



FINDING THE NEEDS UNDERNEATH OUR FEELINGS

PRACTICE

We define a practice as something we are capable of doing all the time, in which we are immersed each and every day until it becomes a lifestyle and a continuing part of existence. This practice can be used any time we want to focus on the goodness we are reaching for rather than focusing on what we don't like.

How do we know what our desires, needs and longing are in the moment? This practice will assist us in making this discernment. Following the steps can be a great help in feeling grounded and guiding ourselves to what we need.

1. SUPPORT FEELING WHEREVER WE ARE IN A GIVEN MOMENT, RATHER THAN EXPRESSING OR SUPPRESSING IT.

This support is especially needed when the feeling is painful, shameful or any other state that we would normally reject. The bottom line is that there is absolutely no feeling or state of being that is unworthy of being felt. Absolutely none! We might support our feeling by telling ourselves something like, "It's okay that this is what you feel. This is a crucial part of living from your heart and nature. Have the courage to stay with what you're feeling."

2. IDENTIFY THE FEELING

From the state of supporting and allowing the feeling, we identify the feeling state as clearly as possible. We recognize that although words can bring us closer to identifying the experience itself, they will never be the same as having the experience. To implement this step, we set aside a period of time, perhaps several seconds or minutes, to do nothing but focus on listening to and clarifying our current state. We notice that we are emotionally sad, frightened or angry. This step is a highly useful tool to help bring to light that which we would normally keep hidden. We may notice a constellation of feelings. It is important to appreciate and acknowledge all that we are experiencing.

3. WHAT IS THE UNDERLYING NEED?

Once we have identified the feelings, we can identify the underlying desire, need or longing that is missing when the heart feels thwarted. We support such a discovery by asking ourselves, “What thwarted desire, need or longing led me to feel this? If I felt sad, what was the desire that would have made me happy? If I felt frightened what did I need that would have allowed me to feel safe or courageous? Among many others, the most common needs here are wanting to feel safe, to feel loved, to be understood and to be supported.

4. FIND A WAY TO CARE FOR OURSELVES

Perhaps the most important and challenging of all, step four comes after we have identified our underlying need. We cultivate sincere questions like, “How can I take care of myself in the present and the near future?” It is deadly to focus on these questions in the abstract. Whether we are religious, spiritual or otherwise, we can open to our intuition and ask how to best support the need in our present circumstances. Often, this requires supporting the opposite of the original feeling. For example, if we are afraid, we can ask ourselves;

“Where do I need to activate a sense of courage? How do I show it? What actions are courageous? How can I most effectively communicate with my partner? Would it be wiser to wait to express my need when I feel calmer? Will prayer or meditation be most helpful right now? How can I give myself the best chance to have what I really need?”

Remember that this step is about being in the present moment and having the right attitude to discover the best method to fulfill ourselves. We ask ourselves the essential questions to discover the actions and attitudes that will help us find our way: What do I need to do? What attitude do I want to focus on to help me? Is the state of my environment appropriate for pursuing the need now? Is the best method of communication to be more personal or less? Is this desire one that I need to let go of?

Step four allows us to activate the insights that arise from these questions. Then we can integrate them in our daily lives with a change of approach concerning our actions, our words and our attitudes.

5. APPRECIATE OURSELVES

Here we encourage and appreciate ourselves for having acted on our needs. We tell ourselves in our own words something like, “I’m so grateful that I acted on what I needed, and that’s my priority. I’m glad I was as courageous as I could be. With this deep breath, may I relax and trust that I did what was needed, no matter the outcome. I appreciate acting on my highest need. Responding in this way is who I really am and whom I long to be.”

The five-step process above, in its essence, is clear, direct and uncomplicated. Simply put, when we identify each feeling without rejecting ourselves, we can contemplate the underlying need. Then we can ask the right questions to support the need, giving ourselves direct guidance about supporting our newly discovered core longing. We can appreciate and acknowledge our responses with clear statements to ourselves. Repeating this process over and over will provide a motivation that does not come primarily through mental understanding. With continued practice and sincere dedication to the five steps, we actually can focus on what we really want, rather than fight against what we don't like.

No one really likes it when we don't get what we want or when we feel obliged to do something we don't like. Most of us have a dark reaction to what we perceive as darkness. In other words, when we act out our emotions unconsciously in a mean-spirited way, we usually receive a mean-spirited reaction. Remember, this is about feeling our *harmlessly*, not suppressing or acting out on them, so all feelings are acceptable and vital. The key is to become fascinated with our own feelings, rather than rejecting or dumping them on others. Only when it is desirable and fine with us to fully experience our true feelings, can we respond from a softer and stronger place.