

Introduction To Mindfulness Meditation: Mindfulness of Emotions - (3 of 6)

Transcribed and Lightly Edited - from a Talk by Gil Fronsdal 10/17/07

Good evening and welcome back to the 3rd week of our 6 week series. This is an introduction to the practice of mindfulness. The practice of mindfulness is a very simple practice of using your awareness or your attention in order to do two primary things:

One is to take a closer look at the life you are living. Not the life you imagine you are living in the future or the life you hope you have lived in the past. But take a closer look at the life you are living, which is always here in your lived experience of here and now. So take a closer look. Buddhists love different language for the idea of that closer look. One of them is the idea of intimacy. Buddhists love the idea that mindfulness is a kind of intimacy with life, with all different aspects of life, to really connect with it in a deep way, to see it clearly for what it is. The wisdom that Buddhism puts a lot of value on comes not because you read a book that tells you useful knowledge, but comes from seeing our lived experience, from seeing our life in some deeper way than is usually accessible in everyday life. It isn't some kind of strange capacity to see deeply. It's just taking the capacity to see or be aware and heightening it so that we can look more carefully or use it to investigate, to understand. So that's one function.

The other primary function is that there is something about the nature of attention or awareness in its simplicity, in its utmost simplicity, that is very liberating, very freeing, very refreshing. Because usually when people pay attention to things, or even before we pay attention to things, we're already predisposed in some kind of way. And as soon as we notice something, there are all kinds of ways we react to what we are seeing. Some of those reactions are quite fine, some are problematic and cause us a fair degree of suffering. But it's always a kind of complication. It's like if you have a simple, clear window, you can see right through to the other side, but often what happens is the window is smudged over or there's dust on it and you can't see all the way through. So the same thing happens with this capacity to see clearly in its simplicity. It's like having a clear window, and normally our reactions our judgments, our interpretations, our fears our predispositions, our past history or future expectations, very quickly dirty the window so that simple awareness is not there by itself.

On the one hand we're trying to see more deeply, on the other hand, seeing more deeply is also helping us to free our attention so that attention can be there in this kind of pristine simplicity. Perhaps the expression simplicity will seem to you as being simplistic, why would you want something simple when you could have something sophisticated, and wonderful. But when there's no smog in the bay area and you can look across the bay in that clear clean air, that's pretty simple, and it's priceless. There's something very wonderful about it, so to have a heart which is liberated and free, or an awareness which is liberated and free, is one of the goals for Buddhist practice. The marvelous thing is that this freedom is very closely connected to this capacity to pay attention. So rather than think of this capacity for liberation as some kind of abstract thing that's far into the future, there is something about the nature of the simplicity of awareness which partakes of the wonderful experience of liberation that's connected to it.

So we do this mindfulness practice to develop our awareness, to heighten our awareness, to cultivate it so it's a bigger resource, a strength, a skill that we carry with us in our lives. And one function is to help us see more deeply and as we see more deeply, we can see the forces that drive us, that motivate us, that push us around, the forces that we react to. And we can begin making wiser choices in relationship to that. As we see the ways in which we contribute to our suffering, our pain, we can start making different choices, we can start lightening up on that.

So, seeing more deeply is one primary purpose. And the other is to discover something about the freedom that's found in paying attention itself.

As we do this mindfulness practice, as I teach it, as it's often taught, we do it systematically, but it doesn't have to be taught this way. I was taught mindfulness practice in the monasteries in Burma. When I showed up I was given a cassette tape player. I plugged it in and in a half hour, they gave the full instructions and I was sent to my room to practice for the next eight months! So you got the full transmission in half an hour. I could certainly do that, but what we find is that it actually works better for most people, because human life is so complicated, to work with certain domains, certain areas of life and build on that foundation. You get to where you're familiar with more and more so at the end of six weeks you have a sense of what the full instructions are because you build slowly up to it. So we started with breath as the foundation, then last week we talked about the body, our physical embodied experience as a very important part of the mindfulness practice and certainly as part of Buddhist spirituality.

And then tonight's subject is emotions. Emotions are a great topic; emotions are connected to some of the most sublime, precious wonderful things that humans experience and also some of the most awful things that humans experience, so it's a wide range that emotions are about. But whether it's the positive or the negative, emotions are a very important part of human life. Given that, it's very important to get a sense of how to bring mindfulness to our emotional life. So we can see our emotions more clearly and we can discover freedom in relationship to them, or give freedom to them. The idea of freedom is both that you can become free, and that you're giving freedom to something else. It's like a two-way thing, or two-sides to the same coin. So there's a certain kind of freedom you can find that will allow your emotional life to flow through you much more freely than it has and that's a really beautiful part of the practice when the emotions have this freedom.

