

The Everyday Sanyasin

Chapter 15. Opening with the Breath

What's Going on Inside of Me?

B. We're back with our continuing series of conversations with Sean Thomas. Our topic is Ramananda, the founder of the Sadhana Society, and we left off last time with Sean talking about the kinds of experiences you can have as an Everyday Sanyasin, even in the grocery store. For example, you're going through the check out line, and you make eye contact with the cashier, and there's that golden moment of connecting. What I want to talk about today a little bit is the other experience I have is when sometimes I turn to my left and see the people behind me in the check out line. They're tired, it's 5:30, they've had a hard day at work, they're in a bad mood, and I can see it on their faces. Sometimes it's hard to be with that when I'm walking through life in that moment as a radiating Being of Light. Not to say that's always my state, but it's very challenging, and I think that since the life of an Everyday Sanyasin is an everyday life, with all the challenges therein, what can we do about that and how can we approach that?

S. Very carefully.

B. Alright. I know that means we're going to get into something, so I'm looking forward to your delineation there.

S. It's amazing. There are two things going on. There's one thing going on outside of you, and that's the person and their actions, and the way they appear follows their pattern of expression. There's another thing that's going on, and that's what's going inside of you. As this is occurring, you're thinking to yourself, this person's angry, this person's unhappy, this person is not feeling very good.

B. Right, and I go through an experience of, "Wow! What a dreary, dark sorrowful world, and here I am trying to do this path of mine." Do you see what I'm saying?

S. Oh, I do.

B. It's hard to be around that sometimes, because I feel a lack of support. I'm like in this kind of biker-planet world, where everybody's kind of tough and hard and sad all the time.

S. I do. I do understand, and that's why I said it's occurring in two places. And I think that by understanding it from this perspective, we can begin to work with it, because the one thing I can really work with is what's going inside of me.

B. Right, because that's my territory, that's my purview, and I have access to that.

S. Because you have really good access there. And so what's happening is, your perception of them is triggering something going on in you.

B. So it's a kind of projection, like the way my dad looked at me, or my mom looked at me, or how I used to fight with my sister.

S. Well, that's a way to say it, although let's not get that heavily into the story.

B. Alright.

Breathing in Spaciousness

S. Let's say that I'm looking at them, and I'm feeling something. Let's say a queasiness in my chest.

B. Okay, I've had that experience.

S. And that queasiness is typically associated with sadness.

B. Alright.

S. You're feeling sad about what you're picking up from the person, and so what you can do immediately within yourself is to feel that, and then take two or three breaths and breathe right into that part of you.

B. In the moment, right there when I'm in the checkout line, looking behind me.

S. Yes. You might want to look away from the people so they don't think you're staring at them, but basically take the moment to focus three breaths. Three breaths is not even 10 seconds. So take the moment to focus on what you're feeling inside of you. And as you breathe into this recognition of what's going on — of what you're feeling — and this breathing into it, creates a movement and an action that actually expands the pattern within you into a spaciousness. By doing that — the fourth breath may be just this [sound of breath], wow, this nice deep breath that I took in, and actually I'm feeling better.

B. Okay, and the sense of feeling better has to do with not just feeling better, but knowing that I'm feeling better because I've now created some room around this experience. There's spaciousness that has nothing to do with this triggering or this sadness or whatever it is that looking at these folks, or feeling them, brought on in the first place.

S. You have actually created space around that pattern you're talking about of interpreting others' behaviors. And that's what's happened — we've got sensory data, and we've interpreted it, and this interpretation has a whole binding quality. In other words, it's putting the tunnel vision on, so we can only see certain options in terms of reaction to what we're experiencing.

B. Here's a question, a fine point, though I think an important one. Is the story — you know the story behind it, the content — is that what's most binding, or is it the energetic, you know this kind of yucky feeling, or is it both?

S. Well, it can be dealt with as either. In other words, if you can find the binding — in this case, we're saying, kind of a binding or an icky feeling in your chest — if you can find that and feel it, and then breathe directly into it, that begins to open the pattern. Other people who have done certain types of inner work, can locate the emotional, intellectual response that's going on and infuse it with the bliss or the support of Tara, or with a word, or something like that, and that opens it up.

B. We've been talking a lot about inquiry. Is that a cognitive way of doing it, in other words to where you delete the story, and then you replace that with a practice?

S. Well, that's part of it. One of the problems that we have in the West is that we love our stories.

B. Yes, and we like to pay therapists for years to let us tell them our stories.

S. Yes. And so what we want to do isn't so much to get involved in story, but to do an expansion of the venue.

B. Hmmm, an expansion of the venue.

S. Yes, because when I begin to tell my story, my intellect, and in fact my whole body, my emotions, lock into the pattern of the story. It's the known, and it's really fun to talk about what I know.

