

Letting Go

Introduction

About nine months ago my teacher began directing me to let go. It made sense to me. I could feel a type of holding inside me. Through the years this holding has loosened, and it still remains. He was telling me that more practice was not what I needed.¹ Letting go was needed.

I met with him on several weekend retreats during this time. I'd report to him about letting go. He gave me no formula or way to let go other than the teachings he has given me through the years. Each time I reported that letting go was not happening in a deep way; in a way that he was pointing me toward. Something was missing.

What To Let Go Of

*What to let go of is everything that is holding us back from being who we really are.*² Anything that limits us is what to let go of. What limits us can be fear in many forms like worry, anxiety and nervousness. The fear to let go is usually fear from the past and fear of the future.³ Letting go can also be letting go of anger, judgement, vanity, pride, envy and jealousy, and letting go of the stories that go along with these feelings.

The Recent Discovery About Letting Go

I wrote that something was missing as I've been having more attention to letting go over the last several months. *What was missing was the I hadn't realized that the more close that I was with what to let go of, the more that letting go could happen. I needed to be in intimate contact with what could let go.*

If I wanted to let go of fear, then the closer I was to the fear, the more letting go that was possible. If fear was an idea or a memory, then there was very little letting go possible. If fear was 'right up in my face,' then letting go was much more possible. It had not been so obvious to me that we can only let go of what we're currently holding onto. Time and sincerity doesn't guarantee that we'll let go. Many people sincerely on a spiritual path for decades still have harmful reactive, habitual and limiting ways of being.

Who We Are Not

There are two main ways that who we are not manifests. Who we are not manifests in the thinking and in the behavior that comes from the strong emotions and stories that we're holding onto and that cover over who we really are.

Some of the strong emotions to let go of that are easy to recognize are fear, anger, lust, jealousy, envy, pride, and vanity.⁴ The trickier emotions to let go of are the more kind emotions like caring, loving and sympathy when they're mixed with co-dependency and wanting the other person to change.

The strong emotions are usually accompanied by strong stories. The stories also are to be let go of. There are many possible stories; of how our parents were unfair, of our low self esteem, of judgements or resentments of ourselves and others, of what bad things may happen. These stories have a hold on us and keep us from living as who we really are.

Two Directions We Can Go When Emotion Or Story Are Very Strong

I'm going to use the example of fear in regards to the two directions we can go when an emotion is strong. One direction to go when fear is very strong is that we can get caught up in the fear. The fear then will increase. The other way to go when fear is very strong is letting go and the fear will lessen; like a mirage that slowly dissolves into nothing.

We can go in two directions when the story is very strong about our husband or wife or ourselves or something that happened. We can continue listening to the story as it goes on and on; even through the thirteen go around in our head. Listening repeatedly to the story can increase the hold the story has on us. A second direction when a story comes up for us is to not want to listen and respond to the story. If we're not listening to the story, the story will lessen.

Emotion And Story Become Strong Dance Partners

We get most caught when the emotion and the story become dance partners; twirling and spinning each other into a more and more frenzied dance. We each have had this maddening dance happen many times in our lives.

If one dance partner can slow down or let go, then the other dance partner will follow. If the dance partner of emotion slows down, then the dance partner of story can slow down. If dance partner of story slows down, then the dance partner of emotion can slow down.

When we're caught most strongly in this maddening dance is our best opportunity to let go. Once this missing piece was added to what my teacher, Charles, and Pema Chödrön had already given me, then a deeper letting go has been possible.

I'll now go through a way of letting go that I use. I'll start from the beginning (repeating some of what has already been written). This is not the only way of letting go. This way may help the reader in letting go.

Being In Intimate Contact With What We're Holding

We can only let go of what we're in intimate contact with; what we're holding onto or what has got a hold of us. The more strongly and tangibly that we're holding on, the more letting go that is possible.

A problem arises for many people. When the story and emotion are at their highest is also when letting go can be the hardest to do. It takes intent, bravery and skill for letting go to happen when the story and/or emotion is most powerful.

Intent And Bravery

What we're holding onto is like velcro. It's stuck to us and it's not easy to peel away. *If the strong emotions and stories were easy to peel away, then we wouldn't still be carrying them for months, years or decades. It's very important to know that these strong patterns in us want to continue.*⁵ It'll take intent for us to face them. It'll also take bravery.

