



open the council

Start the council with a 3-minute practice of TUZA. (p. 7)

council check-in

Name one emotion you are feeling right now.

review home assignment

theme: noticing emotional triggers

We all respond emotionally to what we experience in the world around us. For example, we feel happy when we receive a compliment, afraid of a threat, or sad when we experience loss. However, sometimes we can be strongly triggered by what happens. That is, it stirs us up, presses our buttons, sends us over the edge, or provokes some of those rerun feelings in us. We cannot change the fact that we are affected by the world around us, in the same way that a tree cannot stop its branches from swaying when the wind blows. However, we can learn to pay attention and be aware of our emotions and then steady ourselves like a tree with deep roots.

Sometimes, such as in a social confrontation, our reaction is so instantaneous that it feels like there is no other option. It is important to realize that there are stages in our emotional experience and that we have options for the way in which we handle our feelings. We can disagree without being disagreeable. For example, when someone insults us we have an emotional response to that event—we may feel scared, angry or upset. Before responding, it is important to identify what emotions arise and qualify them. That is, ask ourselves why they bother us now, is there a real threat here or did something else set us off, and what action, if any, do we need to to protect ourselves.

If we are *not* mindful, we will often jump right from the first event to the reaction, without considering the in-between. So when someone hurls an insult, we push right back; the tension mounts or a fight begins. But if we let ourselves experience those middle steps—feel how we are affected inside and notice our judgments—then we can slow the whole process down. We can be more aware of the sequence of events, disrupt the automatic reaction and choose a skillful response.

As we pay more attention to the mind-body connection and the various conditions that trigger us, we can choose to respond to our emotions in a new way. We can name the trigger, and we can take time to breathe, pause and reflect on the situation. Once we do this, we may be less impulsive and become more capable and responsible about how we want to respond. In time, we learn how to better manage our behavior and what kinds of things trigger us. With a mindfulness practice, we become more aware of our emotions, we switch off our habitual behavior and break the cycle of reactivity. By acknowledging our feelings and giving ourselves space for thought, we can take control of our experiences instead of being controlled by them.

mindfulness without borders

council lessons: **noticing emotional triggers**

present moment tools

- Notice the rush of energy when you are triggered and allow the idea that in many situations, you do not have to act immediately.
- Use your breath as a technique to regaining composure and building clarity.
- Be aware of the habits, conditions and situations that trigger your emotions and explore ways to avoid being trapped by them.
- Be sensitive to the impact that your actions have on others.

teaching quote

“Any person capable of angering you becomes your master; he can anger you only when you permit yourself to be disturbed by him.”

— Epictetus (pronounced Epic-TEE-tus), Greek philosopher

council dialogue

- Tell a story of a time you got angry and you wished you had reacted differently.
- Looking back, what do you think was at the root of your reaction?
- How can your awareness of the conditions that trigger you help you to better shape your response in the future?

mindfulness practice: anchor breath

One way to be mindful is to bring our attention to the experience of breathing. In time and with practice we notice how this moment-to-moment attention to the breath helps quiet the mind and calm the heart. The intent of breathing mindfully is to pay attention to the in-breath and the out-breath as a basic skill to bring us back to the present moment. It is also a useful tool to help us pause before reacting in emotionally-charged situations. While there are many useful mindfulness practices, breathing mindfully can be done at any time and place throughout the day.

anchor breath

here's how:

- Sit in a comfortable position. Allow both soles of your feet to connect to the floor.
- Rest your hands on your thighs and let your shoulders drop.
- Close your eyes or look for a reference point somewhere on the floor where you can return your eyes when they get distracted and begin to wander around the room.
- Let your spine grow tall and noble like the trunk of a tall tree.
- Take a moment to notice how your body feels.
- Now, bring your attention to the flow of your breath.
- You don't need to breathe in a special way. Your body knows how to breathe.

mindfulness without borders

council lessons: **noticing emotional triggers**

- Simply notice each breath coming into the body as you inhale, and leaving the body as you exhale.
- If your mind is distracted with thoughts, emotions or body sensations, notice what is distracting you and gently let it go by redirecting your attention back to the breath.
- At the end of your next exhalation, bring your awareness to where the breath first enters the body.
- Breathing in, follow the path of the breath as it moves down to the chest.
- Notice the chest rising with each in-breath and falling with each out-breath.
- With your next in-breath, follow the breath as it moves down to the lower belly.
- Allow the belly to expand and contract with each cycle of breath.
- Continue to trace the path of the breath as you breathe in and out.
- You don't need to breathe in any special way. Simply let the breath come and go of its own accord for the next few minutes.
- When you are ready, slowly bring your attention back to the room.

reflecting on the practice

Take a moment to silently reflect on how you feel right now.

home assignment

Try using the anchor breath this week in one situation that usually makes you angry or upset.

Record in your journal what happens. Also answer the following questions:

- In what situations do you most often get triggered?
- When you are upset, how do you contain it and turn down the volume?
- How can you apply your mindfulness practice when you are triggered?

Continue volunteering with your community service project.

Pause and practice TUZA for 3 minutes once a day to help bring your attention back to your breath and stay in the moment.

close the council

Council members are asked to stand close together in a *Circle of Intentions* and share one intention that they can set for the remainder of the day.