

ALLOWANCE

BRINGING INTO AWARENESS

Allowance is bringing your emotional experience into conscious awareness. Limb One of Emotional Yoga is called allowance because it is the process of allowing yourself to be aware of your feelings. This is the starting point, where you begin to examine yourself.

The words *allow* and *mind* have similar meanings. When you mind something you pay attention to it, and you can choose to pay attention to anything. The process of allowance gets you in touch with a mood or emotion so that you can recognize it, name it, and then clarify it. Emotional awareness is a pivotal skill, because only when you know what you feel can you heal what you feel.

Allowance is the deliberate action of reaching out with your attention and bringing into focus an unclear feeling. This is the initial energy of thrusting your attention toward feeling and meaning. When you allow yourself to feel, you let the part of you that desires reach out and make contact with yourself. Yoga teaches you how to do this through a step-by-step process of

observation. First, you learn how to be aware of the “felt sense” of your body. Then you learn how to recognize and balance what you feel.

When you allow yourself to feel your emotions with deliberate attention, you plant yourself in a positive way and become some body. You identify yourself with your bodily awareness. You define yourself as something separate from others, and create your individual boundary formation. This is how you initiate your emotional embodiment. The more you make yourself presently aware in your body, the more shape you have, and the more emotional energy you can express.

In yoga, the experience of realizing your awareness is called “witnessing.” It happens when *you are aware of the one who feels*. When you allow yourself to feel your emotional body, you can easily be aware of the one who is doing the feeling. This means you are identifying with your inner, feeling self. Clarity of awareness brings you emotional autonomy, stability, and power. It gives you your emotional roots. Only when you feel your roots can you begin to feel your growing.

The Fear of Painful Emotions

Why are we afraid to feel? Emotional energy is powerful, and dealing with it can be scary. In fact, sometimes it’s so scary that we completely shut down the flow of our emotions and justify it with a myriad of reasons. We tell ourselves we’re too busy to deal with them. They’re interfering with our work right now. Unpleasant emotions are a waste of time. They’re embarrassing. They make us look weak. So, rather than choose to feel them for long, we decide that it’s safer to hold them in, block them out, or push them away.

There is a lot of energy around painful emotions. It can make you feel as if you are losing control. But shutting down your emotions will, in reality, only slow down your growth.

In the long run, a truly productive life *requires* you to receive the vital emotional energy that comes when you realize and then manage what you feel. Inquiring into your emotions tells you what you are feeling, how strongly, and why. This has dramatic energy-enhancing effects. When you re-

sist your emotions in any way, you resist what your energy might show you. In other words, you miss out on valuable information.

Deliberately feeling your emotions is an act of faith. It takes grace and courage to deal with them. Sure, it’s a risk to feel them. They’re unfamiliar. But the point is, if you really want to heal, you have to use your feelings as fuel and stop wasting valuable energy controlling, suppressing, or blocking them out.

By moving through your fear of feeling, you *allow* yourself to feel all the ways you can feel, and live all the ways you can live. By learning to feel, you become wiser, not just about your own feelings but about the feelings of others.

Feeling Your Body

This is a simple process allowing you to stay grounded in your body as you work through your emotional fears. Feeling Your Body is an essential exercise. Come back to it often. It is not complex. The more you practice it, the simpler it gets, and the deeper it goes.

- ◆ Find a quiet place to sit down. You may keep your eyes open or closed. Become aware of your natural breathing.
- ◆ Observe any sensations you are feeling. Try not to lose yourself to your thinking mind or to outside distractions. Be fully present in your body and direct your attention to it as much as possible.
- ◆ Now notice where you have your attention at this moment. Surely, you are reading these words and you are also aware of your surroundings. See if you can be aware of your *inner body* at the same time. Keep your attention within. Pull it into focus.
- ◆ Stay aware of yourself in your body. Let yourself become aware of your breathing for a moment and notice any feelings of discomfort in your body. At the same time, notice that the sun is shining, the dog is barking, and the people in the next room are talking. Keep breathing and notice that all this is happening in a remarkable inter-

relationship between you, your breathing, and all you are observing. This effortless maneuver is both spontaneous and extraordinary. In this state, there is total acceptance. You are simply observing what is already occurring in your natural ordinary awareness.