B. And so the intellect is actually reinforcing that yucky feeling, and that can really decrease spaciousness around it.

S. Right, and so your story, in this case, your story saying, "God, I live in a biker-world. A bunch of Hell's Angels walking around, kicking each other."

B. Right, that's what it feels like sometimes.

S. That story is, in fact, reinforcing the energetics of your body and your perception. And as you become more tense — and this is just a scientific fact — as I become more intense, physically, more tense, my perception is less accurate.

B. So a contraction takes place, and with that contraction comes a narrowing of perception.

S. Totally. Rather than get into the story — because there's going to be time enough to get into the story, believe me — in this instance, it's much more effective to find where I'm feeling bound.

B. Okay, so I'm in the situation in the grocery store. Can I ask, after I do my breath, can I ask that question, "Where am I feeling bound?"

S. Well, hopefully you ask it before.

B. Oh, so that's actually the best thing to do first.

S. Sure. The first thing you do is mindfulness. Observe. Observe what's going in my body. Yes, I'm going, "Boy, these people are really funky." The people may be funky, no question about it.

B. Okay, the contraction I'm feeling in my body from being around these folks could be correct.

S. Well, but you can't work, you can't deal with these people as effectively if you allow the contraction in your body to dominate.

B. Right, because then I'm identified with that, and I'm just becoming like them.

S. Right, so you become trapped. In contrast, what happens is, you open up to your flow, you open up to the Majesty of your Being, and you breathe, and what you find is that the pattern unwinds.

Working Creatively with Life

B. So let's see if I understand this now. The binding that you're talking about, that's the contraction, and the story behind that can even reinforce the contraction. And the breath and asking yourself, "What is binding me?" or "What is contracting me?" is an invitation for an opening.

S. Well, it's not 'what is contracting me' but '**where.**' "What am I feeling?"

B. What am I feeling? So I could just ask that question. "What am I feeling right now?"

S. Yes, "What am feeling? And where in my body am I feeling it?" Because typically, if I'm feeling tension in my shoulders and neck, it's anger, it's frustration.

B. Oh yes.

S. If I'm feeling a constriction in my chest, typically that's a sadness, that's kind of mourning type of thing.

B. So for our listeners, they could just remember those two questions. They could even keep them in their pocket as they go through life, on a little index card. "What am I feeling and where am I feeling it?"

S. Yes.

B. Well, that's pretty simple.

S. It is, and then, once you can locate it — because what happens to most of us, is the first thing that happens is, I feel it all over. "I feel it all over my body, I feel their negative vibes all over my body." And you want to be a little more specific than that. First of all, it's not true, but also, it's just too bloody big to work with. If you really felt it all over your body, then hand the gal her money and get the hell out of there. Because you're working with a reaction inside of you that's taking you over, and what you want to do, is you want to work creatively with life, because you're going to run into people who are tired and grumpy. You're going to run into people who are frustrated with their lives and with what's going on. And the way to deal with that is, first of all, to say, "Okay, am I feeling funky here?" If I am, then to recognize, "Oh wow, my stomach just went real queasy. I'm afraid."

B. And we have to be willing to admit that. I think part of what happens in the moment-to-moment living of daily life — in the trenches so to speak, not as a monastic, not as someone sequestered — is that there are a lot of people out there who are unhappy but they really don't want to feel it right now because they're trying to get stuff done.

S. I think so. I think also that it's very easy to say, "It's them. It's the other guy. It's those people that are behind me that are causing this. If they didn't exist, then I wouldn't be feeling this." And yet a hundred percent responsibility for myself says, "Hmmm, yes they've triggered something. No doubt about that, but I can deal with what's been triggered. I can open up to that. I can fill it with breath. I can expand it, and I can begin to feel the Freedom of Being, and the Flow of my Heart."

B. Well, part of it is just admitting that I am being triggered.

S. Part of it is recognizing that when I make a judgmental statement, the odds are that I'm triggered.

B. In other words, that's a way to get onto myself about this stuff. If I'm judging, and I'm having this kind of negative feeling, perhaps as you say, there's anger or frustration, I'm triggered.

S. Yes, I'm triggered. And the best thing you can do is to clear what's going on inside of you.

B. Because I can't do anything about them. In my example, I felt bad just looking at them. They didn't even say anything. They didn't even make a mean remark to me. It was just looking at their sad, what I interpreted to be, their sad and tragic faces. A sea of sadness.

S. It's kind of like the guy who cuts you off in traffic as you're driving down the road. It's not that he sat there and thought about it and said, "I'm going to pull in front of him." He didn't even know you were there.