We're programmed to run away or to turn away or to go in the other direction when pain is there. This is a very good survival instinct. When something is painful, we're prodded to stop doing it or to get away from what is causing the pain. This is fully sane to do when a certain type of pain is there. If we're stepping on a thorn, it's very good to stop doing that. If someone is threatening our life, it's very good to get away.

When it's the torrid dance partners of strong emotion and story causing the pain, it'll take bravery to be with them. Intent and bravery are needed to go against their pull to become more involved in their dance or the desire to run away from or stuff down the emotions and the story.

Usually the velcro is loosened bit by bit (gradual letting go). Whatever amount of the story or emotion that is running strong in us is what can let go. It's often like pulling on a velcro strip; some of the velcro loosens and the rest stays stuck together.⁶ Letting go is

usually gradual. Full and instantaneous letting go happens in two ways. We can have only a little bit of the velcro strip left to undo, and it completely lets go. Or we can have a lot of the velcro strip to undo, and usually with a miraculous feeling, it all gets undone.⁷

Our B & B: Our Breath and Body

Most everyone loves a B & B; a bed and breakfast inn. Unique, intimate, cozy and we get a scrumptious breakfast.

Our B & B, our ability to be in a more comfortable place when the dance partners are at a fever pitch, is our *breath and body*. This is our refuge and the ground that supports us during this inner turmoil; helping us to be less swept away by the strong emotion and story.

Breathing with our abdomen going out on inhalation and going in on exhalation activates the calming, grounding and centering (parasympathetic) part of our nervous system. Chest breathing activates the stress (sympathetic) part of our nervous system. *Non-abdominal breathing gives more energy to the dancers. Abdominal breathing slows down their dance.*⁸

The Strong Emotions Are Anchored In Our Body

There is always a location in our body that is the anchor point for strong emotions. Sensing into our body and locating this tight or uncomfortable or painful or over-energized area or dense or dark location in our body tells us where the strong emotions are anchored. Often this place is located in our belly or chest.

Breathing into this location helps release the anchor. We can move, breathe, shake, rub ourselves or gently pound on the area, we can make sounds, yell, or cry to help dissolve the anchor point.

Don't think about which of the above listed ways to dissolve the anchor point. Sense into your body. Our body will guide us in how to help release this anchor point. Follow the body's guidance in how to help this physical anchor point for the strong emotions to release. *Finding this part of our body that the strong emotions use as their anchor is very important.*

We greatly benefit when we ground and center during this time of letting go. We use both parts of B & B (breath and body) by using our abdominal breathing and also by

physically releasing the dense point in our body where the strong emotions are anchored through breathing, using our voice, emoting or moving.

If we're primarily in contact with the story, then the anchor point may be in our head. Staying in our head with the story feeds the story to become stronger. If the story stays in our head, we can choose to focus on our breath and body (primarily in our chest and belly) to ground and center ourselves during the time of strong story. As the story gains more momentum, the emotions become stronger. When the emotions become strong, then a bodily location outside of our head can usually be found.⁹ This location becomes the anchor point to dissolve and release the story. *Unpinning the strong dancer of emotion from our body releases the story along with releasing the feelings.*

Summary To This Point In The Paper

The more that we're aware of holding on or something having a hold of us, the deeper the letting go is possible. Humans are programmed to go away from pain; including emotional pain. It'll take the intention of wanting to let go and bravery to stay with what is uncomfortable for letting go to happen.

The dance partners of story and emotion energize each other, and keep the holding on active. The dancers are like velcro; they're stuck inside us and need to be peeled away. By utilizing our breath and body, the torrid dancers of emotion and story will slow down and begin to dissolve.

It's also possible to go in the opposite direction of letting go by repeatedly reinforcing our strong story and emotion. This is why intent, bravery and skill are all needed. Skill is developed by being gentle with ourselves. Over time and with gentleness, we're more skillful in the torrid dancers slowing down and the anchor point dissolving.

Letting Go With Body, Emotion and Mind

Letting go, as described in this paper, is letting go through body, emotion and mind. Letting go through body is by breathing abdominally to ground and center ourselves during the time of letting go.