This experience doesn't need to take long. But spending a few minutes in contact with yourself is one of the most important tools of self-inquiry, leading to emotional balance and self-understanding. Inevitably, it will become a cornerstone in your Emotional Yoga practice.

Allowing Yourself to Feel

The next step is to feel your emotions. As you bring your emotions to the light of consciousness, you become aware that they are interpretations of bodily sensations and you are the interpreter who chooses their meaning. This function of interpretation is what gives you choice, and choice gives you mastery over your life. When you don't have a choice, you feel like a victim to circumstance. Healing your emotions requires making active and conscious choices.

Feeling your emotions does not mean losing yourself to the running commentaries of your thinking mind. Nor does it mean that you can fake what you feel in order to cope. This only multiplies the strain on your system.

To repeat: Painful feelings are *not dangerous*. Burying them can be. Understanding your emotions by feeling and identifying them lets you recover your emotional autonomy and strength. Anything in the dark always seems dangerous at first. But once you get *into* your body, and out of your mind's distractions, the darkness will come into the light. You can spend years justifying your feelings or ignoring them, but until you choose to feel them, you will be sitting in the dark.

ALLOWING FEELINGS

Try the following emotional inquiry. I first learned this practice from my friend and mystic Robert O. Williams. The premise of this exercise is simple: If you are sad, mad, uncomfortable, or in pain, *allow yourself to feel it*.

☛ Begin by giving yourself your full attention. Giving yourself your attention is the basis of healing, and healing something inside yourself is the real purpose of Emotional Yoga.

STEP 1 As you give yourself your full attention, become aware of what you feel, as though you are shining a light on yourself. Continue by asking yourself this:

—What am I feeling? or, What am I thinking? or, What did I just do?

STEP 2 Use your awareness to identify what you feel. Tell yourself this:

—I am happy because . . . I am uncomfortable because . . . I feel some sadness because . . .

STEP 3 Identify what you are experiencing in the present moment. This time, make no references to the reasons for your feelings. Let go of the "why." Simply say to yourself:

—I feel pain; or, I feel anxious; or, I feel frustrated; or, I feel pleasure.

STEP 4 Now, *allow it*. Accept what you are feeling as you experience it *right now*. Do not resist it. Allow it to continue as long as it needs to. If your feelings begin to change, let them change.

STEP 5 Breathe with it. Consciously begin to breathe, and at the same time keep feeling what you are feeling. Gently deepen your breath for a minute or so. Just stay with your breath.

STEP 6 After a while, feel the emotion come to a place of balance on its own. What you feel now may be slightly different from when you started. Perhaps you feel a little peace, some contentment, or connection with yourself. Continue to stay with what you are feeling *now*.

STEP 7 Settle it. Simply place your attention on your heart and feel this moment as it is. It's something that you know, like coming back home. Have a feeling awareness within your entire body. Just effortlessly keep your attention in your body.

That's it. You can do this process anywhere, anytime, and it takes only a few minutes. Spend as much time on it as you wish, depending on the cir-

Allowance opens
your awareness to
the intelligence of
your emotions, while
guiding the nature
of your behaviors.

circumstances and how deep you want to go. *Feel it, and you will feel released.* What you are feeling isn't what's making you suffer, it's what you are *not* feeling.

In every moment you have the time to feel, in every feeling you have the chance to heal, and in every person there is the power to feel it.

INTELLIGENT BEHAVIORS (YAMA)

Traditionally, the first limb of yoga consists of five ethical behaviors or "great vows of living"—nonviolence; truthfulness; not coveting; harmonizing your desires; nonattachment. These behaviors are not merely codes of conduct for relating to people or things; they are useful and creative practices for transforming challenging emotions.

In Emotional Yoga, the ability to deal with your emotional issues is based entirely on your awareness of them. In yoga, awareness always comes first. Once you are able to witness your attitudes and emotions, you can choose to participate with them. You can shift your reactive tendencies into more responsive and appropriate behaviors, creating healthier interactions with others. Knowing what you feel—letting yourself feel your emotions fully—is the first step in allowing yourself to deal with your emotional experiences and is at the basis of all your ethical behaviors.

