



The “Turning Toward” Meditation for Difficult Emotions (transcript)

For the audio recording, see [The Turning Toward Meditation](#)

This meditation can be done either sitting or lying down and it’s designed to work with difficult emotions. There is another, similar, meditation that’s specifically for severe or chronic physical pain.

1. Beginning with Awareness and Kindness

As we begin, noticing the support you are receiving from what you’re sitting or lying on, paying special attention to the sensations of support. If you’re sitting, notice how your feet are making contact with the floor, how your buttocks are supported by the chair or cushion, how your arms and hands are resting... If you’re lying down, noticing how you are supported by the floor or bed, how your upper body, arms, legs, and feet are making contact with the bed or mat. Whether sitting or lying down, allowing your weight to sink down through these points of contact, and wherever possible, letting any tension drain down into the support and beyond... And as you’re sitting or lying here, letting any thoughts or images go, just feeling supported by what’s beneath you...

When you’re ready, noticing the breath...actually feeling the breath, through the movement of your belly or chest or shoulders, noticing how the whole body expands a little on the in-breath and relaxes a little on the outbreath, just letting your breath be your breath, knowing that you’re breathing just fine (you could even observe your breath the way you’d watch waves at the seashore... watching them go out and come back in, and flow back out again, smoothing the sand as they come in and out... you know, you wouldn’t demand that they go faster or slower, or that they be bigger or smaller... you’d just enjoy watching them)... and seeing if, in the same way, you can allow the breath to be just as it is, letting the breath just breathe itself... (pause)

2. Turning toward the Difficult: softening, allowing...

In a moment, we’ll turn our attention to something that is troubling you, something that’s not the way you want it to be. Until you’ve had experience with this process, it’s best to choose something that’s not huge, something that has enough charge that you have a definite reaction to it, but not the biggest thing in your life...

It could be a loss or a setback, something you don’t like about yourself or someone else, a physical or medical issue, or it could just be a chore or task you are dreading... and taking your time... letting yourself get a sense of what you could choose to work on, and just pick *one* of these, and not the biggest... there’s no wrong choice, whatever you choose is going to be right for this meditation...

Once you’ve found a situation or issue, see if it’s possible to get curious about this difficulty, dropping the natural tendency to move away from it, but paying attention in a special way, with kindness and gentleness, the way you might if you were with a loved one who was experiencing this...

See if you can identify the feeling about this situation. Is there Anger? Fear? Sadness? Impatience? Confusion? What would you call it? And if, for example, it was anger, rather than saying “I am angry or I am frustrated or I am sad” about something, see how it feels to say “I’m noticing something *in me* that is this way, that is angry or afraid or sad.” “I’m noticing something *in me* that has this feeling”. Just see how it feels to say it that way. This gives the feeling more room to move and you won’t identify with it as much. This way, you’re not labeling yourself as angry or fearful, you’re merely aware you have those feelings right now.

And as you say this, “Something in me is annoyed (or angry, or confused, or mad, or sad)”, whichever best describes the feeling, using your own words, seeing if you can notice where there might be a physical reaction to this. It could be a tightening in the shoulders or chest, tightness or queasiness in the stomach, pressure or tension of some sort, achiness, constriction, tension in the throat, heat in face, tightness in the jaw, just seeing where it is that it affects you physically, where you can notice it. Or if you can’t find a specific place, that’s fine - it could just be a general sense of unease you feel all over, or a tensing or readiness of the arms as if you were going to protect yourself or someone else, or of the legs, as if you’re getting ready to run... if you can, just allowing what you are noticing to just be there, simply acknowledging it, letting your awareness gently rest there, allowing it to be just the way it is, without demanding that it be any different...

... if it's possible for you, seeing if you can *soften* your reaction to the difficulty, to this situation, with gentle breaths, seeing if you can be with it the same way you'd be with a child or a pet whom you love and who is in distress... if that were the case, you would do this with tenderness, with gentleness, you wouldn't demand that your loved one respond differently than they are...

And if you like, you might even place your hand where in the body you're physically feeling the difficulty the most, *or*, on your heart or belly, meeting this experience with kindness, recognizing that this would be difficult or painful or challenging for anybody, holding it and yourself gently and with compassion ... and taking your time with this, there's no rush... (pause)

This is *softening and allowing*. Softening of your reaction to the feeling that you're having, allowing that reaction to be there, allowing the feeling to be there... all the while knowing that allowing it to be there doesn't mean that you like it, it's simply an acknowledgment that this *is* what you are feeling right now.

...as you do this, you may feel sensations and feelings coming and going, and noticing, if you pay close attention, that there may be movement, change from moment to moment, perhaps a tightening or loosening, you may notice heat, waves of energy, or images or impressions emerging... through all of this, seeing if you can bring a sense of kindness, curiosity, and compassion to your exploration...

