

Five Steps To A Freer Life: Ode To Racquel

Introduction Part I

Recently people in the Thursday group have been going forward and then they're having times of complacency. They become freer, they have more attention to continuing to do what helps them become more free, and then their attention fades. They begin slipping back to a more ordinary attention. In this more ordinary attention, they're listening to their mind more and being with a more usual habitual thought pattern.

Introduction Part II

I've been blessed to intimately know Racquel. [Racquel](#) has been a student of Charles (my teacher) for twenty years. I've known Racquel for eight years. Racquel, in my view, never takes a day off. I'm not saying that Racquel always has 'the pedal to the metal,' though she's having the pedal to the metal a lot of the time.

What is most important in her life is living free – living more in freedom from self-induced limitations and restraints. Self-induced restraints are both conscious and subconscious.

This article addresses what I've learned from Racquel about living a life in which every day is a day lived in deeper freedom. In fairness to Racquel, she has never told me what is being written in this article. The points expressed in this article are what I've distilled from knowing Racquel for eight years. This article will address five points toward living a freer life. There are many ways to live a freer life. What is addressed in this article is one way, not *the way*, to live a freer life.

Step One: Being In Intimate Contact With Feeling

I'm writing that Racquel's step one is being in intimate contact with feeling. Again, this is what I've surmised from observing Racquel; not what Racquel has said to me. Racquel's step two is breathing. My step one is usually breathing and my step two is usually being in more intimate contact with feeling.

Most people are usually disconnected to feeling what is deeply inside themselves. The degree of this disconnection varies, though there is a marked internal disconnection for most people to their deeper feelings for most of the day. Most people are involved during the day in listening to their mind and in doing different tasks.

When we're thinking, we usually never have a deep feeling connection inside ourselves; we're in the realm of our mind. *Deep feeling is very different from feelings initiated from thoughts begun by our mind. Deep feelings arise first and then thoughts appear.*

There are two types of thoughts: willful thoughts and mind-generated thoughts. Willful thoughts are thoughts that we initiate and continue with. Examples of willful thoughts are thinking about what to get from the grocery store or how to plan out our day. Willful thoughts are very needed and helpful.

Mind-generated thoughts just pop up and we continue to think about the thought that just popped up (continuing on a mind-generated thought pattern; not a willful thought pattern). Over 90% of our thoughts are generated from our mind and not directed by ourselves. If we observe our thoughts throughout the day, we'll find out if this 90% statistic is true.

Our mind is a thought generating organ. The mind's function is to think. If we're not initiating willful thoughts, then the mind will generate thoughts on its own. It's said that once the mind learns language, it's hard for the mind to stop talking.

When our primary attention is in our mind, with our thoughts, we're not deeply connected to feeling. We may be feeling a lot of fear or anger. Feeling a lot doesn't mean that we're deeply connected to the feeling. *We're first connected to the thought that then produces a feeling.* The feeling may be 'taking us for a ride.' We may be carried away with the feeling. Being carried away, taken over, by a feeling is very different from being deeply connected to the feeling. The mind is still very engaged when we're being taken away by thoughts that produce different feelings. Just listen to what the mind has to say when this happens. It's usually talking up a storm.

In group we've been working with, staying with and coming closer to the uncomfortable feelings inside us; becoming more intimate with our feelings and having a deeper connection to our feelings. *By putting our attention to the feelings, the thoughts become less.* We're not suppressing or repressing thought. Some examples of different uncomfortable feelings are feeling angry, envious, jealous, being in fear and feeling low self worth.

When we're deeply connected to feeling, the mind becomes very quiet. Our attention drops into our body; usually (not always) into the chest, abdomen and back. Feelings are stored in our body; not in our brain. Thoughts are stored in our brain and can run havoc on our body (ex: stressful thoughts can produce ulcers).

