

Week 5 - Dealing with Difficult Emotions or Physical Pain

The "Turning Toward..." Meditations



You can have compassion for yourself - which is not self-pity.
You're simply recognizing that 'this is tough, this hurts,'
and bringing the same warmhearted wish for suffering to lessen or end
that you would bring to any dear friend
grappling with the same pain, upset, or challenges as you.
- Rick Hanson -

What do you do?

So what do you do when you have a jittery feeling or a tightness or a choking sensation in your throat? If you're like most of us, you try to get rid of it. Maybe you curse it a little: "Why does this stupid feeling have to come now, just when I need to be my best?" Or maybe you put yourself down: "If I were a better person, I wouldn't freeze up this way." Maybe you do deep breathing exercises, or have a drink or a cigarette.

What doesn't occur to you, ... is to listen to the feeling, to let it speak to you.

And yet, when you let the feeling speak to you, you are allowing yourself to be open to the depth and richness of your whole self. Furthermore, when you listen to the feeling, it is much more likely to relax, release, and let you go on with what you're doing in a clear and centered way. You might even move forward in this area of your life in ways that surprise and delight you...

- Ann Weiser Cornell, from [The Power of Focusing](#) -

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The "Turning Toward..." Meditations

So far in this course, when some difficulty presents itself during meditation in the form of a thought, emotion, or physical sensation, we have been simply acknowledging it and then “firmly but gently” returning to the object of awareness (for instance, breath in the sitting meditation). This week, we introduce a new way to deal with difficult emotions or physical pain, called **"Turning Toward"** that involves intentionally exploring the difficulty rather than moving away from it. This is a powerful method, but it is deeply counter-intuitive, because the last thing we think we want to do is to move closer to what's been troubling us.

When used as an informal practice, **"Turning Toward"** can be thought of as a more nuanced form of STOP ("One-Minute Breathing Space") that allows for a fuller exploration of what's happening. Although such an exploration might sound scary and uncomfortable, this is a gentle process, and is done in a special way, one that draws on the skills of awareness and non-judgment that you've been building so far in this course.

The "Turning Toward" practices described here were inspired by [Vidyamala Burch](#) and her "Five-Step" model. For more about her work, see "Supplementary materials by Vidyamala Burch" below.

Videos

In **Turning Toward Difficulty** and **One Moment at a Time**, Vidyamala Burch describes this surprising and counter-intuitive way of dealing with issues, whether physical or emotional. In **The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage**, Susan David describes a gentle but effective way of "turning toward" difficult emotional issues. Also included is a short, but powerful video called **Holding Your Feelings Like a Baby** by Thupten Jinpa, the Dalai Lama's interpreter, and **The Three Components of Self-Compassion** by Kristin Neff.

NOTE: *If you are dealing with significant physical pain, be sure to also watch Tara Brach's **Working Skillfully with Pain** and **Guided Reflection on Inhabiting this Body** in the supplementary section.*

Readings

Responding to Emotional or Physical Pain describes how "Turning Toward" differs from more typical ways of dealing with difficulty. **"Turning Toward" Difficult Emotions** and **"Turning Toward" Physical Pain** are one-page descriptions that will be used for the informal practice this week. Tara Brach's **Radical Acceptance** comes from her book by the same name and talks about the two "wings" of Radical Acceptance, clear seeing and self-compassion, both very important for "Turning Toward". *If you or a loved one is dealing with back pain, **The Strange Case of Chronic Back Pain**, in the Supplementary section, is a must-read.*

Daily Practices

For the **formal practice**, we introduce the **"Turning Toward" Meditation**. You will do this the first two days of this week, and on the following days you can choose from any of the practices you've learned so far. The "Turning Toward" meditation prepares you for doing the "Turning Toward" informal practice.

The **informal practice** will be to practice "Turning Toward" an unwanted emotion or physical pain that may have come up during the day. *Be sure to print and review **"Turning Toward" Difficult Emotions** and **"Turning Toward" Physical Pain** to use as guides for these informal practices.*

Week 5 Materials

Video List

- ☐ [Turning Toward Difficulty](#) [and] [One Moment at a Time](#) - Vidyamala Burch [12 min]
- ☐ [The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage](#) - Susan David [16 min]
- ☐ [Pain x Resistance = Suffering](#) - Tara Brach [8 min]
- ☐ [Holding Your Feelings "Like a Baby"](#) - Thupten Jinpa [2 min]
- ☐ [The Three Components of Self-Compassion](#) - Kristin Neff [6 min]

Reading List

- ☐ [The Four Ways of Responding to Emotional or Physical Pain](#) - Dave Potter
- ☐ ["Turning Toward" Difficult Emotions](#) - option 1 for Informal Practice
- ☐ ["Turning Toward" Physical Pain](#) - option 2 for Informal Practice
- ☐ [Radical Acceptance](#) - Tara Brach
- ☐ [The "Felt Sense" Prayer](#) - as shared by Tara Brach

