

This third handout is a follow up from Class 2 of the “Art of Being Uncomfortable.”

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT EMOTIONS

These misconceptions were identified by class members. Please add them to the previous list in handout #2.

MISCONCEPTION ABOUT EMOTIONS	COMMENT
It's important for me to get rid of the emotion as quickly as possible.	Over time, your spiritual muscles: awareness, stability, and flexibility, all become stronger. As these muscles strengthen, you will be able to connect with an uncomfortable feeling. Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it won't kill you when it comes to emotions.
I don't know what I am feeling.	Confusion about emotions is not uncommon. This can mean that you need to allow yourself to stay with the feeling or sensation, whatever it is, and see if what it is becomes clear. This is not so much a misconception as it is being willing to be with yourself until something clarifies, if anything.

MISCONCEPTION ABOUT EMOTIONS	COMMENT
If I can't understand the cause of my feeling, it won't go away.	Drop the story and go to the feeling, go to the energy. Feelings, like everything else, are subject to impermanence: they arise, live out their life span, and disappear all on their own. Understanding may give some satisfaction and even distraction, but it does not address experiencing the feeling.
I have to hide what I feel.	This is a strong conditioning, perhaps learned during childhood when hiding your feelings may have been a wise strategy for you at the time. We all outgrow these childhood strategies. Now that you don't have to hide, learn to feel whatever you are feeling.
I get stuck on whether what I am feeling is appropriate or inappropriate to what has happened.	Just feel! Appropriate or inappropriate is your story about the emotion. The key here is to accept whatever feeling is arising regardless of what your ideas are about what a so-called spiritual person should or should not feel.
Add your own misconception:	Write your own comment:

STAGES OF CONTACT WITH EMOTIONS

Object	Come Closer	Experience Feeling Directly
<p>Make the feeling an object to observe. In this way, there is some distance between “feeler” and “object of feeling.” From this so-called distance, you can practice observing the feeling.</p>	<p>Over time, you can allow the gap between you and the feeling to lessen. This is especially true of emotions that are particularly challenging for you. There is no need to force anything. You are in charge. Over time you may allow the feeling to come closer, so to speak. The gap can become quite narrow.</p> <p>In my own practice, I noticed that over time that I could experience anger very closely, but that there was still a gap, which I called the “saran wrap” gap, where you think you are feeling directly but there is still a slight gap.</p>	<p>You experience the feeling without any gap between you and the feeling (no saran wrap needed). Feeling is touched. This is an instantaneous experience. I often visualized this as “embracing the feeling.” I would visualize myself hugging the feeling to close the gap. Overtime, you will just experience directly.</p>

ATTITUDES TOWARDS EMOTIONS

The basic Buddhist attitudes can be summed up in this way: Aversion, Attraction, and Neutral.

Attitudes	Comment
Aversion	This is pushing away the feeling, which results in repressing or suppressing. Energy always finds its outlet, such as in an unexpected outburst or sometimes as symptoms in the body. If aversion is your particular habit, notice it and practice including by welcoming it in.
Attraction	This is moving towards the feeling and engaging it through story. It often results in clinging to the feeling or story about the feeling. You become identified with the feeling and invested in your story and identity about it.
Neutral	<p>This is staying still in the midst of the feeling and story about the feeling. This does not mean one is deadened to feeling, but rather you are feeling it either directly or at a distance and are aware of the story but not caught up in it.</p> <p>The strength of zazen is that your capacity to be present to feeling is enhanced. You will also become aware of aversion and attraction arising without being pulled in either direction. When you feel aversion or attraction arise, you are aware of it.</p>