...spending enough time here to make contact with what you're noticing and feeling, but not so much that you become overwhelmed...

When you do this on your own, or at any time during this meditation, if you do feel overwhelmed, you can return to breath, or simply sense into the physical support you have from the chair, or bed, or floor. And if it is still too much, you can always pause or stop the meditation, open your eyes and look around the room to orient yourself...

3. Seeking the Pleasant, the “good things”

Now, without trying to push the difficult issue away, taking a moment now, seeing if you can find somewhere in your life where things are generally okay, or maybe even good, something or someone you are grateful for. It could have to do with a loved one, a favorite pet past or present, a good friend, maybe an achievement in the past or present you are proud of, or a hobby or sport that gives you pleasure and satisfaction... or a quality or strength that you have and are rightfully proud of... it could even be something as simple as recalling a smile or a kind word someone had for you recently or in the past...

There may be several things or people or qualities you are grateful for that come to mind, and just letting them flow into your awareness, feeling the sense of gratitude and warmth... ... noticing where in your body you feel this the most vividly, maybe a feeling of warmth in your heart or safe secure feeling in your belly, or a softness around the face or eyes...

If there is a physical setting associated with these things or people you are grateful for, imagining being there in that setting, including what you can see and who might be around you. Even if being in that setting doesn't involve a lot of movement (like writing or drawing, or just sitting near a stream in the forest), imagining how it feels to be physically there, and if there is any movement involved, imagining how it feels to move in this way ...

Letting yourself spend some time here, reflecting on those people or things or qualities you are grateful for...
(pause)

When you do this on your own, you can stay here as long as you want, whatever feels right for you...

...and if you find yourself being drawn back to what's been troubling you, don't fight it, but allow yourself some soft breaths, breathing into this area of your life with gentleness and kindness, and when you're ready and able, gently bringing your awareness back to what you are grateful for, to the good things or people in your life... you could even let the breath be between these two areas, the pleasant and the difficult, just feeling the rhythm of your breath, the soft breath, breathing into both areas with gentleness and kindness...

...as you do this, you may notice that things may feel differently than they did before, that they are actually fluid and dynamic, they're not solid or fixed...

4. Broadening Awareness

...and when you're ready, seeing if you can broaden your awareness, like panning out with a wide-angle lens, including both the difficulty and what you are grateful for, so wide that there's enough space and room for both of them, without pushing away the difficult or clinging to the pleasant... shifting to an even wider, more inclusive

perspective that includes both the pleasant and unpleasant... including the entire body and all of its sensations.... and when you're ready, moving wider still, to include in your awareness the room or area you are sitting or lying in... you might notice that by widening your awareness, there's a sense of space, of freedom, a capacity for change and movement...

Letting yourself spend some a moment here with this wider perspective... (pause)

If it's not too much of a stretch, seeing if you can expand your awareness to include the building or natural setting you are in, right now,... and even wider to your neighborhood, your town or city... even further to your region of the country... The difficulty you began with may not have itself changed, but now it's part of something much bigger ...

...and as your awareness expands even further, to include the entire world, if that's possible for you, recognizing that at this very moment, there are others who are experiencing the same kind of pain or discomfort as you have been, and, in this way, you are not alone ... out of the many millions, billions, of people included, it's certainly true that some of them are experiencing the same sort of pain or difficulty that you are, with the same or even more intensity... The pains, the fears, the worries, are not yours to bear alone, they are, in fact, shared by others. There are others feeling the very same thing at literally the same time as you... you're not alone...

... if it seems possible to do this, you might see if you can imagine your awareness expanding even further, seeing the earth from space the way an astronaut might, that beautiful blue/white sphere against a velvety black backdrop, no visible borders, seamless, whole, alive, and *so* precious...

When you're doing this on your own, you could stay here for a while if you like, seeing the earth as this beautiful, glowing jewel, suspended in space...

...when you're ready, letting your awareness gradually return to your part of the world... to you, your body... how you are right now, feeling and sensing how it is to be in your body, right here, right now... coming back to "just" you, but with awareness still wide enough to hold both the difficulties and pleasures of your body and your life... (pause)

... and seeing if you can bring gentleness and kindness to whatever you're feeling right now, holding yourself with compassion and understanding... spending the next few unguided moments resting deep in the body, in the breath, and allowing any discomfort or unease to be soothed by the rhythm of the breath again, and again and again... (pause)

5. Opening... and the possibility of Responding rather than Reacting

We're near the end of the meditation, so if you would like to stay here longer, you can pause or stop the recording...

When you're ready, slowly opening your eyes if they've been closed, letting your attention move out to the outside world, taking in sight, sound, sensation, beginning to gently move your body and re-engage with the world... and in the minutes, hours, and days that follow, seeing if you can bring a fresh sense of curiosity, openness, and kindness to all that you encounter.

(bell)