

Mindy Newman
Acknowledging the Spiritual Bypass
Week Four: "Finding Our Way through Sensation"
May 22, 2017



Welcome to the last episode in this four part series on spiritual bypassing. Today, we're going to focus on a meditation practice for allowing us to start to get closer to sensation. As we've talked about before, spiritual bypassing is an attempt to avoid or sidestep painful feelings and interpersonal conflict and wounds from the past using spiritual practice like meditation or belief. It's really all about and it's motivated by the avoidance of pain and the avoidance of discomfort. Some of the ways that we're able to notice that we're spiritually bypassing is that we become numbed out physically and disconnected. We're up in our head and very over-analytical. We're really trying to get away from sensation and feeling.

An antidote to this is to use meditation to get closer to sensation and feelings, not to just watch them rise and fall in a distant way but to actually become familiar with them and get to know them. For today's practice, what we're going to do is do a mindfulness meditation on the second foundation of mindfulness. Mindfulness of feeling tone, which is meditating on pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations in the body.

By doing that, by becoming familiar with pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations, we start to change our relationship with them. This isn't just about watching them rise and fall in a distant kind of way. It's about getting close to what they actual feel like, to noticing our reactivity around them. With pleasant sensations, over time, what we hope to do is to cultivate an ability to really enjoy them fully, to fully experience them the most and in fact to be able to tolerate that they pass away without having to cling so much for them.

With unpleasant sensations, what we eventually hope to do is to be able to tolerate and really feel them as arise without having to increase our suffering around them by fighting against them or really trying to get away from them or attaching a lot of meaning to them, but to just really be able to actually experience them. They're still uncomfortable, but to just let them be there. With neutral sensation, what we hope to do is to notice the places that feel neutral or feel numb. There's actually something happening there.

This directly relates to spiritual bypassing because what happens when we're bypassing is we're entering that kind of numbed out or neutral state. By meditating on that, we're able to try and awaken a little bit. This practice helps us develop balance sensitivity where we cultivate a different and healthier relationship with all these sensations.

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Let's get started. Just come to a comfortable position, however you can sit comfortable for the next several minutes. When you're ready taking a nice deep breath in and using the exhale to let yourself settle in trying to let go of any expectations that you have to sit in a certain way, that there's a perfectly right way to do this. Just sit in any way that you can relatively comfortable be still although feeling free to make any adjustments as needed.

Just come into the sensation of your breath flowing in and out. Familiarizing yourself with your internal experience by starting with the breath. Wherever you feel it is totally fine, just allowing that rise and fall to happen naturally. Anytime your mind wanders, bringing it back.

From there, start at the top of your head and scan your body at a kind of relaxed pace, just moving from head to toe and becoming familiar with all of the sensations that are happening. You don't need to linger for too long on any one sensation, just starting to become familiar with how many sensations are happening right now at one time in the whole body.

Next identify a place in your body that you're feeling a sensation that you find pleasant. It might be a place where there's a very comfortable temperature, warmth or coolness, a pleasant tingling or just any place where the sensation, you really like it. Let your attention hover on that place. Notice how the sensation changes if it changes. Notice your reactions towards it. If you happen to get distracted, just come back to feeling that pleasant sensation, familiarizing and getting to know it.

Next identify an unpleasant sensation letting go of your focus on that pleasant sensation and transitioning to somewhere where there's a sensation that's kind of uncomfortable. As you begin to get closer to it, see what happens.

Next, let go of that focus on the unpleasant sensation and scan for a neutral sensation. That's a place that feels kind of blank or grayed out. It might feel numb or as though there's not a body part there. You know there's an elbow there, but you really can't feel that elbow at all. Let your awareness rest on that place and as you do so, see what happens.

Letting go of the focus on that neutral sensation, back out, away from that tighter focus to again getting a sense of the whole body. If you want to scan it again from top to bottom or you might just back away and get sort of a softened view of all of the different sensations you're feeling at one time, taking in the whole scope of experience

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Then bringing the focus back down to where we started, to the sensation of breath moving in and out. Please do take a moment to dedicate the benefit of your practice, to the benefit of all beings, as you're ready, opening your eyes. This meditation is beneficial to working with spiritual bypassing because just by going towards sensation, it takes us out of that avoidant numbing, bypassing kind of place towards moving towards experience. Then focus on unpleasant sensation really helps us start to cultivate an ability to go towards, become curious about, and engage with things that we'd rather avoid. When meditating on neutral sensations, what we're doing is really taking on that kind of bypassing place. That numbness is the state that we're in when we're trying to bypass or really trying to freeze out or avoid something.

By engaging in the numbness, you may have started to feel some sensations arising, some little pinpricks or something happening, starting to notice that the numbness is not actually that numb. In this way, we can start to move more towards feeling, become less avoidant, develop a greater balance sensitivity and be able to work more skillfully with things that come up.

I encourage you to do it regularly. If throughout these talks you've started to discover some of the ways in which you bypass, if you haven't started to discover some of those ways, probably do it anyway because it probably means you're bypassing also like the rest of us. I want to thank you for being part of this four part series. I hope you found it helpful. If anything about it hasn't been helpful, please feel free to disregard that and take what's helpful and leave the rest. Thank you.