

Connecting With Self and Others

by Jim Pescud

As we well know life can at times be quite difficult. Difficult from the level of a slight inconvenience up to absolute horror.

However, what happens when we are in any sort of difficulty is that we move ourselves into a psychological, and even a physical state, of defensiveness.

We are protecting ourselves from some kind of threat – a threat to how we want things to be.

As life rarely does what we want it to do, we can be in an almost constant state of defensiveness. We withdraw, put up barriers, even attack. The body shows this through its tension and pain, even feeling sick.

There is another way to be however when faced with emotional pain. A way of being which will not only allow the tension in your body to soften, but also allow you to soften your emotional stance towards yourself and others.

Now this may at first sound strange, but we can in fact open to our difficulties. I'm not talking about opening to 'the story' of our difficulties. I'm talking about opening the body, opening the heart. We can be open to what we are feeling, fully recognising the hurt we are experiencing.

To do this we need to let go of the story of why we are upset. Let go of the 'he said that to me', or 'she did that to me', story.

Instead, you simply feel into your body, experience where the hurt is. Tension may be felt in the back, shoulders, neck, stomach, chest, or anywhere really. Where ever you experience this tension and holding, open to it. But don't force opening to happen, like pulling at the petals of a flower bud so it opens. Simply be with your body's holding, with no other agenda, other than a sense of wanting to be with it, allowing it to be.

At first this is not an easy thing to do. Due to years of conditioning, years of holding on to our pain, there will be a lot of resistance in the mind and body. The tension in the body may well increase when you first open to it in this way, before it begins to soften. So it's important to open in a way which doesn't feed this tension.

Letting go of the story behind the upset is very important. Just drop it, come out of the thinking mind and bring your awareness totally into your body. You are not trying to rid yourself of the feelings of upset and tension in the body, because that will simply set up further conflict between how you currently feel and how you want to feel.

The practice here is to provide the tension and holding you feel in your body with space. Have a sense of a soft, open space, surrounding the tension. When your mind tries to re-introduce 'the story' behind the tension, be aware that this is happening, let the thoughts drop away and once again surround the tension with soft, open space. Simply allow the tension to be there, held with a sense of kindness and acceptance.

Think of how you would respond to a young child who is upset and crying because their friend has been cruel to them. Get a sense of the soft, open care, you would hold that child in. That's the way to be with your own pain. The best word to describe this is compassion.

You connect with yourself, with compassion. When you are able to truly connect with yourself in this way, you have opened yourself up to connect with others around you with this soft energy of compassion.

I remember having been on a week long retreat doing the Loving Kindness meditation, which involved a lot of body awareness. During the train journey back home after the retreat I was looking at the other people in the carriage, I recognised me in them, that they also experienced pain and tension, they suffered in a similar way to me. My response was not, 'oh well that's the way of things', it was a response of compassion. Tears of recognition came to me because I had been for the past week in an intimate relationship with my own pain. This was the same pain that these people I was looking at also felt. The distance of a few feet was no longer a barrier to my feeling of connection.

For me these were tears of freedom, I was no longer confined to 'little me', I felt a part of something vaster, and my heart loved it.

The body will allow you to be compassionate with yourself and with others. Allow it the space to show you.

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Jim Pescud and Jenny Cornish will be running a Breathworks Mindfulness for Health, 8 week course, at the Yoga To Go Studio at Petersham commencing Sunday 18th October and finishing 6th December. See Breathworks Australia web site for details www.breathworks-mindfulness.com.au

This mindfulness based course is designed to assist those living with stress, chronic pain or illness. However, the course can also be undertaken simply to learn how to be more mindful. The quality of life for course participants, no matter the reason for attending, can be greatly improved through the practice of truly being aware.