Meditation is a wonderful laboratory or arena because it's a place to have very deep trust of our emotional life. Rather than thinking that something should be denied or repressed or held onto, there's a very deep trust that what moves through us in an emotional way is somehow trustable, maybe not in and of itself, but its trustable to let it move through us, to let it come and be there. And one of the reasons why it's trustable is that most emotions that people have, maybe all emotions, are a form of communication, something is being communicated. So if you're very angry, something is being communicated and if you shut it out or deny it, then you aren't availing yourself of what's being communicated. You're not listening to what needs to be learned or seen there. This doesn't mean you act on the anger, but that you have enough respect or trust in the process that you're willing to open to it more deeply. And what happens is as you get a sense of how to do this in Mindfulness, how to open and be present for emotions, there is a transformation of emotions. There is an evolving, a resolution a movement of emotions that is very clarifying, very helpful and ultimately can be very deepening, where we see not just the surface emotions in our lives but we start seeing some of the depth of emotional life, that is often not available so easily when we go about living our normal life.

So tonight's subject is emotions, and as I start this evening, I know that there are people who have very strong opinions about emotions in our society, people who have manifestos, who are almost willing to fight about what should happen with emotions: they should celebrate emotions, they should act on every emotion, they should not express any emotions, emotions are frightening and scary, lets not show them to anyone, let alone to ourselves. There is wide range of very strong attitudes that people have to emotions in our society.

Probably all of you already have a relationship, consciously or unconsciously, to what we might call our emotional life. And its very helpful in this process of Mindfulness to reflect a little bit about what that relationship might be. This is something you can do, go for a walk with a friend, journal, think about somehow, but if you can kind of explore a little bit what your relationship is to your emotional life, then

that relationship is less likely to hang up the process of mindfulness. Because as you pay attention to emotions, the relationship you have to emotions might interfere with the simplicity of just noticing it...oh this is how it is..right now I'm angry, now I'm happy"...being just very simply aware of that. As opposed to "Great! I'm happy and I'm going to celebrate it and dance in the streets" or "Grrrr..I'm angry and I'm justified in my anger and I'm going to let it rip...really get into it". The idea is to just be really simple with it.

So part of mindfulness practice then is learning to bring a wise attention to our emotional life. But it's important that in Mindfulness practice, we don't give special value to our emotions, different than we give to our physical experience or mental experience or thoughts or the breath. From the point of view of mindfulness or awareness, it's all equal. So, again, some people have these very strong ideas that emotions are what they are about, and that everything is going to be experienced through their emotions. Whereas for some people its like "emotions, no way...I'm not even going to get close to that". And both of those are already having a relationship or a value established that there is a hierarchy of what's important and what's not. But mindfulness practice doesn't really have a hierarchy, its just open awareness, that's willing to see everything as it is. A clear window doesn't have judgment about what's in the center of the window. Many things will come past the window. So we don't want to excessively focus on emotions, or insufficiently focus on them, we want to focus on them as it's appropriate.

Before we do a meditation, there is a famous simile that the Buddha gave called the simile of the arrows. He was talking to a gathering of people and he asked "If a man is struck by an arrow, would that hurt the man?". The assembly said "Yes, that would hurt!". And then the B said "Say the person is struck by a second arrow, is that even more painful?" and the people said "Yeah, one's bad but the second one makes it even worse." So the B said "Life sometimes brings you the first arrow, the second arrow is what you shoot at yourself." This is basically what he said. So if I'm walking down the street here and I stub my toe on the sidewalk, that's the first arrow, things like that happen, my toe hurts. The second arrow would be me telling myself "Gil, you are the worst walker, you are an embarrassment to human kind and maybe you should only walk in places where people can't see you." So I've added something, and I then I see that I'm having all these negative judgments about myself, but I think "I'm a Buddhist teacher, I shouldn't do that, now I'm really embarrassed", and now I'm suffering because I think I shouldn't be doing this, so that's a third arrow. And then I get angry thinking "Now I here I am embarrassed again, I should know better" and that's the fourth arrow. And so the arrows go on and on and on. But it's very important to distinguish between what belongs to life, what just comes with being a human being, and what are those secondary reactions we have to it that adds to the suffering. This is a really important part of mindfulness practice.

So maybe you come here today with a headache or a backache, those things happen, the Buddha had a bad back. You wouldn't believe it with his good posture, but he had a bad back and sometimes he couldn't give his Dharma talk, so he lay down instead and had one of his senior disciples give a talk. That's kind of nice, I like it. So, these things happen. But one of the things we want to be very careful about, like last week we talked about wanting to distinguish the commentary from the experience, we want to distinguish the reaction we have from the primary situation. Are we adding a second arrow? Are we attacking it, criticizing it, running away, how are we reacting to it that's different from just letting it be there in its simplicity. So part of some emotions belong to those second arrows. Anger sometimes is a second arrow, anger toward yourself. So there are a variety of emotions that belong to this world of second arrows, and again in Mindfulness we don't judge ourselves negatively for having second or third arrows, we try to wake up, we try to pay attention and notice what's going on. It doesn't matter if can finally wake up at the 130th arrow, it just matters that you wake up. Waking up means that you notice it, that you're aware of it and you don't add anything more...just, "Oh, ok, this is what I'm doing". Because if you get to the 130th arrow, and you say "This is terrible, I shouldn't be doing this", then you've

just added a 131st. Sooner or later you either just forget what you're doing and be distracted or you wake up and say "Ok, enough" and just step back and take in the bigger picture here.

