

## Summary of Session 5: **Allowing/Letting Be**

### **Turning Toward the Difficult**

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, as we discussed today, 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 in to 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 following session 5

### Audio: 'Exploring the Difficult'

- Practice **Sitting Meditation**: Use the audio "Exploring the Difficult" on days 1, 3 and 5. On days 2, 4 and 6 sit with 'Exploring the Difficult' *without audio*.
- Regular **Three-Minute Breathing Space**: Practice this 3 times a day.
- **Breathing Space: Extra Guidance** – now practising using the Breathing Space, with the extra guidance, in times of stress, when difficult/strong emotions are present (*responsive breathing space*).

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

### Jon Kabat-Zinn: 'Healing and the Mind' on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKCFeRL49Es>

This is a film (about 45 min long) we watch in session 5, about how Jon Kabat-Zinn started his 'Mindfulness based Stress Reduction' programme in the United States, working with patients with chronic physical pain and illness. Only the first half of the video is relevant to our course.

# Practice Record Form

Name:.....

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

Day / date	Practice (Yes / No)	Comments
Date:	Exploring the Difficult audio:  BS: 1 2 3  Responsive BS:	
Date:	Exploring the Difficult <i>self-guided</i> :  BS: 1 2 3  Responsive BS:	
Date:	Exploring the Difficult audio:  BS: 1 2 3  Responsive BS:	
Date:	Exploring the Difficult <i>self-guided</i> :  BS: 1 2 :3  Responsive BS:	
Date:	Exploring the Difficult audio:  BS: 1 2 3  Responsive BS:	
Date:	Exploring the Difficult <i>self-guided</i> :  BS: 1 2 3  Responsive BS:	