The first limb teaches you how to use your emotional awareness in greater depth. Read about this limb and start using these practices immediately. They are fundamental tools for shaping a healthy emotional self.

I. Nonviolence (Ahimsa)

Yoga Sutra, ch. 2, v. 35:

When one perseveres in non-violence, hostility vanishes in their presence.

Nonviolence, as an emotional practice, involves your ability to deal with the feelings of anger and its various subtleties. Anger is an emotion that de-

mands change. When it's left to simmer, it can lead to all kinds of resentment, sulking, tantrums, and irrational fears.

Internalized negativity is the enemy within. No matter what degree of negativity or resistance you have, it is toxic. Chronic irritability or anger that stays in the physiology sends stress hormones throughout the body. Over time it can do a lot of damage. Anger is the emotion that underlies any level of hostility, outrage, or violent behavior, so it must be dealt with immediately and not be denied or ignored.

The good news is that anger itself can give you the feedback necessary to turn it around. If you can recognize and experience your anger simply as a kind of energy, you'll be able to see and then choose another way of feeling and behaving. The key is to come face to face with your intentions of violence, hatred, or fear, and accept them. Be conscious of them. Then you can deal with them. You can neutralize the hostility within you and your environment, break through your anger, and move on. Feeling fully what you feel lets you transform what you feel. When you are transformed, your whole world is transformed.

Use the following self-inquiry for transforming any negative or aggressive behavior:

CHOOSING NONVIOLENCE

- ◆ The first step is the most important one. Have the intention of noticing yourself in an agitated state (caused by feelings of anger, jealousy, envy, the need to control, anxiety, etc.). Then, as soon as the feelings of tension come up, try not to judge yourself. Simply observe and notice what you feel. This may be hard to do. But if you can, the moment you begin to notice a strong negative thought or feeling, pause for a conscious moment. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Then find a quiet place. Sit down and respectfully become aware of yourself and what you're feeling. Include all sensations or negative thoughts, and ask yourself the following questions:

- ◆ What do I think that I don't like thinking? or, What do I feel that I don't like feeling?

- ◆ Identify the feeling or thought by asking yourself again: What am I unhappy about? or, What am I angry about? or, What am I uncomfortable about?
- ◆ Once you identify your feelings, clarify them even more: Why am I angry, or uncomfortable, or unhappy about that? Is there a better way I can think or feel?

- ◆ Sustain your questions and continue to see if there is another way to think or feel. If there is a better way, ask yourself: Is it all right if I am not angry, or irritated, or upset, or mad? What would happen then?

There is a skill to recognizing emotional choices. While it's true that one feeling is no less valid than another feeling, the best choices come when you face up to what needs your attention now. If anger is there, discover the how, why, what, when, and where of it. Pretty soon, if you keep on looking and asking yourself why this anger, fear, or sadness is the best way for you to feel, you may see it is the result of what you believe you *should* feel. If you look, you will see the options. Then you can embrace what feels most inherently right.

In the end, reducing the qualities of violence within you will result in your ability to diminish the hostility around you and to find inner quiet and peaceful action in the most challenging moments. This will open the door to your heart. It will even repair your heart, because the reward for transforming your disturbance is always healing.

At some point, it will become clear that the tensions you feel inside yourself are there ultimately to generate expansion—and love. Properly channeled, they will become the power behind your emotional growth.

2. Truthfulness (Satya)

Yoga Sutra, ch. 2, v. 36:

When truth is established, all acts will achieve their desired results.

For some people, it's a struggle to tell the truth. Finding it hard to tell your emotional truth doesn't mean you will not be able to do it. It might mean

just that the truth is too scary, or you don't know how to recognize it, or you have forgotten what the truth really is.

Part of the problem is that there are so many versions of the truth, it gets confusing. Is the truth something you have to reveal? Is it a matter of clearing up past lies? Is it about admitting how you feel the moment you feel it? What is the truth?