B. Right. He's just doing his own thing, and he didn't bother to turn around or look in his rear view mirror.

S. He's trapped in his own thing. And that's a really far out thing to work with.

B. It's actually that being cut off in traffic is a perfect example of tunnel vision, because he didn't look.

S. Totally. The people who are standing in the line behind you that are going "Well, will this guy quit smiling and just get done, cuz I got to get home." They're in their stories, they're totally in their stories. By your internalizing and becoming bound by your interpretation of what you're picking up from them, that entrains you to what they're doing and makes them more bound in what they're doing.

B. I see, so it's almost like a negative reinforcement.

S. It is a negative reinforcement. Well, it is a reinforcement. Actually, it's a positive reinforcement, because then they're justified, their whole world is screwed.

Smiling from the Flow of Your Heart

B. You know I want to take that example a little further because in Prescott, Arizona, where I used to live and you still reside, I had two or three favorite people at the check out line at the grocery store, and they would always visit with me. And if there were a bunch of frustrated, sad people behind me, I could actually feel their anger that I'm taking a few seconds to visit before I leave.

S. Oh.

B. So I've actually had the experience you're talking about.

S. It's so interesting. Again, going back to an analogy we spoke of before in an earlier interview, the snake bites the thought, not the person. As I said, I have actually watched the fear of somebody who saw a snake, who I stopped, and he saw the snake in front of him, and I watched, almost palpably, the vibration of his fear stretch out from him and strike the snake and the snake coiled.

B. You could actually see the whole unfoldment of that.

S. And that's the same thing that you're feeling in the check out line. This is a very good example of how together, how un-separate humanity is, how I feel your pain. How you, tied up in your story of frustration, is communicated all over the place to the whole world. What happens is, that by breathing into and opening up and staying in your flow, you end up not having to go to the illness of the person, or the tiredness of the person.

B. Right.

S. You can actually look at them and maybe even smile, genuinely, not a phony smile, but a smile from within you, which is part of the Flow of your Heart. And it's even possible that that smile, that that Flow of your Heart may actually touch something in them that might even say to them, "Maybe I don't have to be bound this tight."

B. Well, I've had that happen to me, too. And when I was not doing well in a situation, I have had some times when that smile of a stranger, and it feels like complete compassion. I had that experience yesterday. I had to buy a piece of office furniture at Office Max, and the fellow who normally helps me — he's an older gentleman, he's retired, this is kind of a little part time job for him — and I said, "How

are you doing today?" And he goes, "60-40." And I said, "Oh I know about those 60-40 days." He laughed, and he felt better, and so did I.

S. It's not a point of having to adopt the pattern that the person is projecting, because in truth, we really don't know what they're projecting. We can say, "Well, they really seem to be tied into whatever pattern, whatever story that they're playing, because they're not seeing me." And that's okay. I mean, basically, this is just somebody that's standing in line behind you.

B. Right. And what made it so challenging was, I just wanted to run back home where it was safe. It's like "Wow, what a tough world." I don't watch news all the time because it's usually kind of bad news.

S. Well, the news can be very depressing, that's for sure. The thing is, in doing this simple, simple little breathing technique, you actually find your safety where you're standing.

B. Which is, of course, the light and support that's always there from the Universe. I'm just giving myself a short practice. It's just reconnect and touch it one more time.

S. Sure, and believe me, you find that you do that a lot in your life. The idea of looking at somebody and realizing they're angry, and then in your own mind, filling them with light and releasing them into the light.

B. That's a whole practice we did on another recording that we actually showed our listeners how to do, and that's part of the repertoire.

S. Of course, and just doing that makes a difference, when somebody is mad at me, when somebody's mad and speaking harshly at me or making gestures to me or something like that, it doesn't feel very good — and so I immediately start saying, "Okay, where am I feeling it?" And starting to breath into it and everything, and saying, "Okay, do I want to respond at all, and if I do, how do I want to respond?" And it may mean, "You know what, it's not worth responding." It's just, "Oh, okay, it's just a car driving down a road and I'm turning. Bye."

B. So it's not like we have to put our attention to everything. It's more about being in touch with what really does trigger us. Because if I have a bad experience, and my wonderful state of mind is changed, and I come home and bring that to my family, then I'm not being a very good Sanyasin at the moment.

S. You're a bad Sanyasin. Bad Sanyasa.

B. Bad boy, very bad boy.

I Really Do Have Choice

S. Well, let's look at that, because it's recognizing that circumstances come and go and the gift of a circumstance that's happening, that's playing out in front of me in life, is that it's triggering something inside of me. It could be triggering really great stuff, or it could be triggering fear, it could be triggering trouble, it could be triggering a sense of being misunderstood. I'm going to go back to your analogy from the last time of dark nebulae.

