

Mindful Stress Reduction

Session 5



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Summary of Session 5

Allowing/Letting Be

TURNING TOWARD THE DIFFICULT

In this session we extended our formal practice to begin deliberately to turn toward and approach difficult 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, the *first step*, if the mind is repeatedly drawn to a particular place, to particular thoughts, feelings, or body sensations, is deliberately to take a gentle and friendly awareness to whatever is pulling for our attention, noting the sense of being pulled again and again to the same place.

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 persist. Often we can be with an arising thought, feeling, or body sensation but in a nonallowing, 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 allowing.

LETTING GO AND LETTING BE

The easiest way to relax is, first, to let go of trying to make things different. *Allowing experience means simply allowing space for whatever is going on, rather than trying to create some other state.* Through cultivating a “willingness to experience,” we settle back into awareness of what is already 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 they seem. 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 skillfully and with compassion rather than reacting, in knee jerk fashion, by automatically running off old (often unhelpful) strategies.

A NEW PRACTICE

In the class, 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 practiced in the body scan, we can take a gentle and friendly awareness to that part of the body by “breathing into” it on the inbreath, and “breathing out” from it on the outbreath.

Once our attention had moved to the body sensations, and they were in the field of awareness, the guidance was to say to ourselves, “It’s OK. Whatever it is, it’s OK to allow myself to be open to it.” Then we just stayed with the awareness of these body sensations and our relationship to them, breathing with them, accepting them, letting them be. It may be helpful to repeat “It’s OK. Whatever it is, it’s OK. Let me be open to it,” using each outbreath to soften and open to the sensations. “Allowing” is *not* resignation—it allows us, as a vital first step, to become fully aware of difficulties and to respond to them skillfully.

Using the Breathing Space: Extra Guidance

You have been practicing 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 practiced bringing the focus of awareness to your inner experience and noticing what is happening in your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations. Now, you may find it helpful to describe and identify what is arising—to put 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 practiced 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 breaths from 1 to 5, then starting over again: “Inhaling, 1 . . . exhaling, 1; inhaling, 2” . . . and so forth.

3. EXPANDING ATTENTION

We have already practiced 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 inbreath. Then, breathe out from the sensations, softening and opening with the outbreath. Say to yourself on the outbreath, “It’s OK. . . whatever it is, it’s already here. Let me feel it.”

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

“The Guest House”

-Rumi

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 honorably.
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.

Home Practice Following Session 5

1. Practice the sitting meditation (breath, body, sounds, and thoughts) each day before our next class (track 3).

Ideally, you can also practice staying present with a difficulty, sitting with the thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations that come up, for about 5-10 minutes (instead of or after listening to track 3). You might then choose to finish with track 4 (the 3-minute breathing space). You could also listen to the website audio, Practice Working with Difficulty meditation.

2. 3-Minute Breathing Space - Regular: Practice three times a day, at the times that you have decided in advance. You can follow along on track 4 of the CD or do it on your own. Record each time you do it by circling the number on the homework form; note any comments/difficulties.
3. 3-Minute Breathing Space - Responsive: Practice *whenever you notice unpleasant feelings*. Record each time you do it by making a tick mark on the homework form; note any comments/difficulties.

Week 5 – Home Practice Record Form

Record on the Home Practice Record Form each time you practice. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice, so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day	Sitting Meditation	3-Minute Breathing Space-Regular	3-Minute Breathing Space-Responsive. Place tick mark for each time done	Comments
Monday	Y or N	1 2 3		
Tuesday	Y or N	1 2 3		
Wednesday	Y or N	1 2 3		
Thursday	Y or N	1 2 3		
Friday	Y or N	1 2 3		
Saturday	Y or N	1 2 3		
Sunday	Y or N	1 2 3		