In yoga, truthfulness is a practice of observation, then verification. First, you have to *notice* the truth. It requires your constant attention. As you become increasingly aware of your emotions, they begin to show you what is true. As long as you stay connected to your emotional truth, and then verify it through your experience, you will find that your life becomes more about doing and saying what you deeply know is true. This kind of authentic truth-telling is like medicine. It becomes an act of healing, an antidote to fear, hurt, anger, and confusion.

Here is a practice for telling your emotional truth. Use it if you're having a hard time revealing the truth about anything. *Remember: All honest emotions are positive.*

TELLING YOUR EMOTIONAL TRUTH

- ◆ First, sit someplace comfortable. Tune in to your body, focus your attention on your breath, and listen to its flowing rhythm. Put your attention on your heart and ask yourself the following questions. After each one, close your eyes, take a moment, and *feel* the answer.
 - ◆ What feeling am I allowing right now?
 - ◆ What am I not allowing myself to feel?
 - ◆ Right now, what I am scared to say or feel is . . .
 - ◆ What I *really* want to say or feel is . . .
 - ◆ In this situation the *real* truth is . . .

Once you are able to verify the truth, you can reflect on how to communicate it. The teachings of yoga say, tell the truth that is pleasant; tell the truth that is unpleasant, but make it as pleasant as possible—and find the right moment.

How will you know the truth? You will know if you let yourself know. The answer lies in what you *feel*. The essential truth is always there within you.

3. *Noncoveting (A. 2. 37)*

Yoga Sutra, ch. 2, v. 37:

When one does not covet, one attains prosperity.

Coveting is a normal human emotion. However, when it leads to the emotions of greed, envy, jealousy, mistrust, and, more acutely, the abuse of control and power, it's one of the greatest weaknesses.

To *covet* means to be attached to a particular outcome. Look into your feelings and you may be surprised to find that you want to control future events or win the approval of others. In other words, covetous feelings reach far beyond the desire for material objects.

For example, if you approach a relationship as a way to get something from someone, you become a prisoner of your own covetousness. But once you are willing to recognize that you have these desires and bring some awareness to them, you become free of them.

From the yoga perspective, emotions like envy, jealousy, and greed actually indicate a "lacking feeling," as if something is missing inside, so you look for something on the outside to fill that need. It could be that these emotions are simply a mask for fear.

Keep in mind that wanting or desiring is not a bad thing. Desire is natural. There is no progress in life without desire. Yoga philosophy teaches that coveting or desiring becomes harmful only when it takes you over. And if you can be free of the binding influence of your desire—in other words, if you can connect to *yourself* instead of to your desire—you can be free of its binding influence. This is the beginning of prosperity.

How does this work? First, you have to realize that you don't need to be victimized by your inner turmoil. Accept your feelings, don't deny them. Then, take a look at them. Pursue some valid information.

EXPLORING YOUR COVETING

Ask yourself:

- What is causing this sense of jealousy?
- Is there a deeper fear behind this feeling?
- What about this situation makes me feel so envious, or jealous?
- What am I attached to?
- What am I trying to control?

Once you start exploring your coveting, things will begin shifting. By understanding and opening yourself to your deeper fears, you will gain a quality of expansion, a broader perspective of your beliefs, attachments, and desires. Then you can make new choices—and choice holds the key to your freedom.

4. *Refraining from Desire (Brahmacharya)*

Yoga Sutra, ch. 2, v. 38:

With the highest desires, one obtains vital energy.

In Sanskrit, the word *brahmacharya* comes from the root *brh*, which means "to grow" or "to expand." *Brahmacharya* is the growth or expansion of the self, and when you cultivate yourself in all ways, it causes everything else to grow.

In some commentaries, *brahmacharya* has also been interpreted as conducting a life of chastity, and in many conventional yoga texts it is regarded as the renunciation of sexual activity and desire. But on the path toward transformation, developing and refining every level of your life, including sexuality, is essential. Sexuality is profoundly emotional—and spiritual. If you repress, abuse, or avoid the complexities and the implications of your sexuality, you may find yourself unfulfilled, troubled, in pain, and, according to author Thomas Moore, in the biggest emotional mess of your life.

