

## **Working with Physical Pain**

May 17th, 2018

### **Goals of working meditatively with pain**

Meditation is not a cure for pain. It is a tool with which to be able to experience the pain without suffering so much from it.

There are two realistic and achievable goals of working with pain:

1. Reducing the perception of suffering as a result of the pain.
2. Discovering the “taste of purification” within the pain.

Suffering = Pain x Resistance

Purification = Pain x Equanimity

•

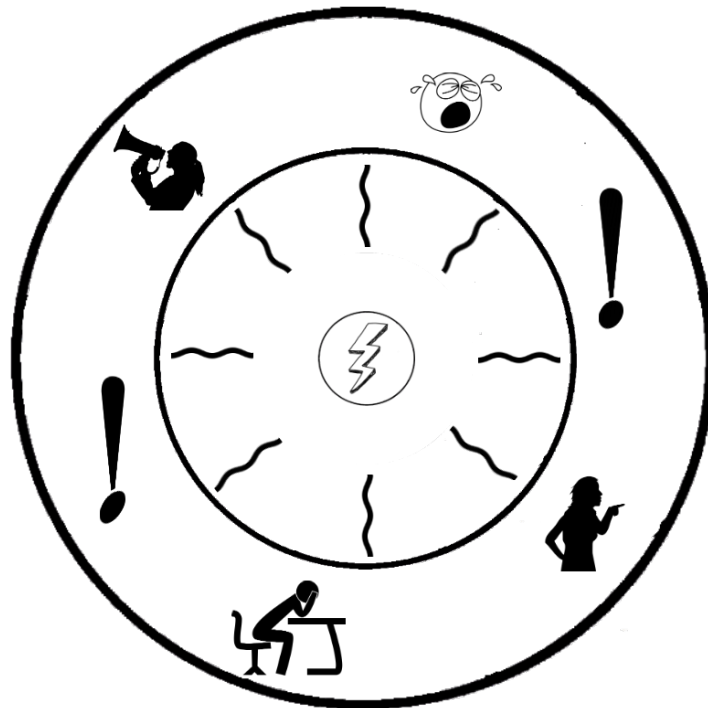
- *Resistance* is the friction we put into the pain process; the aversion, fighting, and so on; not allowing the pain to flow freely.
- *Equanimity* is the absence of such resistance; the allowing of the pain to be present, as well as all the consequent physical and emotional reactions.

Therefore, the goal of meditating with pain is to reduce our resistance to and to increase our equanimity with the whole experience of the pain.

## Sensory Categories

In order to bring *equanimity* to the experience of pain, we must also have a lot of *sensory clarity*. The pain of course is experienced in FEEL OUT space, but our reactions to the root pain sensation can also arise in SEE and HEAR (both IN and OUT) spaces. Additionally, pain causes three layers of experience:

- The **local intensity** of the initial pain sensation.
- An additional **global spread** of other physical sensations (which may or may not be subtle) throughout the rest of the body, radiating or resulting from the local intensity.
  - In severe cases, global spread can also appear in SEE OUT or HEAR OUT (blurred vision, ears ringing, etc)
- Your **subjective, emotional reactions** to the first two.
  - The subjective reactions appear is SEE IN, HEAR IN, and FEEL IN



## The Pain Processing Algorithm

### Summary

1. **Observe subjective reactions.** This is the most obvious source of actual suffering.
2. **Observe the global spread.** This is a root of extreme unconscious resistance, and therefore is typically responsible for the bulk of perceived suffering.
3. **Observe the local pain itself,** focusing on change (impermanence).
4. **Experience the entire body** as the splash-ripple of activation from pain to spread to subjective reaction. The process becomes a clear smooth motion resulting in release of energy as the “waves” hit the “shore” of the edges of perception.
5. **Asses and repeat** if necessary. If often takes multiple rounds of the process.

### Detail

1. **Observe subjective reactions.** *Second-by-second* label your subjective reactions to the pain. Note that unlike standard noting procedure, you are noting your reactions as quickly as they arise, each moment, and are not taking time to soak in. Be sure, however, that your noting is still the clear noticing and acknowledging of each subjective response. Try to infuse each note experience with a gentle matter-of-factness rather than judging or fighting it. Use the following inclusive labels:
  1. Feel (in)
  2. See (in)
  3. Hear (in)
  4. See and Feel
  5. Hear and Feel
  6. See and Hear
  7. See-Hear-Feel
  8. None

Notice how the sense of “I” increases as subjective reactions intensify.  
Notice how the sense of “I” decreases as subjective reactions decrease.  
Notice that when there are no reactions, there is no “I” there to suffer.

2. **Observe global spread of physical sensations.** Let your awareness freely float in the areas of FEEL Space that are not experiencing the primary pain.

- a) If you detect any secondary sensations caused by or resulting from the primary local pain: (anything from muscles tightening around the pain, clenched jaw, headache, to subtle, wispy yukky feelings in other parts of your body, etc):
  1. Continually note any changes to these sensations (intensity, shape, location, etc).
  2. Infuse these sensations with equanimity (that matter-of-factness, not judging or resisting)
- b) If you do *not* detect any secondary sensations:
  1. Stay with those parts of the body and enjoy the small relief caused by the lack of pain there.
  2. This can require a lot of effort, but by staying with the pain-free areas, you are both experiencing some relief and building concentration power.

3. **Focus on the Primary Pain.**

1. Continually notice any change in the pain. Become curious about the activity. Notice if you start to experience the pain as a moving “doing” rather than a solid “thing.”
2. If the pain does not change, notice if it is solid because of inward pressure, outward pressure, or both. Allow yourself to yield to the pressures. These are the fundamental expansion and contraction forces of existence.

4. **Note local-global interactions.** Place your attention in the whole of FEEL space:

1. If you are drawn primarily to the primary pain only, note *local*.
2. If you are drawn primarily to secondary sensations only, note *global*.
3. If you are drawn to both at the same time, note *both*.
4. Allow subjective reactions to remain in the background, focusing only on physical sensations.
5. Continue to infuse equanimity into every sensation.
6. You may eventually find yourself in a pattern of “local-global-release (those sensations vanish).” If this occurs, let yourself sink into the rhythm. The pain experience becomes a peaceful motion like gentle waves on a beach. The pain remains but the suffering is gone.

5. **Assess and repeat as necessary.** It may take multiple cycles of the process to find that calm rhythm.