B. Oh yes. Dark nebulae.

S. That basically are visually defined by what they obscure.

B. Correct.

S. Okay, so if we look at the trigger, and something's arising in me, and realize that I'm defining this feeling based upon how it's limiting me. I know it because it's contracting, it's pulling my senses in, it's tunneling my vision. You see what I'm saying?

B. Okay, so I'm defining it in terms of how it's contracting me. I follow you so far.

S. So then by breathing into it, I change the way I define it.

B. Ahhh!

S. And I'm defining it in terms of how it can expand my expression.

B. Okay, let me repeat that. In other words, if I'm feeling defined by how it's contracting me, by breathing into it and asking those two questions — and I'll repeat those two questions again. "What am I feeling and where am I feeling it in my body?" — there's a very good likelihood that it will then change into, and say it again...

S. Well, the opportunity will present itself for you to use that pattern as a vehicle of expression, of greater expression, rather than a vehicle of limitation.

B. Just like that?

S. Just like that. Yes. Because you changed, you've expanded your perspective. Instead of being trapped in the energetic feeling, or in the story, you expanded your perception and said, "Oh wow, I can breathe. Wow, this is wonderful. I have choices. I really do have choices." How many times has something happened on the road on the way home, and you've internalized that. You get home, and the person you're living with says, "Wow, you're really grumpy." And you go, "Yeah, this guy flipped me off on the road."

B. And so that's how the binding quality begins to dissolve.

S. By holding onto that gesture, you've bound yourself to it.

B. Okay.

S. In other words, by holding on to the energetics, by holding on to the story and being upset — so much so that a half an hour later, when you get home, your mate says, "wow, you're really upset" — well, that's you being bound. And the effect of this one person, who's really just tied up in what they're dealing with, is staying with you. You're letting them control you. You're letting that action control you. And what you think was behind that action that was specifically, personally related to you.

B. Well, the way you explain it, Sean, it doesn't sound that challenging. It sounds like it's pretty simple and elegant, and I guess the main thing for me to do would be just to remember that as I go through my day.

S. It is simple, and it is elegant. In my situation, someone came to visit me, and they sat down and their communication was very much tied up with their frustration with institutions and the way things are going with institutions and stuff like that. I looked at them, and I did feel a little bit of trigger inside of me about their frustration, but really, it was what was going on inside of me. And I took a breath and I opened up. And by opening up, I was able to then sit there with them and talk with them and not have to go into their frustration, not have to parrot back to them their frustration. I could honor where they

were. I just didn't have to go there. And eventually, their frustration transformed into a chuckle.

B. Sean, wasn't it a combination of maintaining your state and not being triggered, and also the person you were talking with then feeling your compassion for what they were going through?

S. That's kind of what we were saying. When I don't reinforce their frustration — and there are a lot of different methods of doing this. Sometimes it's a "Wow, it sounds like you're really frustrated." Or "I'm guessing that you don't like the feeling that you're feeling right now." Sometimes people really need to have somebody just say that, but you can say that without becoming caught up in what they're feeling.

B. It sounds to me, Sean, like perhaps, before I said that to someone, if they were a friend of mine, as opposed to strangers in a check out line, I might want to ask those two questions, "What am I feeling and where am I feeling it in my body?" before I proceed with anything else. At least I'm a little bit more clear.

S. For sure, ideally, you don't want to interact with somebody who's triggering you, in your trigger.

B. Right. Because then I'm actually going to reinforce their sting. I might put us both in a worse mood.

S. You may. And so that's part of it, is to recognize that it has to do with really looking at yourself and saying, "I'm being triggered. Something's going on inside of me." That's why you ask the question, "What am I feeling and where am I feeling it?" You notice we didn't say, "What are they causing me to feel?"

B. I see. Right. We didn't ask that question, or "How are they messing with me?" or something like that.

S. Right. We made it an inner, a very strong inner question. "What am I feeling, and where do I feel it in me?"

B. And so there's no outward or outer or blaming or judgment in those questions at all.

S. Right, and then breathing into that and opening up that, I then open up the possibility of all kinds of things happening. And you never know. The person who looked that way at first, as you clear it from

you, could reach out and touch your hand and say, "It's so nice standing next to you in line."

B. I've had that experience, so you're right. I mean I've had people look in my basket to see what I'm buying, and I tell them what I'm doing, and they say, "Oh, you're being so nice to yourself. You bought these cute little snacks." Or "Oh, I'd like to try that kind of bubbly water."

S. So it opens up to the possibilities. That is the key. By working with and expanding the frame of reference with which you're viewing, what's going inside of you, so it doesn't become an entrapping pattern, it opens the possibilities of interaction, and it could end up being really enjoyable.