Sexuality can take you into a world of higher passion, refined touch, and

subtle emotion. It can light up your imagination, even bring immune strength. This is a world where you can emotionally and energetically thrive. While it does not mean that you should indulge excessively and therefore weaken your vital energy, to deny this flow of energy is to deny the emotional expression of who you are.

The real meaning of *brahmacharya* is "harmonizing your life with the whole." This includes the courage to make your life fiercely emotional. Keep in mind that over any extended period of time spent dealing with your emotions and desires, you require more enthusiasm than discipline. Enthusiasm is an emotional commitment, a loving surrender to your emotional process, and a loving recognition of the joy and vital energy your emotional life will bring.

HARMONIZING YOUR DESIRES

Challenge yourself:

- ◊ Dare to live in a state of excitement and vitality. Loosen up your thinking and let your rationality become less rigid and tense. Appreciate, respect, and protect the magnificence of your vital and sexual energy.
- ◊ Affirm pleasure in your life. Celebrate the sensuous.
- ◊ Be affectionate toward your friends, neighbors, and lovers. Nurture your affection for animals, things, and places. Let yourself give affection to others and accept it from them.
- ◊ Discover the power and pleasure of your deepest desires.
- ◊ Enter more energetically into your senses and be sensually creative and free.
- ◊ Find ways to have deep pleasure even in the presence of pain.
- ◊ Seek to find emotionally satisfying relationships. Intend to speak openly about what you sense and feel.
- ◊ Connect more with others. Touch, hug, caress, hold hands, kiss and express your affection. Allow yourself to be touched, hugged, caressed, held, and kissed.

- ◊ Pay attention to the presence of any invitation to move deeper into your emotional self. Trust in the depth of your feelings.

- ◊ Harmonize your life with the whole. There is a real connection between the joy of your emotional expression and the joy of life itself. On the deepest level, life is sensuous, and this makes you whole. Marvel in your wholeness by discovering yourself at every level. Create passionate experiences, enhance your senses, add even more sensations to your saturated world. Seek to live a deeply fulfilling and, if you dare, an emotionally and erotically sensuous and spiritual life.

8. Nonattachment (Aparigraha)

Yoga Sūtra, ch. 2, v. 39.

One who is not attached or possessive is secure.

Nonattachment does not mean that you can't be emotional. I like to think of nonattachment as not holding on. Anytime you clutch something, you are overwhelmed by the fear of losing it: "It's mine," you say. "I can't do without this person or thing." You identify with it. But what if you could find a joyful place inside yourself where you are not possessive or afraid of loss?

NOT HOLDING ON

Try this for a moment:

- ◊ Close your eyes and take a mental inventory. What are you attached to? What do you have judgments about? Take one of the things you are holding on to and feel exactly what this holding on *feels* like in your body. Feel the breath surrounding the tension of your grasp. Tune in to the network of your tightness. Take a deep breath and allow yourself to release this feeling of holding on. Keep watching your breath. Notice how tense your body feels when you try to hold on, and what it feels like when you let it go.
- ◊ Accept your holding on. Get in there with it. But don't lose track of your breathing or the feelings in your body. Watch the parts of your

body that feel irritated, frustrated, tight, or hurt. *Remain with your breath.*

It's true that letting go of something is frightening. But so what? Trust yourself. Break the boundaries of your emotional holding and dive into absolute uncertainty. Dispel it all into the air with your breath. Whatever you really need will come back to you, and whatever you don't need will just drift away.

PROFOUND ATTUNEMENT

There is no such thing as a casual use of your awareness. Every day, every moment, how you invest your awareness determines who you are.

Awareness is the most intimate experience you have and the most powerful tool of yoga. In yoga, you always begin with awareness. It can stimulate you to move into action. You notice you are aware, and so you breathe. You sense you are hungry, and so you eat. You see a possibility, and so you fly to the moon!

The field of your awareness is full of unlimited information, energy, and intelligence. Every one of your thoughts, feelings, and emotions can be found within it. The question is: How can you contact this field? How can you familiarize yourself with its energy and intelligence? All you need to do is to *observe*. It's that simple. Develop the ability to guide your attention. As you pay attention to your feelings, to your body, and to your breath, something inside begins to tell you what you need.