Practice Sheets

- ☐ [Formal Practice \[PDF\]](#) [or [WORD format](#)] - **"Turning Toward" Meditation**
- ☐ [Informal Practice \[PDF\]](#) [or [WORD format](#)] - **"Turning Toward" informal practices**

*Be sure to read the two "Turning Toward" guidelines in the Reading List before doing the informal practices.
All of the guided practices can be found through the top menu*

Supplementary materials related to this week's topic [optional]

- ["Inner Listening" - An Introduction to Focusing](#) article and videos by Ann Weiser-Cornell
- [Working Skillfully with Pain](#) video by Tara Brach [4 min]
- [Guided Reflection on Inhabiting this Body](#) video by Tara Brach [13 min]
- [Mindfulness and Painful Emotions](#) video by Steven Hayes [2 min]
- [The "PACE" of Pain](#) video by Amberly Lago (14 min)
- [Lower Back Ache?](#) New York Times article
- [The Strange Case of Chronic Back Pain](#) article by Ron Siegel
- [Back Sense: Halting the Cycle of Chronic Back Pain](#) book by Ron Siegel
- [Working with Pain - Mindfulness Strategies](#) articles, talks, and meditations by Tara Brach
- [How To Be Sick](#) book by Toni Bernhard
- [Dealing with Panic Attacks](#) video by Steven Hayes (3 min)
- ... [For the rest of the "Supplementary Materials" list, see <https://palousemindfulness.com/MBSR/week5.html>] ...

Once you have done at least six days of practice (over a span of a week or more) and feel that you've gotten the essence of this "Week" through the videos and reading, you are ready to go to [Week 6](#). It's not necessary to read/view any of the Supplementary materials - these are totally optional.

Practice Log - Week 5

FORMAL PRACTICE: Practice at least six times this week, doing the ["Turning Toward" Meditation](#) *the first two days of this week* and the other four days you can choose any of the practices you've done so far, including Turning Toward (Sitting, Body Scan, Yoga, Turning Toward).

INFORMAL PRACTICE: Practice with either *"Turning Toward Difficult Emotions"* or *"Turning Toward Physical Pain"*, focusing on an unwanted emotion or physical pain that may have come up during the day. The unwanted emotion or physical pain doesn't have to be severe, for instance, being mildly annoyed by someone/something that day, or a sore back or tense neck/shoulders.

NOTE about the Informal Practice: *If, at the end of the day, no unwanted emotion or physical discomfort comes to mind, ignore the "Turning Toward" format, and take the time to feel gratitude for something that happened that day (or even simply for the fact that you have no significant unwanted feelings!). We often don't take time to experience gratitude, so you might see if you can stay with the feeling of gratitude for a moment or two, and maybe even feel it in your body (e.g., warmth in chest, softness in belly, full heart, relaxed neck and shoulders...). You can make a short note about what happened when you did that somewhere on that day's row of the Informal Practice sheet.*

Date	Practice Comments (include which type of practice)
7th day & beyond is optional	

Informal Practice Log (“Turning Toward”) – Week 5

What was the situation? What were you noticing? (something that caused physical or emotional distress: “I don’t like this!”)	What was the strongest emotion you were feeling? (e.g. anger, sadness, grief, impatience, confusion, fear, shame, longing, despair?)	How would you describe this physically? (e.g. tightness in chest, queasiness in stomach, ache in heart, headache)	Where did you find something pleasant? (image, memory, past event, something grateful for, or part of body without pain)	What did you notice immediately AFTER having done this process (or what do you notice now)? (body-mind-emotion-action)
EXAMPLE (emotional) My boss harshly reprimanded me in an email. I went through all the things I could say in my defense. My shoulders were tense, my jaw clenched, stomach tight.	I felt vulnerable and angry, but mostly I felt hurt about how unfair he had been. At first, I was shocked, then felt like I had been kicked in the stomach.	There was a sinking feeling in my stomach, and a tightness because I really thought I had done a good job in the document he wrote to me about.	I remembered how much I love my work and how grateful I am for being able to do something that makes a difference in other peoples’ lives.	I softened around my stomach, noticed I could relax my shoulders. I was able to respond non-defensively to my boss.
EXAMPLE (physical) I was working at my desk and my back was killing me, but I had two hours more to go – I couldn’t leave.	Anger, impatience, wishing it would just go away. “How am I going to get through the day like this? I have so much to do!”	Compressed area in small of back, tight, binding, pinching. It’s oblong and about 1” thick in middle, tapers off at edge. Texture like granite.	My legs don’t hurt, they actually feel relaxed, pleasant... sensing warmth and ease there. Recalling nice interaction with a friend this afternoon...	I felt much bigger, that there is much more to me than this area in my back. The back pain didn’t go away, but I felt it as only part of me, not all, not so troubling.
7th day & beyond is optional				