Step Two: Relaxed Abdominal Breathing

Different articles have been written about the importance of breathing into our belly. These articles, with the specific pages referring to abdominal breathing, are [Processing](#) (pg. 4), [Being Triggered](#) (pg. 5) and [Moving Forward When We're In Reaction](#) (pg. 4).

Belly breathing activates the relaxing part of our nervous system. Chest breathing activates the part of our nervous system that's active when we're stressed. Deeper breathing brings more relaxation. By doubling up on relaxing ourselves (belly breathing vs. chest breathing and deep breathing vs. shallow breathing) we're more supported to be with, stay with and even get closer to the uncomfortable and disturbing feelings that come up.

At retreats I've watched Racquel drop into her heart and body through breathing in this way. I bring my attention back to this relaxed deeper abdominal breathing many times a day.

Step Three: Being With, Staying With and Coming Even Closer To Our Deep Feelings

Being with and coming closer to our deep and positive feelings is easy to do. When we feel deep love, deep bliss, deep contentment, it's easy to be with these feelings. Though watch how long these feelings are there. Staying with deep positive feelings, not being attached or desiring to prolong the feelings, simply staying with the deep positive feelings is an art; not easily attained. Thoughts will pull us out of these very positive and deep feelings. Thoughts also pull us out of the depth of being with and staying with uncomfortable feelings.

Being with, staying with and coming even closer to our deep painful uncomfortable feelings is more difficult than being with the deep pleasurable feelings. *These deep uncomfortable feelings are an energy already inside us. We're getting in contact with the feelings that are already there. We may feel these uncomfortable feelings daily or rarely; either way these feelings are inside and running our lives to an appreciable degree.*

These deep uncomfortable feelings are like batteries. They have a charge. This charge can lessen to the point where 'there's no life' left in the uncomfortable feelings. When the energy of the uncomfortable feelings have discharged, these feelings can no longer run our life; just as a discharged battery can no longer power up a flashlight.

The group has worked for over a year with Pema Chödrön's three points about being with, staying with and coming even closer to the uncomfortable feelings that are inside of us. The three points are to relax, find out if less thought is possible and be gentle with ourselves as we're being with, staying with and coming even closer to the deep uncomfortable feelings. My teacher, Charles, has been teaching me this way of being with what's uncomfortable from the first time I met him; even though he has never told me a step by step way of how to do this.

The more that we can breathe, relax, not listen to the thoughts (in a very gentle way), the more that we can be with, stay with and come even closer to what's uncomfortable inside us. Racquel has shown me many times a living example (herself) of how a person can do this. By the osmosis of being with Racquel and other people like Racquel and by being guided by Charles, I've gained a deeper connection to being with, staying with and coming even closer to the uncomfortable feelings inside me.

Step Four: Not Interfering With The Uncomfortable Feelings That Are Coming Up

The first two steps of feeling and breathing (or breathing and feeling) require our will to be engaged. In the beginning years of working this way, our attention almost always needs to be there for these two steps to happen. After years of practicing, it'll be natural (less attention will be needed) for deep feelings to come up spontaneously and for our abdominal breathing to be naturally relaxed and deeper.

In the third step of being with, staying with and coming even closer to what's uncomfortable, we're beginning to disengage our mind and our will. The less attention to our thoughts, the more we'll be able to stay with the uncomfortable feelings.

When our thoughts dominate our daily life, will/directed attention is needed for the first two steps of feeling deeply and breathing from our abdomen. A gentleness toward ourselves also helps facilitate these first two steps. Pema says that she benefits greatly by repeatedly coming back to gentleness toward herself.

In the third step, a gentleness toward ourselves greatly supports the lessening of the active mind pattern that disconnects us from being with, staying with and coming even

closer to these deep uncomfortable feelings. We benefit more in this third step through increasing gentleness and decreasing the use of our will. This gentleness also greatly facilitates steps four and five.

