</u> a process of discursive thinking to try to figure out “why” the emotion is happening. This is not a process of the mind. You might ask, “What is this?” or “What is going on?” Expect an answer at some point (not necessarily on your time line), and not be tied to receiving an answer or not. This investigative inquiry need not be too tight or constrictive. It is meant to be open and spacious—allowing the answer to come rather than trying to force it. Again, this is not a process in the mind. It is a process done by being mindful of these in-the-body perspectives: - physical (tightening of muscles) - energetic (experienced as a rush or lethargy) - emotional (pleasant/unpleasant) - cognitive (beliefs, stories about self and other) - motivational (strong will to do something) When my body is constricted, my mind is constricted as well., and I do not have access to all of my being. My mind is not open and spacious to see the options of how to move forward. When constricted, my thinking is narrow. When my mind was sufficiently quiet and relaxed, new ideas were birthed seemingly without effort. “The awareness of fear is not afraid.” The awareness was stronger than the the fear, and as it turned out, the fear was transformed into courage as I had the energy and where with all to explore and work with Zoom. Courage is not the absence of fear, it more about being able to be present with fear. We learn wisdom through life experiences. We are also born with an innate wisdom that helps us know what is good and not good. In order to

	access our innate wisdom, our minds must be quiet and we must be present in our body. Innate wisdom helps guide me in knowing how to respond. Turn all emotions into practice. Receive life as it is; receive difficulties as they are. Make your day your meditation. Identities are not permanent. As I worked this process, I realized I held an identity of “not being tech savvy.” When I softened my resistance, and when I stopped trying to manage the uncertainty, then my belief around not being tech savvy softened. I no longer had to expend energy to prop up that part of my personality. With all of that, my mind started getting messages of how to proceed to learn about using Zoom and to prepping for class. And as I proceeded to learn about Zoom, the fear soon subsided.
Nature/ Natural/ Non Self (non identification)	Allowing myself to be with all of the above is an act of love for myself. I did not have to beat myself up. I could love myself just as I was. It is not always easy to love that part of yourself that you want to push away. Being “whole” means being with “all” of ourselves; nothing left out. Non-identification is about not taking the situation personally. Seeing the situation as “this is fear,” vs “I am afraid.” It is seeing the fear that is happening in this moment is normal and natural and something to work with. There is no need for judgment. Judgment is an add on to suffering. What I felt might be the same as what someone else might feel if they were in the same or similar situation. I am not alone in what I am feeling. Non identification (or non self) says, “The emotion is happening. I am not my emotion.” What I was feeling did not have to be a fixed identity that I related to myself. Non self sees “self” as a process rather than as a solid unchanging self. The Shambhala saying, “Place the fearful mind in the cradle of loving kindness” summarizes the RRAIN process. That phrase is a reminder to be friendly with ourselves. In the midst of the RRAIN process I found opportunities to laugh at myself. Laughing was a way of my connecting with my humanness. The mindfulness or awareness of fear often leads to courage! Then, rest in presence.

In the process of using RRAIN, the steps of allow and investigate often are done simultaneously. Sometimes doing the first step of recognizing is all that is needed to diffuse a situation. Then, the other steps are not needed. Other times all the stages are needed taking hours or days. This process works for all unwholesome emotions such as greed, anger, fear, hurt, grief, anxiety, boredom, restlessness, insecurity, etc. It also works for all wholesome emotions like joy, gratitude, generosity, etc. (that is, if needed at all).

Peace can be experienced even in the midst of chaos. It is our relationship to pain that matters. Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional. In the story of the two arrows – the first arrow represents human pain, and it is part of the human condition. The second arrow represents the judgments we lay on ourselves about experiencing the pain. It is the narrative or story we create in our mind about the pain. The pain of the second arrow typically causes us to suffer more than the pain of the first arrow. Working RRAIN helps us work with the first arrow. It also helps us avoid the pain of the second arrow.

The Three Characteristics

As a part of RRAIN or as a separate exercise, when an emotion arises, it can be helpful to remind yourself of three questions. This teaching is often known as “The Three Characteristics”--suffering, impermanence, and non self.

Is what I am experiencing *pain or suffering*?

Is what I am experiencing *permanent*, or how long will it last? Will it last forever?

With what I am experiencing, have I created a *self*?