So lets do a meditation. Take an alert, comfortable posture and gently close your eyes and then before doing anything else, take a few moments to notice how you are, how you're feeling, what's your emotional state, your mood. There is always an emotional state or mood present, even if you don't recognize it. So how are you?

....(silence)

And how are you about how you are? How are you relating to that? What are your judgments, thoughts, ideas, reactions, if any?

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Then if you do recognize how you're feeling, reflect a little bit about how your feelings, your emotional state, might influence how you relate, interpret, react to this period of mediation. If you're sitting here and you're kind of grumpy, then are you likely to interpret things in aversive ways as we go through here? If you're discouraged, are you likely to carry a little burden of being discouraged or feeling a little hopeless as you go about this? Is there some way in which your mood or emotional state could have an effect on this experience as we go forward?

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So then, take a few long slow deep breaths as a way of beginning here. As you breathe in deeply here, expand your rib cage, front, back, shoulders, feel the stretch. Like a massage. Then a slow long exhale where you relax and let go.

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Taking a deep breath in and relax as you exhale. And then let your breathing return to normal and scan through your body to see if there are any obvious places where you can soften the muscles. It might be possible to soften the muscles of the forehead, around the eyes and the jaws, cheeks, especially as you exhale, send a softening wave through your head.

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And also your shoulders, shoulder blades.

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Perhaps you can soften the muscles of your chest, ribcage area, letting go of any holding, pressure. Also it can be helpful when you meditate to let your belly be soft, hang forward, perhaps you can feel the weight of your belly and let gravity gently let it settle.

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And then within your body, as part of your bodily experience, become aware of how your body experiences breathing.

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And then see if you can compose yourself, your attention, your presence, around the experience of breathing around the place in your body where you feel the breathing as most pronounced. Settle around that area, compose yourself around it, and then begin to hang in there, hang out there, with the rhythm of breathing in, breathing out..the expansion and contraction.

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If your mind wanders away in thought, relax, relax the thinking mind and begin again with your breathing. Let go of what you're thinking about. If you can stay with your breathing and thoughts are in the background, let them stay there in the background quietly. You don't have to take care of them or attend to them, pick them up if in the foreground you can stay with your breath, breathing in, breathing out.

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Notice when you shift from a simple awareness of what's happening to getting involved in commentary or getting involved in reactions. And if you can tease that apart, then return to the simplicity of your breathing.

...

If you find yourself reacting to what's going on, it might be helpful to very calmly and softly in the mind name the reaction "reaction...reacting" or some other name. Maybe it helps kind of free yourself a little bit from being caught in it. And then after a few moments of recognition come back again to your breathing. Trust that for now its enough just to be aware of breathing.

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So now, let go of the focus on your breathing and instead, again, notice what is the emotional state you have, the mood, the mental state, or if there is a kind of reactive state that's present, very simply, see if you can recognize that reactive state and offer a kind of very simple awareness, like you're going to hang there with awareness, feeling what's happening, what you're feeling..

...

And then see if you can find out where in your body that emotional state or mood is most manifested, most expressed. What sensations or feelings in your body let you know that you're having this emotional state. It could be you're calm or agitated; it could be that you're impatient or content, could be you're peaceful, agitated, happy or sad, irritated, delighted, confused, eager. See if you can notice how the emotional state is expressed through your body, through sensations in your body.

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If your mood or emotional state changes or goes away, notice what replaces it. And as you do this, you can also very quietly label it or name it, letting the naming of it help you be simple with it, independent of it, but still feeling it.

...

So then for the last minute of the sitting, come back again to your breathing, and hang, hang out with your breathing, as if it's the most important place to be. Everything else can recede to the background.

(bell)

I'd like to say a few more words about the actual instructions for mindfulness. Generally we encourage people to put the breathing at the center of the meditation and with some encouragement to stay there because focusing on the breath can help stabilize the mind, help concentrate the mind, can help calm things down, and strengthen the mindfulness. There are a lot of benefits to staying with the breathing. But, if something else becomes more pronounced, more compelling than the breath, then the instruction is to let go of the breathing and take your meditative awareness and shift it to this other thing that is happening. Basically meditate with that, bring your awareness to that, cultivate your mindfulness, your present awareness on that experience. So if it's something in your body, some strong sensations in your body, then rather than thinking of the sensations as a distraction, we take them as just something new to develop our meditation on. So new meditators often have to deal with discomfort, so within reason, we simply move our attention to the discomfort and we hold it in awareness, explore it in awareness, trying to be really simple, not getting caught up in the reactions or aversions or fears we might have toward it, and just to be present for it. If there are compelling or loud sounds, again we don't treat them as distractions, but we treat it as listening meditation. Let go of the breath and in a calm way, open up and take in the sounds as long as they are there. Sounds always happen in the present moment, so you're in the present moment when you're with a sound and your mindfulness of sound. Be present for that, experience that fully.