Steps four and five do not involve our will. Steps four and five involve surrender. Letting go is a part of surrender. An article has been written about [Letting Go](#). Letting go implies an action – to let go. Surrender is being taken over by something greater than ourselves. When one country surrenders, they're taken over by another country. There is a deciding point when we (or a country) surrender. What happens after that deciding point is that we're taken over by a stronger force. When we surrender, Grace can take over. Grace is the stronger force that takes over when we surrender.

Step four of not interfering with the deep uncomfortable feelings that are coming up is a non-action rather than an willful action. When we've fallen in love, it's a deep feeling and also a non-action. We don't do something to fall in love. The feeling of love takes us over. This feeling of love, at the time, is the stronger force; stronger than our thoughts and will.

It's 'being taken over by Grace' that happens *after surrender begins* that helps us to not interfere with the deep uncomfortable feelings that are coming up. This fourth step of not interfering with the deep uncomfortable feelings coming up that paves the way for the fifth, and final, step.

Step Five: Not Interfering With The Deep Uncomfortable Feelings Releasing and Leaving

We have deep uncomfortable feelings inside us. Whether they're from our actions, from what someone did or said to us, from this life or from previous lives, it's all the same – there are deep uncomfortable feelings inside us and these feelings run us to a significant degree. The stronger the charge of these energies, the more they run us. We know people (or we may be the person) who have a past of being abused by parents, siblings or boy-girlfriends/spouses. That trauma can strongly run how they feel and how they relate in relationship. We know people who still are run by damaged programs. Like a computer, if there's no power, nothing happens. When our deep uncomfortable feelings release and leave, their power over us also leaves. As long as we're carrying deep uncomfortable feelings inside us, these feelings are limiting our freedom.

Charles has said to me: “Phil, you don’t know what you’re carrying inside you.” Each time I’ve quickly agreed with Charles and said: “Charles, you’re right. I don’t know all of what is inside of me.”

Through the years of doing this work and previous work, I’ve found that there was so much inside me that I wasn’t in contact with; that I wasn’t aware of. I still do not know all that is inside of me. I do know the amount that was there and that no longer has the charge to run how I feel, what I say and what I do.

I’ve seen with Racquel and others (and with me) that there is always more to release and leave. The deep uncomfortable feelings that are released in the later years of this work are more subtle; running the show in a more subtle way. I’ve seen in others and felt in myself the freedom expand and the self-restriction from the deep uncomfortable feelings decrease through the years of doing this work.

This fifth step is done completely by being taken over by a Higher Power. The act of a country surrendering is the beginning of being taken over by a stronger force. Similarly, our surrender is only the beginning of what is needed for the deep uncomfortable feelings to continue to rise up, release and leave.

Many times Charles has said to me: “Phil, you need to get out of the way.” Each time I’ve agreed with Charles. Getting out of the way implies an action; just as surrender and letting go implies an action. Getting out of the way is needed for the uncomfortable feelings to release and leave, though we cannot get out of our own way by action. This fifth step of the deep uncomfortable feelings releasing and leaving is done by non-action on our part, and by the action of a Higher Power.

People in the group are beginning to have this fifth step occur more deeply. There is an energy in group work; of being with others who are practicing these five steps. The more one person opens, the easier it is for others to open.

Closing Remarks

What is written in this article has not been previously written down or told to me as it’s written in this article. We learn in Charles’ group by repeatedly observing the interrelating of Charles and the people he works with. One of the ways that I work with the Thursday group is to write articles. Maybe someone’s uncomfortable feelings will be able to more fully release and leave through the writing of this article.

There is no end (that I've seen) to the evolution of what we can become. Paramahansa Yogananda had 'the great samadhi' in 1948. Those closest to him said there was a great deepening of his being from that point on; and that this deepening continued until his bodily death in 1952. If Paramahansa Yogananda can still noticeably deepen after so many years, then surely, we too, can more greatly deepen in how we live. It's up to each of us to do our work, to surrender and to be taken beyond surrender by Grace.

May all beings live in peace, happiness and joy.