Breathing into Anger

B. Alright, so now I'm going to give you an example, Sean, from today. An example from today that does not involve people. I got in my car today to drive down to this recording facility, and I noticed that the price of gasoline had just increased 10 cents. It's almost \$2.50 now for supreme unleaded, and this triggered a whole series of things inside of me that had absolutely nothing to do with that. I was upset about what it was going to cost me the next time I take a trip to Arizona. I was upset with the political system. I'm from Texas, and I know what the price of gas is, what it costs to refine it, and so forth, so there was a whole story that was going on. It was unbelievable, and it sounds to me like that was probably also a time to take those breaths in and ask those two questions, "What am I feeling, and where am I feeling it?"

S. Yes.

B. Just from a sign I saw on the side of the road.

S. I would guess that you're feeling a tightness in your neck and shoulders because you're angry.

B. I'm angry, and I also feel helpless, because I don't feel like I have any participation in this.

S. You might have had a queasiness in your stomach, too. And so you'd say, "Okay, well, I'm feeling a tension in my shoulders and neck, and I'm feeling a queasiness in my stomach." So I pick one.

B. Right, so in other words, work with them one at a time.

S. Breathe into that one and feel the release in that one and then pick the other one. And if you allow yourself to truly feel the constriction, to truly feel the queasiness located in your stomach, by breathing into it, it will open. It won't work if you just say, "Well, I'm going to breathe into my stomach," and then take a quick breath.

B. Or, "I'll do it later, when I'm not making a right turn in heavy traffic."

S. Well, you can do it later when you're not making a right turn, because you want to be safe, but do it as soon as you're done. And for sure, try not to go into the story.

B. Right, because as I just gave you my example, Sean, I'm still a little pissed off. You know what I mean? It's amazing.

S. Where is it?

B It's actually in the solar plexus.

S. In your solar plexus? Ah. Alright, then feel it in your solar plexus.

B. Okay. And I should do my short breaths right now?

S. Well, do easy breaths into the solar plexus and try to feel exactly where you're feeling that.

B. Well, it feels like a hard plate right there. It doesn't feel permeable. Okay, and I think the reason why it's still lingering is because I don't think those gas prices are going to go down tomorrow or the next day, so I'm going to have to deal with this when I fill up my tank.

S. Well, see, and think about what you're doing. You are not focusing on what you are doing, you're still playing in the story.

B. Ahhhhh!

S. And it's a good story. It's a good story. I mean...

B. It's happening all over the country, so I can justify the story.

S. It has, oh God, it has drama, it has fear of the future. It has all kinds of really great things.

B It's got intrigue [laughing].

S. Yes, that's it. That laughter. You needed to laugh at it a little bit.

B. Yes, right.

S. My God, I'm really playing a good story here. Is getting involved with this and being so upset, is that Self Love?

B. Right. Is it Self Love? And of course, it isn't, because it really has nothing to do with loving oneself. It's about indulging in the story. And a story that is devised by the intellect around the actual contractions. If I go back to the contraction, that's where the actual information is.

S. And interestingly enough, the story — and you kind of said it — the story actually takes you away from a direct experience of the contractions.

B. Well, it even took me away from the exercise, Sean.

S. Yes.

B. I'm just conversing with you here, trying to do the darn thing, and I'm already talking to you about the story again.

S. Sure, and that's a very good example of being mindful and saying, "Hmmmmm." You started out saying — it was very interesting, because the analogies that you used were very ultimate analogies. "It was an iron plate."

B. Right. It felt like an immovable object that was intransigent and impermeable.

S. Right, and those words made it even harder.

B. Oh right! Because certainly if I'm describing it that way, how is spaciousness going to appear there?

S. [Laughing] Yes, in these practices, to be an Everyday Sanyasin does require a whole lot of truth, of authenticity with yourself. And some criticism, in a way, a playful criticism, that says, "Hmmm, I got caught up in the story that time, didn't I? And a little chuckle is really good for that.

Seeing into the Story

B. It really is. It's also interesting, and this is why I'm using this example of something that really has a charge, a personal charge. There are other things that may be just as severe a trigger, but don't have the same kind of charge, in other words, don't linger. In my interactions with people, I have a tendency to be able to resolve those pretty quickly internally and often externally with the person, but an increase in something I can't control, like the cost of gasoline, refined petroleum, it's interesting how that appears to be more intransigent.

S. Well, and more ominous.

B. What it makes me do, or triggers me into feeling, is a decline of basic trust and reinforcement of feeling that I live in an inimical universe.

S. Okay, all that is being heaped upon this little bit of tightness of your solar plexus.

B. Which happened from a little transient moment of seeing the cost of gas go up 10 cents as I was driving to work.

S. And it's tough sometimes, we've talked about this. We're getting into what you would do, let's say, in a Wrathful Deity practice. You get into the story. You get into shouting out the story, screaming out the story, screaming out every bloody detail of the story.