So the same thing with emotions, if emotions become pronounced, compelling, or predominant then they become the meditation subject. So again, you let go of your breath and you take in the experience of the emotion. It's a little bit tricky with emotions, because some people get very easily entangled with their emotions. They get involved with them or they resist them or they judge them or they do something with them. The trick is to have this very simple awareness of the emotion as its going through us.

There are a number of steps or aspects to mindfulness of emotions.

The first one is the **recognition** that now an emotion has become predominate or compelling; now there's an emotion that needs our attention. Sometimes that's not so easy for some people because some people are a little bit disconnected from their emotions. So it could be that there is an emotion that is having a really big effect on us however we kind of dismiss it or don't really think it's important, or we think other things are more important like our thoughts or our stories. So there can be a dismissal of them or not valuing them. So part of mindfulness is to recognize when an emotion is present, when it needs attention. So the recognition is "oh here it is". Sometimes the emotion hits us over the head if it's really strong and clear so that the recognition part is pretty straightforward. So just recognize that you're having an emotional experience, a mood or something

The second step I like to call **acceptance or allowance**. And this is not being in any kind of conflict with the emotional experience you're having, so allowing it to be there in its freedom, to be there as it is. Meditation practice is a safe place to have your full range of emotions. You're welcome when you meditate to have murderous rage. Now I don't know if it's such a good idea in other areas of your life, you might have to be wise in other areas of your life, how much you show it. If you have murderous rage toward your boss, maybe it's not so wise to let it be there. But meditation is this beautiful place, this safe place, you're committed to not moving! (laughter) So you can just let it course through you and let it be there as it needs to be.

STUDENT-1: Is murderous rage a second arrow?

GIL: It's possible it's the 130th arrow, but the point is, if it's there, if you think "oh it's the second arrow, it shouldn't be there", then you've added the third arrow.

So once its there, we give it permission, to just let it be there. So sometimes I call it acceptance, allowance, non-conflict, giving it permission to be there.

For some people, that's a huge training, to train oneself or develop oneself to be present for an emotional state while giving it permission to be there. Permission for it to be there is certainly not the same as resistance, judging it or being in conflict with it, but it's also not the same thing as giving in to it. So if you've heard that in meditation you can allow murderous rage, so then you think "ok, I'm really going to pump it up and get into it because it feels so good, Yes!", that's kind of getting entangled with it, that's not simplicity of awareness either. So the idea is not to add on to it, to fuel it, to get engaged in it, but also not to repress it. So mindfulness meditation offers this wonderful middle way, a third alternative to either expression on one side or repression on the other. If you're expressing it, then you've gotten involved, if you're repressing it, then you're entangled. But what we're trying to do in sitting still, in mindfulness, is just let it be there, neither repressed nor expressed. To some people, this is a strange idea, because expression is what it is.

So the first step is to recognize its there, the second is to allow it or accept it. It takes awhile to learn that. Don't think you can do it overnight, it varies in how long it can take to learn to do that.

The third step is to **name it**, the mental noting that is often done in our tradition, using a simple label. As in the ancient folk tales, if you name the dragon, the dragon loses its power. Or in some traditional cultures, you're given a birth name and you shouldn't tell your birth name to anyone because then they would have some kind of power over you. There is power in naming, there is something about naming our experience which sometimes takes the power away from our experience, the power that comes from being identified with it, being entangled with it, being reactive with it, or feeding it or something. So very simply, in a very simple, calm way (as calm as you can be in your mind) just name it "anger, anger" or "happy, happy" or "sad, sad, sad". The idea is that with naming it, you're trying to name it from a place in your being where you're not caught by it, not lost in it, not being swept up in it whatever it might be. So if you do the mental noting and when you're happy, you say "ahhh haaaaappy", then you're in it. Just

say “happy” very simply. If you’re angry and you say “grrrrh anger”, you’re in it, just say very simply “anger”. So try to find that place in you that’s not entangled, not caught in the experience. So you’re not repressing it or not pushing it away, but just finding that adult-like place that can just be present in a stable way. Also, the mental noting has the function of being a gentle encouragement to you to stay present. So when there’s an emotion, they don’t disappear that quickly usually, so the emotion stays for awhile, you can just keep naming it “angry...angry...angry”. It’s also a little bit of an encouragement to stay there because the mind has such a tendency to wander off.