1. *Suffering* – it is a natural part of the human condition for us to experience some of the unsatisfactoriness or challenges in our life. This is the pain we’ve referred to as the 1st arrow.
2. *Impermanence* – whatever arises will change and pass away. Absolutely nothing lasts forever.
3. *Non Self* – Some who see the words “non self” interpret them as “no self,” or that we do not individually exist as a separate individual or self. The Buddha did not teach no self. The table below may help explain the difference between what we mean by creating a “self” and the words, “non self.”

fixed **Self** *identity*

Here the person identifies with the emotion, as in “I am afraid” or “I am sad” or “I am generous” or “I am compassionate” or “I am not computer savvy.” They identify with the emotion; they see themselves as the emotion; they are tied to a view. They see themselves as fear or sadness, etc. It is who they are; it is fixed and they will not or cannot change. With an untrained mind self’s are created with no awareness of them. Self identities can be a source of suffering.

non *fixed* **Self** *identity*

Here the person sees themselves as someone who in awareness happens to be experiencing the emotion. The emotion is not who they are; it is not part of their identity and they are not defined by the emotion nor are they taking it personally. The state they are in is not fixed, solid, or static. Non self sees self as a process. They may say, “This is fear” or “This is sadness” or “This is generosity.” They may see that what they are feeling may be similar to what someone who is in a similar situation may be feeling.

About Innate Wisdom

When we are born, we come into this world with innate wisdom. This is wisdom that is a part of us; it is not something we have to learn. For example, we simply know that when I do an activity that is wholesome, that my body feels good, or vice versa, when I do something that violates my values, my body does not. We know that when we receive a well-deserved compliment, that we feel good and that when we are criticized unjustly that we do not. That wisdom is there. And though we will continue to grow in wisdom from our experiences as we navigate life, this innate wisdom that comes in with us when we are born is very helpful in living happily and skillfully.

The nice thing about innate wisdom is that it is already and naturally a part of us, and it is limitless. We do not have to learn it. So in life we do not have to be concerned about how to grow innate wisdom. What we have to do is learn how to access it. Two things are required for us to access it. One is to be present in our body, and the other is to have a quiet mind. That is why we often say when we are working with emotions that once we recognize we are experiencing an emotion that the pause can be so important. Because in just the second, or maybe two, the mind becomes quiet and we recognize what is happening in the body. That may be just long enough for an insight to surface (from this innate wisdom) that will help us know how to proceed—what to do, what question to ask, what to say. . . . That is why in insight meditation we learn to be present, gain insights, and then act coming from a stance of wisdom.

A few afterthoughts

- This work is not about resolving our emotions. It is about befriending them and allowing them to dissolve. We meditate to help us be intimate with our life.
- When an emotion appears, we have three choices
 1. Let it define us
 2. Let it destroy or overwhelm us
 3. Let it enlighten or inform us
- Here are supporting comments that Tara Brach (teacher at the Insight Meditation Center in Washington DC) makes regarding working with emotions (and RAIN) and the significance of knowing presence in the body. These quotes were taken from her book, *True Refuge*.

“One of the best instructions I’ve heard from meditation practice was given by Thai Buddhist teacher Ajah Buddhadasa: “Do not do anything that takes you away from your body.” The body lives in the present. When you are aware of the body you are connected with living presence—the one place where you can see reality, see what is actually happening. Awareness of the body is our gateway into the truth of what is.”

“Mindful awareness of sensations is the “ground level” in practicing RAIN. . . a state of mind expresses itself as a felt sense, even before it coalesces into a thought. Any experience you have is rooted in your body, and contacting that experience—letting yourself feel the sensations

—will help you feel more grounded and aware.”

The following is a quote from Albery Comus. *“In the midst of winter, I found an invincible summer.* My interpretation is that our heart is a reliable source in ministering and healing ourselves.

- From Phillip Moffit, teacher at Spirit Rock Meditation Center (paraphrased)—if you want to make change, you must have the direct experience in your body.

How to grow a skill or change behavior

It can be skillful to aspire to be a certain way—to be calm, to speak with integrity and skillfully, and to work with emotions with ease. To change any behavior or to be in process of change takes intention and some effort. I have come to see for myself that “striving to change” has not always given me the most benefit. Striving, trying and efforting to change, for me, often leads to grasping for my being a certain way, and it often has led to disappointment. I often put myself on a timetable for the change to happen which causes anxiety. And often, the harder I try to be a certain way, the longer it takes me to get where I hope to be going. What I’ve grown to see for myself is that rather than striving and trying so hard, it works better and faster for me to simply relax and notice what is happening in the present. I don’t even always have to figure out why things are as they are. Change seems to happen on its own when I simply notice and intimately be with how things are right now—whether I like what I’m noticing or not. If things are not as I like, I recognize and feel that in my body. I do not identify with it, I just notice. As wisdom arises, I make changes, and over time my body (or awareness in the body) helps me migrate to that which feels good.