B. So you're really profusing and indulging yourself and identifying with the content at that point.

S. Well, you are and yet, the way in which you do it in a Wrathful Deity practice is, you've created around you an atmosphere of protection, protection both for you and for other beings so that you allow yourself to come forth with this, so that you can really see how you have made the story, how you've made it up.

B. How it was concocted and created and embellished and all that sort of thing.

S. And the truth of it is, as long as you have that opinion about yourself and about reality, you are ineffective.

B. And this opinion about myself is a self-judgment and is self-hatred, correct?

S. Well, it's not a positive self-image [laughing]. Basically, don't get into hatred or anything like that, but just say, "You know what, is it effective? Is it effective for me to be cowering in the corner, afraid because somebody burped?"

B. Right.

S. Our mental hospitals actually are filled with people who have allowed the story to dominate to such a point that somebody asking them to blow their nose is a horrific experience.

B. So part of this, then, going back to this example — and I do want to finish the exercise with you — I think it was wonderful, in this conversation, for me to talk about all the distractions, because you see, there are these two simple questions. If we were doing a workshop together, and I wrote that down, I'd think, "Oh great. I'm done."

S. Of course, that's the difficult thing, the mysterious thing, the magical thing about the Everyday Sanyasin, is that the practices of the Everyday Sanyasin are so simple, deceptively simple, because they require you to be mindful, and mindful in a joyous way. Being angry with yourself for distracting yourself isn't productive either. That's just another strategy for not changing.

B. That's what my teacher calls the "spiritual super-ego." Now you've got another judge in there telling you you're not spiritual or enlightened enough.

S. You know, and so what you do is say, "Yeah, I got distracted again. Okay, I'm going to bring myself back." To understand that the strategies that I've developed to not feel this little bit of queasiness in my solar plexus are so complex and so overbearing, that they can actually stay with me hours later. Hours later, I'm still cogitating and

churning and emotionally distraught about what's going on with the gas prices.

B. I'm feeling that now. I realize I did not resolve it.

S. And my challenge to you in this, is all that's well and good, but there's so much more that you can do as a human being.

B. Than being pissed off about that.

S. Well, than being trapped in being pissed off. Certainly, if something happens in front of you, and you have to act and do something with it really fast, you do it, and then you let go of it.

B. Right. And that's often the case for me, but this one kind of grabbed me, kind of snuck up behind me. There could be a lot of story around that, but I think what I want to do is, with your permission, is go back to impermeable plate within my solar plexus and start to breathe into that.

Moving into the Experience

S. So why don't you, rather than going back to feel the impermeable plate, go in and say, "I wonder what I really feel." Instead of interpreting — because "impermeable plate" is an interpretation.

B. That's a gloss, or a cognitive notion that's being kind of superimposed, that may not be what's going on at all.

S. Right. What you're saying is, "Well, there's some tightness there."

B. Okay, Sean, you know me. Let's go with that. Okay, I'm feeling some tightness there. Let me breathe into that now.

S. So you let yourself focus on the tightness. If it helps to put your hands over the tightness, that's really great to do, also.

B. Okay. I'm doing that now.

S. Okay, and then you breathe in easily. A nice breath. Not a short breath, but a nice breath and exhale.

B. Exhale. Okay. I'm doing that now.

S. Do it two more times.

B. Well, I'm feeling relaxation around the side seams now of my body, like the sides of my ribs. That's where I'm noticing the spaciousness first.

S. That's the beginning. And basically, now you've started the ball rolling in the opposite direction. What had happened is you've spent two hours cultivating your tenseness.

B. Even if it's unconscious.

S. Well, it wasn't unconscious. I mean you had the story.

B. Yes, I did.

S. That's the other thing. That's where mindfulness really comes in, is if I hear myself say, "Oh, yes, I feel that way about that" and I ignore it, that doesn't turn off the story. In fact, the fact that I ignored it turns the story on fast.

B. You know, I want to get to that, Sean. I think that's important for us to talk about because a lot of people, you said, spend a lot of time not feeling things. And I was raised in a family where if you were going to be a tough macho guy, you didn't feel things. You just took actions. I was raised to be some kind of superhero. So there's a part of me that's constantly trying to not feel stuff. The little boy has been trained that way. You know, my small child, my inner child, is doing that and so I'm wanting to talk a little bit about that, too, how we're kind of set up not to feel.

S. And the way in which most of us learn to not feel, is to ignore, is to develop strategies to obscure what we're feeling.

B. And that could be a distraction, that could be willfulness, right?

S. Well, it's really interesting. Premature ejaculation is something that therapists work with, especially with younger men, and I always found it interesting when the therapist would say, "So think about a baseball game, or think about assembling a transmission." And I always thought, "Well, that's about the worst thing to do."