You are usually aware of your emotions, feelings, and thoughts to some degree. But you can go further. By using your awareness, you can sense the flow of energy in your body and mind. You can dissolve fear, settle the turbulence of your mind, let go of pain, and change the way you feel. When you master the art of awareness, you can do almost anything.

The truth is, you already *are* aware. Try something for a moment. Stop and listen. Do you hear the birds? Do you see the sun? Do you remember

your dreams? Then you are aware. According to yoga, there is only awareness. Whatever you put your awareness on creates your framework.

There is a real relationship between the quality of your attention and your capacity to heal yourself. When you have an alert appreciation of what is going on inside you, the opportunities for change on the outside increase enormously. When you listen to yourself and your environment, you start waking up to new thoughts, sensations, and feelings. I call this awakening *profound attunement*.

TUNING IN

❖ Take a moment to notice where you are right now. Notice what is happening around you. Feel the temperature of the air on your skin, the clothes touching your body. Can you hear any sounds in the next room? Notice where you are reading this book. Perhaps you are sitting in a chair. Observe yourself reading. Then turn your attention to the one who is reading, the one who is sitting in the chair. Can you sense a presence there? This presence is behind everything. It is the one who is being aware.

❖ Close your eyes for a moment. Tune in and allow your awareness to flow through your entire body. Put the book down for a while, then read a few lines and pause again. Every time you do this, your experience will be different.

❖ Give yourself your full attention. It's like using a video camera. First, you focus on whatever has your attention, noticing the details. Then you zoom in on what compels you, and you stay on that thing long enough for it to reveal what it's about. Paying attention like this is the simplest and purest act of self-love—it is healing. The greatness, the joy, the rapture, and the beauty you can experience in life all depend on giving and receiving your own attention.

❖ Open your awareness to the space inside your body. Awaken to the sensations within your body. Listen to yourself with keen attention. Gently, easily, become aware at every moment of this motion of

searching. Keep moving your awareness, and touch the outermost corners inside your body.

- ❖ Receive your body as it is, and feel your body breathing on its own. Then bring your attention to the sensations generated by your breath. Capture the images, the feelings, as if you were focusing in a little closer. Feel the sensations in your throat. Is it tight, restricted? Sense the movement in your chest and your belly. Become aware of the coolness in your nostrils. Notice the location of the sensation that accompanies each breath. Do you feel it at your upper lip? Inside the rims of your nostrils? At the tip of your nose? Simply focusing your awareness in your body and on your breathing is a process of healing.
- ❖ Listen to your feelings, your body, and your breath. Listen to the turmoil, the worry, or the pain. Remain present with yourself and notice that you are reaching a deeper level of understanding. Go slowly. Know that you are there for yourself. Trust in yourself and the power of your attention. Acknowledge your aliveness *now*.
- ❖ Feel any tension or fear in your body. Do you sense it in your chest, your belly, your heart? Be with it for a moment, and allow yourself to go there and feel afraid. *To feel it is to heal it*. Don't abandon it. Be faithful. When you refuse to look inside, you betray both yourself and your emotions.
- ❖ Close your eyes again and feel the energy inside you moving like an ocean wave beginning to swell. Allow it to grow. Feel it inside and let that vibration, that feeling be. Be truthful to what you feel. It may be painful, but stay with it. Don't fight it. Just be aware of it. By going inside and letting yourself feel frightened for a while—and breathing and moving until you feel assured by the rhythms of life—you allow the discomfort to break. Then, you can settle right down, like a child who is falling asleep.
- ❖ Dive deep inside yourself and discover what is real. Whatever happens, it happens to *you*. Whatever you do, the doer is *you*. You are

the one who is experiencing all this. You are the one who is breathing. And you are the one who is there inside.

Allow yourself this moment of inner attention. Trust yourself and your ability to listen. If you are willing to tune in, you'll find that the energy of your attention will change you deeply. It will bring the wisdom of each moment to every aspect of your life. Paying attention means having a listening mind. It leads to the experience of freedom.