Change seems to happen on its own, in its own time. As presented in the table below, growing in any skill is a process that will move you from the left to the right in the table. Every position from Consciously Unskillful and to the right on the diagram is a positive place to be. By diligently staying awake and being in the body and noticing, you will move from left to right. The bottom line is that we may not have to work so hard to change. We just have to stay awake and allow the process to happen (which may not always be easy). We possibly can be less judgmental in the process, relax more, and find joy in the process of allowing awareness to do it’s work. Let’s see how this works.

Growing a New Skill is a Process

Unconsciously
Unskillful

Consciously
Unskillful

Consciously
Skillful

Unconsciously
Skillful

As an example, at an early age growing up, I developed a self identity of being lesser than my peers—a shame-based personality. Though I was blind to this growing up, in counseling in my 30's I grew to see that I had developed this identity. I had created a self identity around shame, and though it was ruling my life, I had no awareness of it. To help explain my situation, I first need to talk about two emotions that we have not discussed so far anywhere in Chapter 3--guilt and shame. These two emotions are often confused. Guilt is an emotion that arises when we sense that we have violated a rule or have not done something up to our or someone else's standards. Shame, on the other hand, is an emotion that says, "I am lesser than others," or "I am not as good as others." Without awareness, guilt and shame can be very debilitating.

About Shame

We are not born with shame. We learn shame from how others either react or respond to us. For example, if people often tell us we "should" be one way and not another way, or if we feel one way and someone else discounts how we are feeling (thus suggesting how we are feeling is not okay) or maybe someone just plane says we are no good, or what we like and want is not valued by others, etc. The words matter as well as the tone of voice in which they are said. These messages can be interpreted as we are "lesser" or "not as good as," or "that who we are is not okay and/or we are of little value," or "that our ideas or opinions don't matter." We may even take this (as I did) to the point where we shut down and suppress what is on the inside. I smiled on the outside and cried on the inside. We hide and do not let others know who we really are and what we like rather than risk sharing who we are and being rejected and told that we are not okay. In a sense who we are becomes invisible. This is a classic case of reacting by suppressing, and is most often done without any sense of awareness of what is happening. We likely are in pain, but have no clue as to what is causing it.

These messages can come from home and relatives, peers, significant institutions such as the church and school, or any person we look up to as having authority. As hurtful as those messages coming from others can be, they in no way can compare to the internal messages the recipients of those messages begin to say to themselves once they begin to believe the words. Once the recipient hears those messages enough, they begin to buy in to them and start believing them themselves thus creating a self identity around them—a shame-based identity or personality. And once the person buys into believing they are lesser, no other person can shame them with messages better than the person him/herself. The person begins to constantly shame themselves. They no longer need anyone else to shame them because they can do it better themselves. It is a downward spiral.

In my case, I was born gay. I was born late in the calendar year, and I started school at 5. At that age I already knew that I was different, but I had no words for it. I just knew that I didn't fit in—I was not tough and did not want to fight or play football. Kids didn't want to sit on the same seat on the bus with me. I was sensitive and that was not okay. When gay jokes were told on the playground, though not directed at me, I intuitively knew they were talking about me. I wanted to bake cakes and cook casseroles in home economics classes and was allowed to take shop and welding.. On top of that the church said I was not okay and that I was going to hell, and my grandma didn't want me to be a sissy. And I could go on and on. I knew that in other people's eyes I did not measure up.

To get on with the example of how to grow a skill: Two words that are often used that I interpret as being shaming is "should" and "why." Both words also have uses that are not shaming. For example,

if I am in a chemistry class, and I mix Particle A with Particle B, I “should” get Result C—a fine and perfect use of the word should. When “should” is used to refer to how a person is, is where we get into trouble. For example, “You should be this way,” or “You should have done that,” or “This is what you should believe.” Use of the word “why” works in a similar way. For example, if you are working on a procedure, and things did not work out the way you expected, you may ask and wonder “why?”—a perfectly valid use of the word why. If you use the word why to refer to a person, as in “Why did you do that?” or “Why are you as you are?” you are asking the person to justify themselves. The message could possibly be interpreted as shaming. The resolution is quite easy. When using should and why when referring to a person, simply replace *should* with *could* and *why* with *what is your reasoning?* Those few simple word changes will be heard all together differently.

In counseling at about age 35, I began realizing I was functioning on a shame-based personality. I messaged myself with lots of “shoulds” and “should nots.” In terms of skill development, before counseling, I lived in the world of **Unconsciously/Unskillful**—I didn’t even know what I didn’t know. Once I became aware of being shame based, I began intentionally and consciously changing my internal messaging. I started the process at the **Consciously/Unskillful stage**. Here, I simply started being mindful of my speech, and I most often noticed that I used the word “should” a few seconds after I had already said it. I was conscious, but I didn’t have the skill yet to catch myself. This actually brought me much joy as even this simple recognition took some of the power and sting out of the word should. The thing is, as I became more mindful and conscious of the words I was using, all of a sudden I began catching myself before I used the word, “should.” Then I could choose to substitute the word “could” for “should,” and it had a very different feel and impact. I had moved to the **Consciously/Skillful stage**. It was a process to get there and I stayed there for a while. Now I am happy to say that even though shaming thoughts still arise (and they maybe always will), they’ve lost their energy and I live in the **Unconsciously/Skillful** stage. Shaming thoughts no longer control me.

