



SESSION 5: ALLOWING / LETTING BE

SUMMARY OF SESSION 5

Today we extended our formal practice to begin deliberately to turn towards and approach painful experiences with kindness. The basic guideline in this practice is to become mindfully aware of whatever is most predominant in our moment-by-moment experience. So, if the mind is repeatedly drawn to a particular place, to particular thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations, we deliberately take a gentle and friendly awareness to that place. That is the first step.

The second step is to notice, as best we can, how we are relating to whatever is arising in the body or mind. Our reactions to our own thoughts and feelings may determine whether they are passing events, or whether they persist. Often we can be with an arising thought, feeling or bodily sensation but in a non-acceptant, reactive way. If we like it, we may become attached to it, and try to hold on to it. If, on the other hand, we dislike it because it is painful, unpleasant, or uncomfortable in some way, then we may experience fear or irritation, tense up and contract, or try to push it away. Each of these responses is the opposite of acceptance.

We do these things for what seem like good reasons. We hope that, by hanging on to pleasant experiences, we can get them to last. But pleasure is often momentary, and our attempts to make it last or happen again can actually spoil it or drive it away. Similarly, we attempt to avoid difficulties and painful things, or get tangled up in trying to worry our way out of them, because we have the sense that this will help us to manage them – and indeed we may be fearful that, unless we do these things, we will never find an answer to our problems and will be overwhelmed. But in fact, both avoidance and worry (far from helping us to resolve our problems) tend to keep them in place.

LETTING GO AND LETTING BE

The easiest way to relax is, first, to let go of trying to make things different. Accepting experience means simply allowing space for whatever is going on, rather than trying to create some other state. Through acceptance, we settle back into awareness of what is present. We let it be - we simply notice and observe whatever is already here. This is the way to relate to experiences that have a strong pull on our attention, however powerful and seductive they seem – even intense emotions like helplessness and suicidal despair. When we see them clearly, it helps prevent us from getting pulled into brooding and ruminating about them, or trying to suppress or avoid them. We begin the process of freeing ourselves from them. We open up the possibility of responding skilfully and with compassion, rather than reacting, in knee jerk fashion, by automatically running off old (often unhelpful) strategies.

A NEW PRACTICE

In the class today, we explored together this new way of approaching the difficult. If we noticed that our attention kept being pulled away from the breath (or another focus) to painful thoughts, emotions or feelings, the first step was to become mindfully aware of any physical sensations in the body that were occurring alongside the thought or emotion; we then deliberately moved the focus of awareness to the part of the body where those sensations were strongest. We explored how the breath could provide a useful vehicle to do this - just as we practised in the Body Scan, we can take a gentle and friendly awareness to that part of the body by ‘breathing into’ it on the in-breath, and ‘breathing out’ from it on the out-breath.

Once our attention had moved to the bodily sensations and they were in the field of awareness, the guidance was to say to ourselves “It’s okay. Whatever it is, it’s okay. Let me be open to it”. Then just to stay with the awareness of these bodily sensations and our relationship to them, breathing with them, accepting them, letting them be. It may be helpful to repeat “It’s okay. Whatever it is, it’s okay. Let me be open to it”, using each out breath to soften and open to the sensations. Acceptance is not resignation - acceptance allows us, as a vital first step, to become fully aware of difficulties and then to respond to them skilfully.

USING THE BREATHING SPACE: EXTRA GUIDANCE

You have been practising the Breathing Space, regularly three times a day and whenever you need it. Now we suggest that whenever you feel troubled in body or mind, the first step is always to take a breathing space. Here is some extra guidance that may help at these times.

1. Awareness

We have already practised observing - bringing the focus of awareness to our inner experience and noticing what is happening in our thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations.

In addition, you may like to experiment with describing, acknowledging, identifying - putting experiences into words, e.g. say in your mind "A feeling of anger is arising" or.... "Self-critical thoughts are here."

2. Redirecting Attention

We have already practised gently redirecting your full attention to the breath; following the breath all the way in and all the way out.

In addition: Try noting 'at the back of your mind': "Breathing in... Breathing out" or counting: "Inhaling, one...Exhaling, one; Inhaling, two...etc."

3. Expanding Attention

We have already practised allowing the attention to expand to the whole body. So now we become aware of our posture and facial expression. We hold in awareness all the sensations in our bodies right now, just as they are.

Now extend this step, if you choose, especially if there is any sense of discomfort, tension, or resistance. If these sensations are present, bring your awareness to them by "breathing into them" on the in-breath. Then, "breathe out from the sensations", softening and opening with the out-breath. Say to yourself on the out-breath, "It's okay. Whatever it is, it's already here. Let me be open to it".

As best you can, bring this expanded awareness to the next moments of your day.

The Guest House

This being human is 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 honourably.

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.

Coleman Barks with John Moyne
The Essential Rumi
Harper, San Francisco

HOME PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK FOLLOWING SESSION 5

- Practice the Sitting Meditation “Exploring the Difficult” on days 1, 3 and 5.
- Practice Sitting with Silence and guiding yourself through an exploration of the difficult (unguided practice) on days 2, 4, and 6 for 30 – 40 minutes.
- Practice the regular Three-Minute Breathing Space: Practice this 3 times a day.
- Practice the Three-Minute Responsive Breathing Space (with Extra Guidance) in times of stress, when difficult/strong emotions are present.

Complete the ‘Practice Record Form’ each time you do any of the practices. Make a note of anything that you notice.

HOME PRACTICE RECORD FORM

You can record each time you practice on this form or use your own diary/journal. Make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

| Day/date | Practice (Yes/No) | Comments: Discoveries, Delights, Difficulties? |
|-----------|--|--|
| Saturday | Exploring Difficult: BS BS BS Responsive BS: | |
| Sunday | Sitting with Silence: BS BS BS Responsive BS: | |
| Monday | Exploring Difficult: BS BS BS Responsive BS: | |
| Tuesday | Sitting with Silence: BS BS BS Responsive BS: | |
| Wednesday | Exploring Difficult: BS BS BS Responsive BS: | |
| Thursday | Sitting with Silence: BS BS BS Responsive BS:: | |
| Friday | Exploring Difficult: BS BS BS Responsive BS: | |