

***Session 5***

***Allowing and Letting Be***

*Contentment comes as the infallible result of great acceptances, great humilities - of not trying to make ourselves this or that, but of surrendering ourselves to the fullness of life- of letting life flow through us.*

Author: David Grayson (1870 - 1946)

# Allowing and Letting Be

We can often spend a lot of energy and effort trying to ‘not have’ unwanted experiences and feelings – and it may even work sometimes. However, when we are able to allow things to be as they actually are, not only do we save ourselves a lot of effort, we may also discover a better way to relate to these experiences as we are less likely to be hijacked by the automatic thoughts and responses that have kept us where we are.

We have been learning to use the focus of our breath as a vehicle to become aware of where our attention goes, and to bring our attention back to the single focus of our breath. This skill puts us in a position where we can develop a different, more accepting and more comfortable way to relate to our life experiences.

### Acceptance vs Resignation

Was the king in the story resigned to his son coming home, or was he accepting of it?

**Rain**

*Most of us have at some time been caught in a severe downpour of rain and have run for shelter, perhaps in a telephone booth or shop doorway. Sometimes we have simply been glad to be out of the rain. We stand for a while, hoping it will stop. We are dry at the moment, but as the rain continues we know that sooner or later we are going to have to face it; the thing we tried to escape is still there. We may go back out into the rain, cursing it gently as it drenches us. At other times, we may take shelter in a different way. We stand for a while, aware of being wet and not liking it much. We notice that we are hoping it will stop, but see that it shows no sign of stopping and realize that we are going to get wet. We note that being upset about it only adds to our discomfort. We stop clinging to the hope that it will stop raining. Doing this allows us to look more closely at the rain itself. There is something rather compelling about the way it is splashing off everything it hits. We go back out into the rain. It has not stopped, but our relationship to it has changed the whole experience.*

from Segal, Williams and Teasdale (2002)

Resignation is generally a passive putting up with something; it has an air of helplessness. Whereas acceptance is more of a letting the situation be what it is without immediately trying to change or fix anything, bringing an attitude of gentle curiosity to it. Most of the time the effort involved in resisting or avoiding an unwanted experience prevents us being able to see if alternative approaches may be possible. Through this acceptance, we create a space around our experience from which we can, if we choose, respond with greater wisdom.

### How can we be with our experience?

We can rarely find a new way of being simply by telling ourselves that we should be that way…e.g. ‘I should be more (or less) tolerant/loving/generous etc.’ Such thoughts tend to lead to judgements about our feelings rather than to any change or acceptance of how we are.

More effectively, we can learn to just ‘be with’ the discomfort of a situation that may create such thoughts. We can learn to hold in awareness whatever is pulling for our attention, and observe our reactions to it in our bodies. We may choose to do this with whatever comes up during our practice, or we may choose to deliberately bring to mind something that is bothering us, so that we can learn to be with it in our own time and respond to it more helpfully.

Holding a difficulty in this way helps us to realise that whatever it is, we can face it, name it and work with it.

## Advanced Breathing Space

Adapted from Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression by Segal, Williams and Teasdale (2002)

This can be used whenever you are troubled in thoughts or feelings as a mini-meditation in itself, or as a lead in to your regular practice.

### 1. Awareness

**Observe** – bring the focus of awareness to your inner experience and notice what is happening in our thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations.

**Describe, acknowledge, identify** – put experiences into words, for example, say in your mind, ‘A feeling of anger is arising’ or ‘Self-critical thoughts are here.’

### 2. Redirecting Attention

Gently **redirect** your full attention to your breath.

Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out.

You may wish to note at the back of your mind – Breathing in……breathing out, or counting Inhaling one, exhaling one, inhaling two….etc

### 3. Expanding Attention

Allow your **attention to expand** to the whole body – especially to any sense of discomfort, tension or resistance. If such sensations are there, then take your awareness there by breathing into them on the in breath. Then, breathe out from those sensations, softening and owning with the out breath. Say to yourself on the out breath, ‘It’s ok. whatever it is, it’s ok. Let me feel it.’

Become aware of and adjust your posture and facial expression.

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

# Home Practice

* Use the Advanced Breathing Space whenever you notice unwanted feelings. Practice it formally at least three times in the week, bringing an unwanted situation to mind if necessary.
* Practice a sitting mediation for at least 20 minutes each day if possible (or maybe two slots of 10 minutes) with or without a CD.
* Continue to use the ‘basic’ three minute breathing space regularly.

# Guidelines for Allowing and Letting Be Meditation

Start this meditation by settling into a dignified and wakeful position, allowing your eyes to close and focusing your attention on your breathing. Watching your breath, all the way, as it travels into your body on the in breath, and all the way out, as it leaves your body on the out breath. Stay with the breath for a little while as you settle into this meditation. Perhaps also allowing the sounds around you to just be in your awareness. There is no need to reach for them, just let them arrive and be aware of them, and be aware also of the silence behind the sounds.

In this practice we are learning to bring acceptance to our experiences. We are not trying to change anything, we are simply learning to be with whatever we find. This gives our experience more space to be in, and by doing this we may find a different way to relate to our experiences.

Now, bring to mind something that is giving you difficulty - a worry, a feeling, a situation - noticing what feelings arise in your body. Give your attention to those physical sensations, taking your awareness to whatever part of the body where you feel sensations most strongly. Use your breath to help you move your awareness, breathing in to that part of the body on each in breath.

Notice what it is you are feeling. Maybe resistance, or tensing or pushing away, or some other feeling. Keeping your awareness on this bodily sensation, say gently to yourself…..’It’s ok, whatever it is, it’s ok, let me feel it.’ Stay with the awareness of these feelings and your relationship to them, accepting them and letting them be. You may wish to repeat to yourself, ’It’s ok, whatever it is, it’s ok, let me feel it.’ On each out breath allow yourself to soften and open towards whatever it is you have in your attention, perhaps repeating ‘soften’, or ‘open’ to yourself with each breath out.

As you sit, keep your awareness with these bodily sensations and how you feel about them for as long as they continue to pull for your attention. You may wish to hold both the sensations and your breath in awareness at the same time, breathing with the sensations. And when whatever is there is no longer pulling for your attention , simply allow your awareness to return completely to your breath.

If no significant bodily sensations arise, just pay attention to any sensations that you notice in your body, whether they have a particular charge or not. If any sensations arise, simply watch the intensity of the sensation as it arises and falls, breathing into it as a way of bringing awareness to it, and as a way to soften to it.

Whatever it is, it’s ok.