One of the strong places it can wander off in where there are emotions is that it can wander off into the story. Some emotions are strongly connected to stories, in fact, I can be sitting meditating minding my own business peacefully, and there is the sound of a car driving by. And it reminds me of the kind of car that rear-ended me 32 years ago. Then that anger wells up and it’s partly because of the story “Why did they drive that way? Why didn’t they stop? I should have given them a piece of my mind” and pretty soon I’m like in this other world.

I’ll tell you a story from when I taught a retreat many years ago. I teach week-long, 10-day meditation retreats, and there was a woman who had been coming to retreats for a long time. She was a very troubled woman, emotionally troubled, and she’d been struggling with her emotions for a long time. One morning we had what seemed like a magical sitting. We were all meditating together, students and teachers, and there was a beautiful winter light coming through, very peaceful, very clear and you could feel the whole room got so still and clear and peaceful. The bell rang to end the sitting and no one wanted to get up, it felt so good. But it happened that she and I had an interview right after that sitting. She came in and sat in her chair and it was really clear that she was in an unusually peaceful clear state and I felt the same way, didn’t seem like we had to say anything, we could have just sat there looking at each other, what do you say when you’re at peace? Then we said a few words, and then she said to me, “yeah this is nice, but it wasn’t this way yesterday, yesterday I..” and as she began telling me about yesterday, her features and her emotions got all completely wrapped up in it and I thought oh no, why does she have to start telling me the story of yesterday? Why couldn’t she just stay with telling me what was here? So it’s an example of how story-making can really entangle us in this whole world of emotions. So what we try to do when we do mindfulness of emotions, we try not to live in stories. Stories connected to emotions are usually not real-time stories, not about what’s happening here-and-now. They’re usually about what’s happened before, what might happen in the future. They’re a little bit virtual reality. The idea in mindfulness meditation is to not get sucked into the story, because you’ve spent a lifetime in the story. The idea is to come back. So by naming the experience we’re more likely to stay in the present “anger...anger...Oh, that person!...come back...come back, that’s the story...anger...anger”. Come back and be with the immediacy of what’s here, with the anger. Be with the emotion of anger, don’t be with the story that’s fueling it or connecting to it or that feeds off it or is feeding it.

So, there is the **recognition**, the **acceptance**, the **naming**. Then the last thing I call **investigation**. That is, once you have the ability to recognize, accept it and start naming, be curious about it, start investigating “what is this experience?”. Don’t just hold it at a distance, but get close to it, to find out what is that, how is it really experienced? How do you experience it in your stomach, how do you experience it in your jaws? How do you experience it temperature-wise? What’s actually being experienced when you’re angry? What’s the energy like in your system? Begin to explore it. That exploration is a movement of the mind which is adult-like, independent, not cowering or reacting to the experience, but simply “What is this?”

So one of things that is very important in working with emotions is to explore how is it experienced in your body. What’s the physical manifestation of it? And virtually every emotion you’re going to have is not only going to be expressed in your body, but IS your body. You wouldn’t know what emotion you were having unless there was some kind of sensation in your body that corresponded with it. So some people, when they are afraid, their stomach will get tight, tightness will be there, and the shoulders get

lifted up. Or if you're happy, you feel this softness that goes on, this warmth and tingling. If you're sad, you can feel the heaviness, the weight, the droopiness. So there's something that shifts and changes. Bring your attention closer to that physical side of the emotion, feel the physical side of it. Its one way of avoiding getting caught up in the story, because the body is not a story. You're still connected with the emotion, you're present for it, you're present for how it is in the body.

Also, the body in a sense has a wisdom of its own. Its kind of like, some emotions are fueled by the story making mind. When they are experienced or manifested in the body, the body wants to go to homeostasis, wants to go to healing, wants to come back to peace. So when I teach mindfulness of emotion to kids, like 7-8 yrs old, I have them act out their emotions, like "Show me how you are angry". It's really cute, a room full of 7-8 year olds trying to show me how angry they are. Then I say "Ok now everyone freeze" And they all freezing in different positions, then I say "Ok, now to stop being angry, what do you need to do with your body?" and then they can all relax their bodies. So it's a way of showing them how to pay attention to emotions, to connect with their bodies, and how their bodies can be an aid to having some mastery over their emotion. And they love it, its so much fun.

So the body doesn't want to stay tense, it wants to relax. So for those emotions that involve tension, there's a movement that the body wants to make. If the body's left alone, the body will relax. The body doesn't relax because the mind keeps reasserting its tensions, its resistance. So if you can drop down into the body and feel the emotion as a physical experience, you're kind of getting out of the way, the body has a chance to open up and allow the emotion to course through, to move and to evolve and resolve and dissolve. So in that line, I'm fond of the fact that the word "emotion" in English comes from the Latin word for motion, movement. The "e" part means "out", so "move out". So all emotions are processes. They are processes that want to move out, unless they are frozen. So resentment is frozen anger. So, to misquote Charlie Brown "bad grief" is frozen grief. Grief is grief and everyone experiences that sooner or later, then there is grief that gets frozen. So certain emotions get frozen and then the process, the evolution, the movement doesn't happen. But left alone, all emotions want to move through. That's one of the reasons why sometimes with certain emotions we say "Well, I just have to give this time." If you give them time, things can sort of settle and to some degree take care of themselves.