B. I agree.

S. Because basically, what you're doing is, you're pulling yourself out of the experience. And the way to begin to work with the experience isn't to pull yourself out of it, but to put yourself into it.

B. That's exactly what I did as a young man. You submerge yourself in that experience, and then you realize it's not an on-off switch. There's a whole gradation and range of experiences you can have.

S. Yes, it's a very similar type of thing for a child, as an adult, who knows what's happened to all of us, but virtually all of us have had experiences that were much better at the time gotten away from, as far as we were concerned — okay, hiding from, whatever we want to say. We didn't want to feel them. And now we're faced with the fact that with that strategy that we developed to not feel hurt, to not feel frustrated, to not feel anger, is now obscuring us. It's been over-generalized in our associative interpretation of phenomena.

B. Oh, say that again. Over-generalized?

S. In our associative interpretation of phenomena. So what happens is, that we've associated the letter 'A' with a sadness. And what happens is that over time, in the brain, our associations in the brain, will trigger that same sadness when we see the letter 'E' or the number '3' or perhaps the number '4,' because they have certain characteristics that are similar to the letter 'A.'

B. Oh.

S. So what we have is a generalization of a specific association with an experience. Okay. And that's what's going in us. We're not experiencing the same thing that happened when we were a child. In my case, both my mother and father are dead, so it's not the same thing that happened at all. What's happening is that I'm organizing and interpreting circumstances within myself and I'm being triggered in a manner that was similar, because I'm saying, "This is similar to being deserted, being left on the doorstep."

B. In other words, I'm making an association that does not jive with reality.

S. There's the big question. Does it really jive with reality? Is this the time for me to be in 'fight or flight?' And that's where looking at

yourself, taking a deep breath, finding out where am I triggered and what's going on here, and allowing yourself to open up to it. Okay, the first thing is that it makes you more conscious of yourself, more reactive, more open to perception, which is exactly where you want to be if, if in fact, you need to respond quickly to a circumstance.

Releasing the Tension

B. So here's what I'm thinking about. Now I've been continuing to do the breathing and the relaxation while we've been talking the last few minutes, and I've been keeping my mind away from the content. Another thing that I've done with myself, which I would like to ask about, is, okay, now let's say I'm more relaxed, right? I'm feeling some roominess. Now my mind comes up with this new way of trying to feel better which is "Okay, you're going to be paying 10 cents more a gallon for gas, and it's 20 gallons to fill your tank, so it's only going to cost you two bucks, so what's the big deal?" Now does that help, or not?

S. Actually, as you're doing it right now, if that's just a kind of a babbling of the brook, it doesn't matter.

B. It's not going to help or hurt me.

S. But if it is an extension of your victimization...

B. Right, poor me.

S. If it's an extension of your victimization, then it's not going to help. It's an interesting thing. It's kind of like taking the situation and filling it with light and releasing it.

B. Ahhhh.

S. Because you can do that. You don't have to just wait for the person or the circumstance. You can actually take a situation, you can take the gas prices, okay, and fill them with light and release them into the light.

B. And I don't have to say anything to make myself feel better. I can just do that.

S. Yes, because anything you say is probably going to be an invitation to the story.

B. And then I'm back into contraction again.

S. Yes. So it's probably an even better idea that — as it comes to mind, as I'm doing the breathing, as it comes to mind — to fill it with light and release it. It's to say, "You know right now, another time when I don't feel a contraction, I can think about what I might be able to do or how this might affect me; but right now I want to clear the contraction. I want to be free. I want to gear into my optimum mode.

B. And that's the refinement of the Everyday Sanyasin, as you said, the practices are simple, but the execution takes time. In other words, it sounds to me like — I mean I've been doing the inquiry for a long time — so it sounds to me that as we go through life, the refinement is where the work is.

S. It is, and yet where you would say "inquiry," I would say "discovery."

B. Alright, let's use the word 'discovery' then.

S. And you would say "inquiry" again, and I would say "discovery" again.

B. Well we'll use the term 'discovery' then. That's a good clarification.

S. Because 'inquiry' can easily fall into the same mental/emotional pattern.

B. I see.

S. Same song, second verse.

B. Right, there's a tendency to go back into content.

S. And so, even as you saying to yourself, "Well, it really doesn't matter. There's still churning..." And if you watch yourself — because I can feel it — if you watch yourself, it's churning again. It's that contraction right there. This is one of great problems of behavior modification, is that you can modify the behavior; but the intellect's magnificent, it just turns around and finds something else to have the same compulsive behavior about.

B. Which is, again, going back to your phrase, "The mind is a wonderful slave but a terrible master."

S. Very much so. And so what we do is, we utilize the intellect when it's propitious to use the intellect, when it's effective to use the intellect. When I'm feeling this tremendous contraction and binding, the intellect's already giving me the reason why I feel this and justify it.

