

Joy Practice

An Analytic Meditation – Fear, Anger and Sadness

Joy Practices from the Book of Joy, conversations between the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu

The Dalai Lama says that fear and anger are natural stress responses, and these emotions carry important information for us. Sadness, too, can tell us that we are unhappy with something in our life. These three emotions no doubt evolved to motivate us to change our situation. The Archbishop Tutu says, to be human is to feel, and these emotions will arise at times, regardless of our spiritual mastery. Yet responding to a situation constantly with fear, anger or sadness tends to perpetuate negative energy. It is the irrational and obsessive components of these emotions that are destructive. Meditation is a profound way to develop our ability to escape our fight-or-flight reflex and extend the pause between stimulus and response to act with intention rather than just react out of emotion.

The Dalai Lama is interested in truth wherever it might lie, and analytical meditation is one of his most effective tools for discerning it.

So, on to an analytical meditation...

1. Sit comfortably
2. Close your eyes or keep them open. If you keep them open, keep your gaze soft and your focus inward.
3. Now, pick a topic or experience that is troubling you, or simply watch your thoughts and feelings arise and recognize that they are temporary, without judging or identifying with them. Some thoughts may be bright and pleasant and some will be dark and stormy, but they all pass in time. Let the thoughts float through your mind like clouds in the sky.
4. Now ask yourself, is my thought true? How do I know for sure? Does it help the situation? Is there a better way of thinking about it or approach the situation?

Let's look at how we might analyze the three fundamental, and often negative human emotions.

For **fear**, analytic meditation can help face the fear directly. Think of a fear; and think of the worst thing that could happen if your fear come true (PAUSE FOR ONE MINUTE). Now, can you or your loved one survive what might happen? Could it actually be beneficial for you or your loved ones? What could you or they learn if this were to happen? How might this allow you or them to grow and deepen as a person? When we turn and embrace what we fear, it loses its power to frighten us. We no longer need to fight it, but can instead work with it.

For **anger**, you can ask yourself what is its use? Anger often involves some disappointment or frustrated expectation (PAUSE FOR ONE MINUTE). Ask yourself, what was my expectation? Can I release it and accept what is or how others are, rather than how I think they should be? Can I also acknowledge my part in the conflict? Can I see my part in contributing to the situation I am angry about? If I am angry about what has been said, can I see that these are just words that no longer exist, that, like all things, they are impermanent? Will my anger benefit anyone, including me? You could also reflect on how, if not contained, anger can lead to destructive action – from saying hurtful things to outright violence – that we later regret. Contemplate how anger can destroy relationship, alienate others, and rob you of your peace of mind.

For **sadness**, we can reach out for comfort or count our blessings. Sadness is an emotion that expresses our need for one another, and our sorrows are halved when shared. We can also recognize that while sadness may last longer than other emotions, it, too, will pass. All life, the sadness and sorrow included, is impermanent and will end. There are always going to be highs and lows in any life, in any year, in any day. So much of our mood comes from what we focus on. We can choose to focus on what is going well for us and for the people in our life. The Archbishop says, we can count our blessings. By putting our attention on the things we are grateful for, we can shift how much time we spend in sadness and how quickly we return to joy.