So if we can experience the emotion as an embodied experience, the emotional life has an easier time to move through us, to change and shift. And it shifts in different ways, sometimes it resolves and quiets down, sometimes it gets stronger before it gets freer. So say sometimes you feel a little bit of irritation, and then that irritation, because you're present for it, explodes like this big volcano of huge fury. The fury was very deep inside and finally has a chance to come out. So it's not all a linear process where as soon as you're mindful you're better. But this wisdom, this kind of inner movement, this trust in mindfulness, if you can trust it, it can go in all kind of different directions. And we consider that part of the healing, or part of the resolution that it has to take. So just stay present, stay present and watch it go through its shifts and changes.

So in that last meditation, I asked you to notice your emotions, your emotional state, your mood. So what was that like for some of you? What did you notice when you actually brought your attention to that part of your experience?

STUDENT-2: I noticed that when I'm sitting here, it's always generally pleasant, it's when I go out there that things arise, so I always have a very nice connotation with sitting at IMC. But what I've noticed with meditation without going out there, what you described last time, where you get more space & there is less reactivity to what comes up. So I'm not usually as calm or whatever out there, but I have a little bit better handle on what arises, what's coming up. I can see a little bit better.

GIL: Great, thank you.

So someone else, something about what happened when you focused on your emotions in the last sitting.

STUDENT-3: When you asked us at the very beginning to identify our emotion, I actually came in tonight feeling very low, and I tried to find it like you said, where it might lie, and I found it up in the front part of my forehead. And I put a label on it, I identified it, like oh there it is. But I didn't know what to do with it. I tried not to change it, not to focus in on it too much, but it's still there.

GIL: Ok, so it's a good question. And one place to start with investigating that question is do you have some expectation about what's supposed to happen? Like it's supposed to go away. So that's commentary, that's extra. So it's very important to recognize that that is operating because things like that can operate very subtly in the background and have a big influence on your experience. But if it's not acknowledged, it can be a kind of irritant on your whole system. If you acknowledge it, then maybe you can drop it, and if you drop the expectation that it's supposed to go away, then maybe it's less of a problem. That's one thing. The other is, it's not the meditator's job to be concerned about how long something stays. The meditator's job is simply to use whatever is happening as the vehicle, the means, for developing greater mindfulness, for staying present. So we often come with ideas like it shouldn't be there, I'm supposed to fix things, something is supposed to happen. In mindfulness meditation, we often try to free ourselves from the idea that something is supposed to happen. We're just trying to use whatever is happening as a way of developing stronger mindfulness. So if you're feeling low, ok, it's kind of a drag, but the task today is to cultivate mindfulness of the low feeling. So first we can look at are you really recognizing it accurately? Are you accepting it, is there a sense of allowing there, are you not in conflict with it? Then name it gently in order to stay with it. And then you can start investigating it more. You can go and feel the different sensations more in you head. You can look more closely, from below, from the top, explore it different ways, feel your way into, is it just your skin or does it feel like its deeper in your skull. If you bring your attention in really close, what does it look like, what does it feel like, does it feel like a solid thing or is it made up of a pattern of different sensations that are arising and passing? When you get close, what happens to it? Generally when you get close enough to some physical experience, it begins shifting and changing, then you stay with the shifts and changes. Does that make sense?

STUDENT-3: It does make sense. I think one of the hardest expectations that I'm dealing with..I did your exercises on the pink sheet of eating very slowly and just being with yourself when you eat, and my god that was one of the hardest things I ever had to do (since childbirth!) (laughter). I do have an expectation that the end of my meditation that I will be at peace or more peaceful and that's a very hard expectation to let go of.

GIL: Yes it is. Its to be expected that people have that expectation, because we often advertise meditation as being peacemaking and calming and its nice when it happens, and ultimately we want that to happen, but if it happens too quickly sometimes we mess up the whole deeper psychological and spiritual process that we need to go through. So for example I've know people who have gone through very difficult meditation sessions, sometimes for a whole retreat, and they end up the meditation session thinking well that was a waste of time, I should have gone for a walk or watched television or something. And then they come back some time later and say you know something, that session or that retreat was so hard for me, but what I learned, was I learned how to stay present in difficult situations. I didn't know at the time how useful it was, but later I was in the hospital and it was an awful time and everyone was angry with each other but because I had hung in there with that difficult meditation, I learned something about hanging in there in that difficult situation where I had to hang in there and normally I would have made a mess of it. So sometimes what we think of as a bad meditation, an angry, upset, painful meditation, is actually better than a calm one. So maybe I shouldn't say that in an intro class, but it's the case.