Letting go through body also is by finding, and then helping dissolve, the anchor point for the strong emotions. This anchor point will usually stay in one location during a time of letting go. I've described ways to help this anchor point of the uncomfortable emotions to release; through breathing, crying, toning, yelling, rubbing, gentle pounding or moving.

The strong emotions are not us. The strong emotions are tumultuous waves that are causing a very bad feeling. Be kind to ourselves; be gentle. Don't demand the emotion to go away. Don't think the emotion is wrong. Know that it's velcroed to us. We can loosen the velcro by listening to how the body guides us to release the anchor point. By giving ourselves gentle care while the anchor point dissolves, the dancers of emotion and story will dissolve.

Letting go through mind is knowing that listening to the story, dialoging with the story, justifying the story, having aversion to the story and arguing with the story gives more attention to the story and energizes the story. The more intimate we can be with the story (while not going more into the story and not pushing it away), the greater the opportunity to let go.

If the story remains strong, the emotional dancer is also dancing. We may then locate in our body the physical anchor point for the emotions and use breathing, emoting or moving to help dissolve the anchor point.

Additional Support

People go to exercise classes and yoga classes for support to keep active for the entire time of the class. People go to church, synagogue, temple or mosque to have spiritual support and grounding. People attend group meditation to have more support for their meditation practice.

I've been very fortunate to find a group that supports letting go in the way that has been written in this paper. To have examples of other people letting go helps my letting go. Each person has their individual nuances in letting go. We're not to duplicate another person. Their letting go can inspire us and help us to let go.

Group work can help move, and even activate, what we're holding. People being so raw and vulnerable can help us to become more raw and vulnerable; thereby coming closer to what needs to be let go of.

In the last retreat with my teacher we were sharing throughout the weekend. The same woman shared before me each time. She had so much emotion and turmoil. After her sharing, my turmoil was brought more to the surface, and then more letting go was possible. If I had felt okay, then not much letting go could have happened. I thanked her for repeatedly stirring me up during the weekend.

A group that supports letting go can also use hands-on during the time of letting go. Hands-on healing has been used since the beginning time. Adding hands-on from another person at the anchor point of the strong emotions can greatly assist in dissolving the anchor point.¹⁰

I've been a recipient and a giver of hands-on help many, many times. I've experienced and witnessed at how quickly and more deeply using hands-on help can be for the anchor point of the strong emotions to dissolve.

I encourage the reader to take from this paper what helps them. I also encourage the reader to find how they can be supported in letting go. It may be breathing abdominally more throughout the day, going in nature, going on a retreat, journaling more, meditating, going to expressive dance classes, finding more time to play or finding a group that supports and helps our letting go.

May we all live from who we really are and come to peace with that which has brought us to where we are.

Footnotes:

- 1 I could meditate more, be more mindful, or read something that will help. I've done these practices for decades, and they've moved me forward on the spiritual path. These practices are beneficial and do not need to be given up or lessened, though more of these practices is not letting go.
- 2 Who we really are is love, peace and joy. I don't want the reader to just accept that who we really are is love, peace and joy. Only our experience will be able to tell us who we really are under our personality and ego. What do you find at the core of you when you go deeply within?
- 3 I'll address fear in the present moment later in this paper. There can be a healthy component to fear in the present moment.
- 4 I know that fear and anger can also be very healthy emotions in appropriate situations for a certain amount of time. When fear and anger are carried well past the event that caused them to arise, then fear and anger are not healthy emotions.
- 5 Eckhart Tolle refers to this as the pain body. Many other teachers point out that

our painful emotions and stories do want to stay and continue to act out; as crazy as this may sound.

- 6 I thank [Racquel Palmese](#) for the basis of the velcro analogy.
- 7 The complete and instantaneous undoing of a very deep pattern that we're holding is rare. Most letting go is gradual; with bigger and smaller amounts letting go until the pattern is completely released.
- 8 Abdominal breathing is a major way to slow down the dancers. There is so much more grounding and centering available to us when we breathe into our abdomen.
- 9 Occasionally our head is the anchor point for both the story and the strong emotions.
- 10 Hands-on is not just used at the anchor point, though in many instances, the anchor point is the best place to apply hands-on help. Our intent when using hands-on is very important. The strong emotional energy can be transferred between people. I do not recommend using hands-on until we've been instructed and have experienced hands-on help.