Making Choices to Respond Rather than React

1. Holding Space for Unpleasant Emotions

Welcome to this guided meditation intended to allow you to become a compassionate vessel, through which emotions may flow freely, at their own pace.

 **As human beings, one of our primary drives is to survive. For this reason, we are conditioned to stay away from situations, which may cause us to feel unpleasant emotions. Anything which may trigger a negative state is perceived as a threat. Whether we are aware of this or not, we tend to direct our entire focus towards more positive emotions and thoughts, while we almost systematically avoid negative feelings. In this way, we fail to understand that anxiety, stress, or even fear, are all part of automated responses learned by the brain. By welcoming negative feelings and sensations in our bodies without judgement, we not only realise that these are not fore-telling of the outcome of a situation, but we can also free ourselves from any past maladaptive habits, or patterns of behaviour.**

 **[PREPARATION]** For this guided meditation, you may choose a space that feels safe to you, where you may express yourself fully. As you prepare your space you may light some candles, slightly open the window to let some fresh air in, or put on some comfortable clothes.

Whenever you are ready, look at your surroundings. You may be accustomed to them, or they may be completely new to you. Whatever the case may be, allow yourself to explore through your eyes and senses, as if you were there for the very first time. Move around. Listen to your body. Where do you feel called to rest?

 Now that you have found a comforting place, find a position that will allow your e-motions (energy in motion) to flow freely and without constraints. Perhaps you may feel like uncrossing your legs, wiggling your toes, stretching your arms, rotating your neck and wrists, or caressing your skin. Whatever you may feel called to do, know that it is preparing you to hold space for your emotions so that they can speak to you.

**[BREATH]** As you have slowly adjusted to your surroundings and body, it is time to reconnect with your breath and slowly return to your centre. Gently rest the palm of your hand on your stomach. Notice the rhythm of your breathing. Maybe you are not able to perceive it quite yet and that is fine.

 Take a soundful deep breath in through your nose, down to your abdomen, and out through your mouth. Visualise it as it fills and renews your entire body. You may repeat this cycle as many times as you would like. This will progressively help you to listen to your inner being.

**[INTERNAL EXPERIENCE]** Take a few moments now to really listen to yourself without trying to make sense of anything. Be curious about your subjective experience of the present moment. Bring your awareness to both pleasant and unpleasant emotions. You may feel the need to explore them further, or perhaps avoid them completely.

 **[Physical sensations]** Despite the impulse towards one or the other direction, choose to return to the now moment, and focus on how these emotions may show up in your body. Are certain parts warmer and others cold? Are you able to identify and locate any physical sensations? Receive them as they are.

**[Emotions]** Now listen to your emotions, as you allow them to be heard. Are they intense, or more subtle? Do they feel like a whisper, or perhaps a scream? Maybe you have experienced similar emotions in the past, and you may view them as unexpected, or unwanted guests. Your first impulse could be to dismiss them, rather than try and befriend them. Perhaps, at this stage, you are unable to perceive them at all, and that is perfectly fine too. Whatever the case may be, be present to yourself and your unique experience of your inner world.

**[Thoughts]** Notice any memories, which may start to re-surface as you allow your emotions to flow even more. Now observe any thoughts accompanying these emotions. What do you notice? Maybe your mind has assigned certain meanings to your emotional experiences. Whether that means you are weak, unworthy, or undesirable, ask yourself: What story is the mind telling me?

As these stories unfold and play out in your head, healthily question them. Ask yourself if they still apply to you in this present moment, or if they have served their purpose so you are ready to let them go. Be open to any insight that may come to you at this time.

As these emotions and thought patterns become clearer to you, you start to see them for what they are, and perhaps you can even name a few. However, know that you are not your emotions, nor are you your thoughts, as these are only temporary, like clouds in a clear blue sky.

**[RETURN]** As you return to your body, notice any lingering sensations. You may feel like shaking your hands and legs a bit, note some impressions you may have received, or maybe you are happy to simply remain in your position a while longer.

As you come towards the end of this meditation, thank yourself for taking time to not only hold space for your emotions (whether positive or negative), but also actively and compassionately listen to your inner being.

By Asia Charles