B. In other words, the intellect is already driving it.

S. Right. That's when I need to say, "Okay, well I'm going to focus." It's kind of like, again, if we see the intellect as one of the senses — very much like when we discussed in a previous talk about shifting your focus, so your focus is on your audio sense and not on your visual sense.

B. Yes, I remember that. That's a very powerful focus to move your awareness to another sense.

S. Okay. So that what we do is we move our awareness from our intellect to our sensory, to our feeling, to where we're feeling the pattern in our solar plexus.

B. Ah hah!

S. It's not ignoring the intellect. It's not ignoring the story. It's saying, "Right now I'm choosing to focus on this." And focusing on this, I begin to feel the freedom. I begin to feel the breath. And I begin to, oh wow, my shoulders just moved back just a little bit, my spine straightened, and my chest came out. Oh yeah, okay. Now I'm open. Now if I want to come up with a different strategy for how I'm going to approach the increase in gas prices, I can. Because I'm open with it. Because it's not binding me.

B. And my chances of coming up with a novel, new, or better solution is much more likely if I'm not bound.

S. Of course. When you're pulling yourself in, and your shoulders are coming in, and you're feeling all this tightness in your back and queasiness in the stomach, it's not a good time to try to figure out an answer.

B. Right, and I'm having thoughts that really have nothing to do even with my life anymore. I'm thinking about situations abroad and refineries and supertankers.

S. Yes, And all of those things are strategies for not feeling.

B. Those are strategies for not feeling. So that's a way to get onto that, in other words, if you're continuing to dither with it, and it's continuing to go on as a permutation, that's a real clue that whatever I'm doing to resolve it is not working.

S. Yes. And whatever you're doing to resolve it is not working, but that you're not doing what you think you're doing, because you're busy dithering. I mean, basically, it is very much a self-awareness, it is mindfulness, and it's saying, "don't play at it" in the sense of "don't say I'm doing it and do something else." If you're going to do it, then do it.

The Circle Practice

B. It sounds to me, Sean, that mindfulness is like a muscle that you can strengthen, that becomes more and more adept the more it's used.

S. I think that that's a good way to see it. I would say that mindfulness is a sensory process, that by developing it, we can sense more, we can experience more. By being authentic with it, by listening to what it's saying to us, and by being vigilant and saying to myself, "Oh, I got caught up in the story again." There's a very, very old simple practice, again, one that a Sanyasin gave me years ago, back when I was a pup.

B. Okay, I'd like to hear about that.

S. In this practice, you take a white sheet of paper, just an 8 x 11 sheet of paper, and you take a bowl, like a cereal bowl or a soup bowl. And you turn it upside down on the piece of paper, and with a pencil, you draw a circle. You want a circular bowl, not an oval bowl.

B. Okay, it's just like an ordinary bowl. You put it on the paper and you draw a circle.

S. You draw a circle. And basically, for most of us, it's better to have a large circle. Don't try to make it too small.

B. Okay.

S. And then you sit, and you gaze at the circle.

B You actually look at the circle and there's really nothing else on the page. There's just white paper and this one circle.

S. You gaze at the circle. You don't stare at it, but you gaze at it, and what will happen, if you're allowing yourself to gaze at it, is that as you're watching the circle there, a thought will come to mind. Perhaps a really juicy one about oil prices, and part of the circle will disappear from your visual perception.

B. Wow, I've never done that practice. That sounds really interesting. So a part of the circle disappears because my attention has now been distracted or deterred or moved away.

S. Your mindfulness has wavered, yes. You realize "I don't see the whole circle anymore." You realize also "I got distracted by a thought." And so you bring your perception of the circle back again. You laugh about it maybe, you don't get mad at yourself because that's another distraction.

B. What I like about that circle practice is that it has no intellectual charge on it, and it's hilarious to think about having a thought and seeing part of it disappear and realizing, "Wow, I'm distracted a lot."

S. I would sit there, and a thought would come to mind, and the whole circle would disappear.

B. Really?

S. And I did it with black ink. Nothing lightweight about this at all. And the whole circle would disappear, and I had to admit that the thought was kind of emotional, and it really took me away.

B. Well, you know, we're out of time, and I think it's important for our listeners to realize that they've been given two very wonderful practices. One is to stay in the moment and find out what they're feeling and where they're feeling it in their body. And I like this circle

practice. I have not tried that. I think I'm going to go home and try that tonight.

S. It's a wonderful practice, and there some things about using a circle that are really valuable, and so I really recommend using a circle, not a triangle or a square or a rectangle, but use a circle.

B. Well, we might have to get more into that in another conversation, Sean.

S. I think that's a wonderful idea.