

## Working with Emotions

### A Presentation with Acharya Melissa Moore

Welcome back to The Science of Meditation, I am Acharya Melissa Moore and today we're going to be talking about working with emotions, the meditation of resilience and stress. So why is it important to talk about working with emotions? Emotions are something that, as human beings, we work with on a day to day basis. Some of us more than others. Some of us are forced to relate to our emotions because we feel like they are ruling our world and at other times we feel like we don't have any emotional contact or capacity within ourselves. So the relevance of working with emotions from a Shambhala perspective is that emotions are resources. They are intelligence, they come up for a reason at particular points in time and we notice them or not, depending on our habits of mind. We always have emotional reactions to situations in the world in the moment, and whether we categorised emotions as safe or unsafe.

We often develop habits of managing our emotions or separating from our emotions. Emotions are not really anything other than big thoughts and they have a lot of emotional energetic charge to them in reaction to things that are happening in the world and depending on how we work with that energy and those thoughts will determine the outcome of whether we can tap the resources of our emotions or not. Oftentimes we're managing our emotions in such a way by splitting off from them, we separate from our emotions, we say things like there's me and then there's my emotions or if we get into a struggle with someone, later we might say "Well, I wasn't myself." And we separate from our emotions as if they're something that's overtaking us, but that's because, usually we separate from them because we're afraid of our emotions. But emotional energy is completely arising from within and something inseparable from us and depending on how we learn to make friends with our energy, become aware of our habits, will allow us to draw the wisdom from our emotions.

Every emotion has wisdom interconnected with it, for example anger is the only way that we know how to say no in our life or set a boundary when something is too much, if we don't feel that reaction to circumstances and we've managed that energy away or out of our life, we're never able to say no or to set proper boundaries, so emotional energy is extremely important to tune into as it's a guiding post for us in how to live our life and work with others more skilfully, be a benefit to others in the world.

So to begin working with our emotions we have to first stabilise our mind, we can't just jump into emotional energy, if it's something that frightens us it could be triggering or at other times we might just feel completely overwhelmed, so that's why all work, contemplative work with emotions begins on the meditation cushion, where we learn not to believe everything that we think and feel, that we actually infuse relationship to space in the midst of our emotions that we know how to stabilise our mind and come back to the present moment.

All of that is taming and quieting the mind and then, off the cushion, we might begin to notice what we are feeling when we're feeling it in the present moment and be much more discerning. And the second step to working with emotions is we have to make friends with ourselves, the fact that we feel certain emotions, we could suddenly become very aware and start to feel all sorts of things and then begin to make ourselves wrong for feeling that and that's counterproductive. To begin with we have to embrace ourselves as we are, and that again happens through a lot of practice, sitting on the meditation cushion as we are we can wear out our habits of mind and soon even develop a sense of humour about ourselves and we can begin to befriend our energy as it is. And then, once we have that stability of mind and friendliness towards ourselves, we can begin to move towards emotions in such a way that we learn not to suppress them and not to act them out

at the same time, but how to experience them directly and completely as they're arising in the present moment and that requires that we drop out of the head and into the body and experience the feeling sensation and really truly feel them fully in such a way that they begin to inform us, which is why they're there to begin with and we begin to learn that they're some of our greatest resources and wealth, there's always wisdom attached to whatever emotion we have, but when we're busy acting them out or we're busy suppressing them we have no access to that innate wisdom that's always attached to our emotional energy.

So the obstacles to working with emotions is that they're very habit forming, for example when we begin to bring our awareness to emotion, if we are someone who hasn't been feeling anger for example and suddenly we start to feel anger for the first time and it feels so good to feel it and then we can become very indulgent begin to act out our emotions in such a way that isn't helpful, and we've just swung the pendulum to the other side, so my experience is that as we learn to work with emotions in a contemplative way we need containers or environments that let us practice feeling and expressing our emotions in a place where others are doing the same and we give very clean feedback to each other so that we're in a kind and reflective environment and there are many such opportunities these days to find working with emotions and discovering your intelligence, Shambhala training and Karuna training and many other opportunities in the world where people are setting up the conditions that people can begin to explore the wisdom of emotions. Trying to do that on your own or reading a book, generally we don't have enough support or feedback, because we're the last ones to know when it comes to emotional energy how we're doing.

Emotions are habit forming, they're also cultural, they're familial, we inherit emotions from family members that we don't even know that we're carrying, attitudes about emotions, they're very complex and they're multi-faceted, so really exploring emotions really takes some kind of safe environment where we can trust that we will receive feedback and good guidance in how to express ourselves emotionally and learn to use our emotions as our greatest resource. So it's hard to believe that certain emotions have intelligence, emotions like pride or jealousy or envy for example are not emotional states that we feel ready to embrace at any moment, but it's amazing, emotional energy by nature is dynamic, it's not static so when we learn how to feel and really experience the energy as it's arising, it actually moves and when it moves environments and situations open up.

So I can give an example of a time where I was in a situation where an ex-girlfriend of one of my partners showed up at a program, and the minute this person walked in the building I was on edge, because there was a lot of history under the bridge, and it turns out of course that I got seated directly behind this person in a meditation retreat for ten days and so I had to sit in silence with my imagination and my mind and all the feelings of jealousy and envy that run through us that are not pleasant to feel and at a very particular moment in the program this person just gently turned around and asked me for a tissue and I was so delighted to have contact after having sat with all of that energy that the space just completely opened up and there was a very human to human contact and believe it or not, from that moment forward we became friends, really good friends.

So the thing with emotions is that, the obstacle with emotions is that when we don't allow ourselves to feel them and we manage them, then we're actually held hostage by our emotions and we are not actually relating to the situation and the environment as it is, so when we learn how to stabilise our mind and befriend our energy, it's nature is dynamic, it moves and who knows what the world has in store for us, but it's very important to feel the energy as it's arising and not feed it with concept.