

Compassionate Mindfulness of Body and Feelings

By John Makransky, drawing on teachings of Tsoknyi Rinpoche (two pages)

Compassionate Mindfulness of Body: Sit with a comfortably straight back, eyes open gazing downward, chin down, hands comfortably on lap. Take a long, deep, cleansing breath. Now come down from the thinking mind into the body, settling into the felt sense of the body as a whole. Bring awareness to whatever physical feelings most draw your attention: e.g. any place of tenseness, soreness, pain or pleasantness. Become aware also of any reactions you have to those feelings, like a wish for a painful feeling to go away. Without judging or trying to change these feelings or reactions in any way, just be with them in a gentle, friendly way, with a sense of acceptance and kindness toward all that is felt. (just a few minutes)

Compassionate Mindfulness of Feelings: Now bring to mind an unpleasant emotional feeling that is familiar to you, that you've been feeling recently. To help you bring it to mind, think of the situation that evokes the feeling: e.g. anxiety when you think of something you must do; an inner sense of urgency; feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities; feeling frustrated/irritable at someone or something; feeling sad, feeling fear. Notice how this feeling *feels*, not just in your thinking mind but within your being: e.g. the feeling of tightening up from a sense of urgency, a twinge of anxiety/fear, a queasy feeling of worry, a heavy feeling of sadness, a burning feeling of anger.

Bring awareness to the emotion as you feel it within, with a sense of deep acceptance and kindness, like a friend being quietly present to a friend, without being enmeshed in the feeling, without rejecting it, without trying to solve or change anything in it, without ruminating about why you have it. If there is a reaction of not wanting this feeling, of pushing it away, just be with this reaction in the same way, with a sense of deep acceptance and kindness toward it.

Be with any troubled feeling that arises like being with a troubled friend: without imposing any agenda on your friend, without trying to get him to change or go away, you are just quietly present to him, with warmth and kindness. Similarly here, don't impose any agenda on the feeling, to make it go away, change it or figure it out. *Just be aware of what it feels like within, with a sense of warmth and acceptance toward it.*

By being with feelings in this friendly way, a safe space is made for feelings to trust, open, and reveal further underlying feelings. Let semi-conscious feelings become more conscious in this way. Just accept whatever feelings further arise in a gently welcoming way, without trying to solve or change anything in them.

As this practice deepens, you may find your mind resting right in the marrow of a feeling, which may settle into a place of deep warmth, calm and peace from within. If that happens, just let it happen, without seeking to get such a thing to happen.

Letting Be In the last phase, let the mind release its frameworks, relax and fall completely open. With all senses open, let the mind be completely unconfined, unrestricted, wide open. Just be this openness. Let all patterns of thought and feeling that arise in this openness of mind relax, unwind, and release, like patterns on water, letting all be.

Tips for Learning this Practice

(1) This practice is done both in sitting meditation and throughout the day. Mindfulness of feelings is introduced above by bringing to mind a troubled feeling to help us initially connect to the practice, but we should learn to do this meditation at any time with *any* feelings: physical or emotional, unpleasant, pleasant, neutral, strong feelings, subtle feelings.

(2) Don't impose an exaggerated friendliness agenda -- just be with each feeling like a trustworthy friend listening quietly, with kindness, to a friend.

(3) It's ok to verbalize a feeling to yourself just a little ("oh, this is sadness," "fear," "anger," ...), just enough to help the mind stay in touch with the feeling, sensing how it feels in the body. Don't verbalize a lot more than that; don't ruminate on it or how to solve it. Just be gently aware of it, then notice the next feeling that opens up, and so on.

(4) Explore this practice during the day with any feelings that arise, including feelings you don't like. To be with unpleasant feelings in this simple way, without trying to distract oneself from them, is a gradual learning. So it's important to be patient with the practice and with yourself.

Reported benefits of this practice over time

(1) this practice helps the mind and its emotional energy deeply settle and calm, making a firm basis for all other meditation practices (of love, compassion, shamathā, wisdom)

(2) There is a healing effect from this practice. We are often at odds with our emotional feelings-- seeking distraction from troubled feelings or suppressing them. To be with feelings here in such an unconditional way helps them to relax deeply and unclench, experienced as healing within. The power to be with our own feelings with kindness/compassion becomes the power to be with others and their feelings with kindness and compassion.

(3) Ultimately feelings can thereby open into a ground of warmth, deep calm, and unconditioned well-being in the core of our awareness (Tsoknyi Rinpoche calls this 'essence love,' a quality of the mind's deep nature).

(4) when we experience suffering feelings, we tend to experience them as if they were the only reality here, which can lead to empathic distress when we are with others who are suffering, and to burnout. This practice reveals that suffering feelings are never the only reality here—an inner power of warmth and kindness is always also here, a larger reality of compassionate awareness that can embrace all feelings. To experience this helps prevent empathic distress and burnout.

Supportive readings:

John Makransky, *Awakening through Love* and website for the Foundation for Active Compassion, "audios, videos, texts link."

Tsoknyi Rinpoche, *Open Heart, Open Mind* and Tsoknyi Rinpoche website.

Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, *Medicine and Compassion*

Tulku Thondup, *The Healing Power of Mind* and *The Heart of Unconditional Love*

Pema Chodron, *Start Where You Are*

