

Introduction to Mindfulness  
Gilda's Club Chicago  
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Notes for class #2 (of 4)

Topic: Mindfulness of emotions

Definition of mindfulness

Jack Kornfield, mindfulness teacher and psychologist:

“mindfulness has two aspects: receptive and active. Mindfulness is first a spacious, kind, non-judging awareness of the present. Second...mindfulness includes and appropriate response to the present situation.”

1. Emotions register in the body and can have thoughts, beliefs, images associated with them, as well as feelings underneath/within the feelings.

Feeling tones:

Pleasant

Unpleasant

Neutral

2. When our minds/attention are not trained in to be in the present, we are often caught in *reactivity* to emotions (and experiences) and this create more suffering for us. We can also *react* unwisely and this can create harm in relationships and in the world. We can be unaware of what is really here and reactive.

Pain x Resistance = Suffering

Life has joys and sorrows. Some pain is inevitable; suffering is optional.

When our ability to be with *difficult* experiences/emotions is limited, our capacity to be with *positive* experience is also dampened. So we can live more fully by learning to be with what is here.

Practicing mindfulness of emotions can teach us to relate to emotions with kindness and curiosity -- which can give us a balance -- a place to rest in kind awareness, even when the 'waves' are choppy. Seeing what is truly 'here', and what is underneath the primary emotion, can inform how we *respond* (the second part of mindfulness = wise response.)

3. Practicing mindfulness--including the 'attitudes that cultivate mindfulness'--is how we practice being with emotions.

“The attitudes” we practice in mindfulness meditation are like fertile soil for mindfulness out of which balance and calm and peace can grow. (see Class 1 notes for list of the ‘foundational attitudes’ of mindfulness.)

Example of mindfulness of feelings/emotions:

We began with concentrative practice to steady the attention.

It’s hard to be present when the mind is darting all over the place, so concentrative practice can help us/the mind “settle” down.

Mindfulness of emotion: we can notice how the emotion (for example, anger) plays out in the body, be curious about it with kind attention. We may “investigate” and notice there are other emotions or thoughts underneath it-- under anger there could be hurt, or disappointment, or fear.

We “start with whatever is on top”, recognize with kind attention and allow what is here right now. If there is resistance or disliking the present moment, practice “letting that be” and be curious how that registers in the body. “Putting out the welcome mat” to *whatever experience is here right now*.

Mindfulness is not about passivity--as Jack says above, it is receptive and active. We may not like that we feel sad, but when we can be with it, allow it with kind attention, it helps us develop “equanimity”/balance. We can then respond more wisely having seen what is truly here.

“You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.”

Trauma-sensitive mindfulness reminder:

It’s important to pay attention to whether we are in the “window of tolerance.” If it feels like too much to be with, we are crossing the edge and outside the window of tolerance. This can be re-traumatizing--so it’s important to honor your experience, whether by stopping, or shifting to a different “anchor”, make a cup of tea or call a friend. We are not trying to “white knuckle” it.

A few books and websites:

Ruth King, author of *Mindful of Race*

<https://ruthking.net>

*Awakening Together: The Spiritual Practice of Inclusivity and Community*, Larry Yang  
He is one of the core teachers at East Bay Meditation Center where that community is doing what I consider very inspiring work in building a community where everyone is welcome.

*Trauma Sensitive Mindfulness*, David Treleaven

<https://davidtreleaven.com>

*Full Catastrophe Living, Jon Kabat Zinn*

*How to Be Sick: A Buddhist-Inspired Guide for the Chronically Ill and Their Caregivers, Toni Bernhard*

The quote I shared--“if you only sit when you *want* to sit, you only see the mind that wants to sit” is from Larry Rosenberg’s book *Breath by Breath: The Liberating Practice of Insight Meditation*.

### **Allow**

There is no controlling life.  
Try corralling a lightning bolt,  
containing a tornado. Dam a  
stream and it will create a new  
channel. Resist, and the tide  
will sweep you off your feet.  
Allow, and grace will carry  
you to higher ground. The only  
safety lies in letting it all in –  
the wild and the weak; fear,  
fantasies, failures and success.  
When loss rips off the doors of  
the heart, or sadness veils your  
vision with despair, practice  
becomes simply bearing the truth.  
In the choice to let go of your  
known way of being, the whole  
world is revealed to your new eyes.  
by Danna Faulds

Gerald May: (psychiatrist and theologian)

*“Peace is not something you can force on anything or anyone...much less upon ones own mind. It is like trying to quiet to ocean by pressing upon the waves. Sanity lies in somehow opening to the chaos, allowing anxiety, moving deeply into the tumult, diving into the waves, where underneath, within peace simply is.”*

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And a ‘teaser’ preview of our topic next week: Mindfulness of Thoughts

Tara Brach, Ph.D. says this often:

“Thoughts are an attempt to make a map of the world”

We can ask “Is this (thought) a useful map?”

“Thoughts are useful servants and terrible masters.”

Don't believe everything you think!

OK, I think that is quite enough to throw at you today :)  
Best wishes to you all and see you next week,  
Stephanie