



“Turning Toward” Physical Pain

(Option 2 for the Week 5 informal practice)

Do the guided [Turning Toward Meditation](#) at least once before doing this practice on your own.

This is similar to “STOP” (One Minute Breathing Space), except that in the middle, there is an intentional exploration of physical discomfort.

Beginning with Awareness and Grounding

Bring yourself into the present moment, grounding yourself by physically sensing into the support provided by the ground or floor beneath your feet, or what you are sitting or lying on. Then gently direct full attention to breathing for a few breaths, feeling each inbreath and outbreath.

Turning toward the Difficult (softening, allowing)

How would you describe the sensation? See if you can do this without calling it “pain” and be as specific as possible. For instance, is it sharp, cutting, dull and throbbing, burning, tight, achy? How big is this area of discomfort? How thick or thin is it? What texture would you say it had? What is its shape? Where are the boundaries? Spend a moment at the boundaries, beyond which there’s less or no discomfort. See if you can let the area just beyond the edge soften or relax, without trying to change the area of discomfort itself, just putting your attention at the edges, letting there be a softening there...

See if you can identify the feeling you have about this physical condition. Is there Anger? Does it feel unfair? Is there Fear that it might not get better, or that it will get worse? Sadness about how it’s limiting you? Impatience? Confusion? Use your own words to describe this feeling.

See if you can *soften* your reaction to the difficulty, 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. 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.

This is *softening and allowing*. Softening of your reaction to the feeling that you’re having, allowing that reaction 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.

Seeking the Pleasant

Without trying to push the difficult sensations away, scan your body for an area that’s not in pain, seeing if you can find neutral or even pleasurable sensations, as if you are an explorer looking for hidden treasure. It could be a sense of warmth in your hands, a pleasant tingling somewhere in your body, maybe a sense of release as you sink into your support, or maybe you’re just now noticing your right big toe or lower arm is pain-free. If you’re having difficulty finding someplace that feels okay, you might gently place your hand somewhere, for instance, on your shoulder or chest or head, the way you might to comfort someone you cared about, and if that touch felt comforting, sensing into that area. Or, you might find something that’s beautiful or pleasant in your immediate environment, like a plant, or a ray of sunlight, a piece of art, or a photo.

Broadening Awareness & Opening to the Outside World

In this step, you broaden your awareness, like panning out with a wide-angle lens, including both pleasant and painful areas. You are creating enough space and room for both, without pushing away the painful or clinging to the pleasant, shifting to an even wider, more inclusive perspective, including the entire body and all of its sensations.

Bring into your awareness the room or area you are in, letting your attention now move to the outside world, taking in the sights, sounds, and sensations around you, and when you’re ready, re-engage with the activities of your day.