STUDENT-3: Well I had anxiety, so I thought, well that's inappropriate, its inappropriate to be so anxious in meditating so I tried breathing and I thought ok the anxiety will go away and then once I was breathing alright I was so anxious, so you said, ok just go with that, so I thought Ok, I'll just breathe. It was alright, it was just what you described, a big wave came and I had to think about that, and when it got really scary I was breathing, so I learned to separate from that and at least keep breathing.

GIL: Beautiful. It can give you a lot of power in your life to have that ability. There's a practice I teach people sometime that I call "riding out an emotion" or "riding out the desire". This is good for people who have addiction issues, or it could be anything. Wait till you have a really strong juicy desire and when that time comes, sit down in a chair, and don't give in to it, ride it out. All the lawyers of the mind come out and will explain why you have to go do something, and you quiet the lawyers, and then the publicists come out, the commercials come out, and all this tremendous surge of energy, this tremendous compulsion, really powerful, but you're committed like being at the rodeo, you're not going to fall off your horse, and sooner or later, its guaranteed, the wave will kind of crest and you'll find yourself on the other side. And you'll get calm eventually. And the people I've known who have hung in there through a really good wave, and watched it come to the other side, have felt so empowered in their life, "wow, I can be stronger than my addiction, than these very strong emotions, I can learn how to breathe through it, how to be present for it."

GIL: Did somebody else have something to say?

STUDENT-4: Mine was very similar to the first one, I came in feeling irritated, then when I gave my irritation some attention I felt quite sorry for myself and then I felt sad, and I was annoyed because I usually feel better when I'm meditating, and I didn't do as well when you said label reaction, or did you say to label what reaction it was?

GIL: Either one, you can name it reaction. The labeling can be very helpful, but its not very helpful if you spend a lot of time trying to figure out what the right name is, what the right label is, trying this and that. So if it's not obvious, just say "reaction". Or if it's not obvious what some emotion is, you can just say "emotion". I remember once I was feeling off, I didn't quite know what was going on, so I went and laid down, and because I know how to do this practice, I went into my body and felt this awfulness, and I could feel that I couldn't exhale all the way, so I felt that for awhile, and somehow it popped into my mind that I was depressed. And as soon as I named the depression, the chest relaxed. But at first, I just started noting "off, off" and I was just content with that and then at some point the clarity came, but it came on its own, it wasn't as if I was guessing or analyzing. Keep it really simple.

GIL: Does someone else want to share?

STUDENT-5: I woke up this morning and I felt something and I labeled it fear. I told myself where it was in my body, wrote about it at work and then I thought about the fourth step of investigation. I came here, we meditated. You said pick an emotion and I tried to reach for that one from this morning, but it wasn't there and I had no emotion to pick, so I thought that was interesting, wow. Then I got stuck on investigation and I thought now that I've done these three steps shouldn't something be happening? Shouldn't I be asking fear questions? Shouldn't I be doing more investigation of those body symptoms and I just didn't know what to do after that. I guess I wasn't supposed to do anything.

GIL: Yeah, nothing has to happen in this practice. The idea that something is supposed to happen is just another commentary another judgment, an idea. Nothing is supposed to happen. If something happens, that's ok, but don't burden yourself that something has to happen. Just be present, ok, nothing's happening, now I'm bored, now something's happening...now I get to do boredom meditation. Ok, I've been told that I have to take boredom as my subject, so I guess I'll just write my PhD on boredom, get to know it really well, really feel that. Free yourself from the idea that something is supposed to happen, but on the other hand there is always some mood that is going on, but it might not be something you

recognize very well, nothing you're familiar with, very vague or something you don't think of as a mood or emotional state. There was one woman on retreat who came to an interview with a teacher and said "I'm feeling something very strange. I don't quite know what it is". The teacher said "Keep investigating it, keep being present". And she came back the next interview a few days later and said "I discovered what it was..I'm calm! And I've never been calm in my life before so I couldn't recognize it." (laughter)

STUDENT-6: This feels like a stupid question but I have to ask it. I wasn't feeling an emotion but I was feeling sleepy. So at some point when you said see if you have an emotion, I said I'm sleepy and stayed with that.

GIL: That's good. Being sleepy is maybe not an emotion, but being tired or having sloth and torpor may be a kind of state you're in so you can go in and explore that. Emotion, mood, mental state—it's kind of a wide field. And this is very interesting because the word emotion is really big here in the West but there is no easy word in Buddhist languages for the English word emotion. You can't easily translate it. So what does that mean, Buddhists don't have emotions? It's like the pie of human experience can be divided up different ways. English divides it up in a particular way and has this pie section called the emotions. But it's kind of a generalization, it's very vague and general what an emotion is. So it's interesting to explore what makes up an emotion. Emotions are made up of physical sensations, sometimes motivations, desires, things we want, stories we tell each other, feelings of pleasant or unpleasant. They are kind of composite anyway, not a unitary or singular thing. So you can explore the different aspects of them.