Though making the change required intention and effort, the change did not happen because I tried so hard. It mostly happened because my attention was simply to stay awake and be aware. I watched how my body felt when I used the word should and how different it felt when I used the word could. The body helps us migrate to the behavior that makes us feel good. The big thing was I had to stay awake and notice. The change took place on it’s own on it’s own time frame. What I needed to do was set my intention, stay awake and notice, and allow awareness to do its work to make the change happen. When I relaxed, and stopped trying so hard, and simply was aware, change started taking place pretty fast. In the process I learned to not judge any stage of the process where I was. I simply started being okay as I was regardless of what stage of skill development I was in. Literally, this process and mindfulness has saved my life. What I have just written may make all of this sound easy. It did take courage and some effort, and it took processing of more issues than just changing the word *should* to *could*. It also helped to be part of a supportive meditation community who also appreciated the benefits of meditation and mindfulness as well as a counselor who also saw that mindfulness was part of the healing process.

In the process of life and of learning to be mindful, I’ve learned that all actions have consequences—that’s karma. What I do in this moment influences what I experience in the next moments. For me, the karmic effect of seeing myself as lesser and acting that out led to bleeding ulcers. The karmic effect of embracing my shame and not pushing it away led to a rich spiritual and emotional well being and a world full of options and opportunity. I am not sure I can even imagine what my life would be like today had I not been directed by the universe to study mindfulness-based meditation. As I am not sure

I could have done this work all on my own volition, I will be forever grateful to the energies of the universe in helping me out. The privilege of a life time is being able to be who you are.

Working through my issues of growing up has made me strong. It has taught me things I may have never learned had I not experienced it. I truly feel blessed. I would not change anything—even the hard times. After all, all of these life experiences has made me who I am today.

Homework

1. Sit (Experiential Knowledge)

Aim to meditate 6 out of 7 days for an amount of time that works for you. Include mindfulness of the breath, body sensations, sounds, and if emotions show up, include them too.

2. Study (Intellectual/Cognitive Knowledge)

Read/Review Chapter 3: Part III as it meets your needs

Next week **Chapter 4**, “Simply Being Present With Thoughts/Thinking” will be emailed to you

3. Integrate (Daily Life Practice) (Experiential Knowledge)

- Every day continue to STOP and PAUSE as many times as you remember to take a few breaths and check in with yourself. This is an in-the-body experience. It is like giving yourself an emotional hug. This gives you an opportunity to practice loving yourself just as you are.
- Pick and choose to be mindful:
 - Just see, hear, touch
 - Notice intuitive hunches/gut feelings
 - Notice your body when you are having conversations with friends
 - Notice 1st and 2nd arrows
 - Use of words like “should,” and “why”
 - Notice if you have created any self identities
- I received the following three paragraphs as a daily life assignment handout in one of the classes I took at the Vermont Insight Meditation Center – from teachers Claire Stanley and Jack Millett.

“Over the next two weeks, work with awareness of the strong emotions that rise up like waves in the midst of your life. When you become aware of a wave of emotion, pause and take a few minutes to breathe and to connect with the body. If you can, then and there, take a moment to recognize what you are feeling. That may be all that you can do in that moment. Just pausing, taking a breath, and then connecting with the body and naming what the emotion is that is in your heart and mind in the moment.

If you feel relatively centered and think you have the time and space to go further, invite the energy of allowing or accepting what is happening in terms of this wave of emotion. If you can feel the emotion as it is manifesting in your body (is it mostly in your shoulders, in your belly, in your throat, or elsewhere?), you will be investigating this emotion in terms of Buddhist practice. This is not about the story of the emotion, it is about how it feels and how it is manifesting right now.

Finally perhaps not right then in the moment, but later in the day or a few days later, you might be able to look back on that experience and to see how it has changed over time. You can then let go of the impact of that emotion and not identify with it. You will be able to see from a distance how this emotion arose and then changed and perhaps has completely gone away. It is not self manifesting in your life.

Finally, take a moment to recognize that all human beings have this same experience of emotions arising and passing. Recognize the common humanity of this experience and let it go.”

And one last question:

Meditation can be seen as a practice of self love. Please explain.