

Emotional Awareness Meditation

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



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■ PURPOSE / EFFECTS

- This meditation brings about a great deal of equanimity with emotions. They will not seem to affect us as deeply or adversely.
- Many people have trouble contacting their emotions directly. Even if we feel that we know what emotion we are having, that does not necessarily mean that we are contacting it directly.
- To contact an emotion directly means to feel it in the body. This is the opposite of most people's experience, which is to related ideas about the emotion.
- Here is an example. A person asks you how you are feeling. You respond by saying, "I am angry, because..." You then go on to tell the person all the reasons you are angry.
- In this example, only the first three words, "I am angry" have anything to do with contacting emotion. All the rest of the explanation is about concepts.
- A fuller example of contacting emotions directly, that is somatically, would be to say, "I am angry. I can feel a sort of gripping tension in my belly that is uncomfortable.

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The tense area feels kind of twisted and sharp. Parts of it are throbbing. It also feels like it is radiating heat outwards.”

- Notice that the cause of the anger is irrelevant. The practice here is to feel the physical expression of the anger as completely as possible.
- Extended practice of this meditation will bring about “skill at feeling,” that is, a tremendous amount of clarity in the emotional world. Emotional intelligence.
- It will also help emotions to process and release much more quickly and completely, because we are not holding on to ideas about the emotions. The body processes emotion quickly, naturally, and fully.

METHOD

Summary

Feel the physical expression of an emotion as completely as possible.

Long Version

1. Settle into a comfortable meditation posture.
2. Breathing normally, bring your attention to your emotions. Notice if you are feeling any emotions, no matter how faintly. It is not necessary to know precisely which emotion you are having, or why you are having it. Just knowing that you are feeling something emotional is enough. Guessing is OK.
3. Once you detect an emotion, see if you can find its expression in your body. Maybe there is a feeling of tension, gripping, tightening, burning, twisting, throbbing, pressure, lightness, openness, etc.
4. If you like, you can mentally make the label “feel” when you detect a body sensation of emotion. Other labels are possible (“emotion” for example).
5. Each time you detect an emotional body sensation, try to actually feel the sensation in your body, as completely as possible. Feel it through and through.

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6. Completely let go of any ideas you have about the emotion, or self talk you might have about why the emotion is arising. Return to the body sensation of the emotion.

7. Continue contacting these emotional body sensations for as long as you wish.

HISTORY

Meditating on emotions is a traditional part of Vipassana practice in Buddhism. It is, for example, one of the four main techniques covered in the Vissudhimagga (The Path to Purity), an important Buddhist text.

The version presented here is a summary of a practice given by American Buddhist teacher Shinzen Young.

NOTES

- At first, practicing this meditation may make it seem as if the emotions are getting bigger. If they are negative emotions, this may seem overwhelming for a while. This is natural. It is occurring not because the emotions are actually getting bigger, but for two interesting reasons. The first is because we are no longer suppressing them.

We are allowing them to actually express themselves fully. The second is because we are observing them (actually feeling them) very closely. Just as a microscope makes small things look bigger, the “microscope” of attention makes the emotional body sensations seem larger than they really are.

- The good news here is that as the emotions express themselves freely in the body, they are being processed. Usually this means that they will pass much more quickly.
- If we are feeling a positive emotion in this way, it may pass quickly, but we will also derive much more satisfaction from it, because our experience of it is so rich and complete.
- If we are feeling a negative emotion in this way, we will experience much less suffering from it, because we are not resisting and suppressing it.