Now one of the things about emotional states or mental states is that Buddhism distinguishes those which are born out of reactions or reactivity or are born in relationship to things in the world, versus emotions which arise when the inner system (the heart, the mind, the body) are open channels, free and present and stable but not reactive or responding to anything.

So many emotions have to do with our relationships with things around us. So for example if I win the lottery, if I follow the usual pattern, apparently according to scholars who've studied it, I'll be really happy at first and then after a year I feel pretty miserable. So the happiness and the misery have a lot to do with my relationship to things in the world. So when I was 13 it was 1967, for those of you who are old enough to remember that wonderful time, and I was living in a little town in Italy. I'd come from California and I had the longest hair of any guy in that little town. And I was the only one with blue jeans. And having long hair back then was a big deal, for guys. So I was really cool. (laughter) So I went around town with a good feeling about myself, it's good, it's great. Then in the summer I came back to Los Angeles, and there was a lot that happened in California in the summer of 1967 and I no longer had the longest hair of the guys. So I went to school and I started pulling my hair, trying to get it longer, because I was so uncool. And they had figured out somehow to put their jeans through the washing machine 50 times, and some people put their jeans out in the road where cars would drive over them, and people cut them up and patched them up. And I just had plain blue jeans, and I was no longer cool. And I felt kind of inflated, kind of embarrassed. The only thing that happened was that I had crossed the Atlantic. And my energy level and my mood were so different. And that's an example of how my mood and my emotional state existed in relationship to some other people.

So we have all these experiences in life, people like us, people don't like us, we have failure in life, we get what we want, we don't get what we want. There are all these things that happen, we get sick, we get healthy, so all these things can affect our mood or our emotional state. To some degree this is normal and healthy, to some degree it can be very unhealthy to be always very caught up in the world of always having our emotional state tied to or relating to the experience of how things are in the world. Because then you're just like a slave, you're always just pushed around by the winds of the world. So that's one kind of emotion that arises, emotions that arise because of our relationship with the world.

There's a whole other category of emotional states that have much more to do with not being in relationship to the world, when we're not caught in relationship, when we're liberated, we're free from all that for and against, the system is just open and flowing. There can be a tremendous amount of what can be called maybe "unrelated" joy or happiness or peace. Peace, joy, happiness that bubbles up not because anything is going right or wrong. It doesn't have a reason or a cause or condition or catalyst for it in how things are going in the world. And that's a phenomenal thing, to discover a happiness or well-being that's not dependent on how things are going. Part of the possibility as we do this practice and learn how to just be present for things as they are and free ourselves from the commentary and the reactions and just be present, is that in time you will discover this tremendous treasure, and source of tremendous power in your life also, this happiness that doesn't require you to win the lottery or have people like you or think well of you.

So there are these two different realms. Generally the shift over time for people who do meditation practice is they start shifting to having more and more of the unrelated emotions, away from the related or reactive ones. But the key to doing that, or making that shift, to the personal growth that happens during meditation, has a lot to do with just staying present in a very simple way, to be present for what is, don't be present for what you want to happen, just be present for what is, and just be as simple as you can for that. Try not to have an agenda, try not to have commentaries. If you do have them, all you're asked to do then is know that's there. Just know it's there, know it's there, know it's there, just stay in the knowing of "this is what's happening now, this is what's happening now" and see if you can avoid adding a second arrow. And if you add a second arrow, just be very allowing of that, "ok, there's a second arrow, wow, that's what a second arrow is like" as opposed to "shoot!" because then you have the third arrow. So it takes awhile to get the hang of it, but I hope you're getting the feel of how this practice goes. It's meant to be very very simple. Because it's so simple, it takes awhile to get the hang of it, because we always think we have to do something.

There is a handout for today, so explore it and practice with emotions over the next week. See if you can get into your emotional life, explore it, see how it works, both in meditation and outside. Also you might do people watching, see if you can pick up their emotions and see what's going on. Also you might hang out with some people, friends, colleagues, strangers, and ask them about their emotional life. Not so much what emotions you're having and the dark secrets of your life, but more abstractly, how do you relate to emotions? How do you work with them? What do you do with them? Maybe find someone you think is wise and ask them "How do you relate to emotions? What wise things have you learned about emotions?"

So, get into your emotions this week. The more you know about it the easier it is to be free of it and practice with it, but another reason is that the more you are familiar with the world of emotions, the easier it will be to understand next week's instructions, which is mindfulness of thinking. Because thinking has a very close connection with emotions, and it's easier to be free of your thinking if you know how to be free in relationship to your emotions. Thank you very much and we'll see you next week.