

# The Beautiful and Scary Practice of Moving Closer

Life is full of all kinds of stresses, and each of us has habitual ways of reacting to those stresses — we procrastinate, run to comforts, lash out or distance ourselves from others, try to exit from a stressful place, mentally complain about others.

The sad effect of these habitual reactions is that **they move us further away from others, and from the direct experience of the moment.**

Let's take a quick example: If you are hurt by the way someone is acting, your habitual reaction might be complaining about them, taking offense, getting angry (all of these or a combo). Then you shut them out, closing your heart to them, moving away from them.

The effect of this is that you've now distanced yourself from the other person. And I submit that this is the cause of most of our relationship problems, work issues, violence, racism, political strife, and wars.

**Closing our hearts to others and creating distance from them out of habitual reaction to stress is the heart of aggression, violence and pain.**

We do the same thing when it comes to our direct experience of the moment — if we're bored, unhappy with our situation, unhappy with ourselves, stressed or tired ... we habitually try to find comfort in food, drink, drugs, online distractions, TV or videos, shopping, porn, drowning everything out with music, and so on. We are moving away from the present moment, shutting out the world around us.

**Moving ourselves away from the direct experience of this moment, out of habitual reaction, is the heart of our unhappiness and disconnect from life.**

These are all based on the same problem — we have habitual reactions to stress, and those habitual reactions move us further from other people. From life itself. From ourselves.

Today, I'd like to offer you a practice that I've been exploring myself: **the beautiful practice of moving closer.**

It is scary, shaky, and transformative.

It goes like this:

1. **Notice that you're feeling some kind of stress** — anxiety, pain, struggle, frustration, overwhelm, sadness.
2. **Notice your habitual reaction to that stress:** you procrastinate, try to exit, shut

someone out, complain, run to one of your comforts, hide, quit, run away, lash out, yell, hit, medicate, etc.

3. **Refrain from indulging in your habitual reaction.** Instead, just remain still. Instead of complaining, do nothing. Instead of spinning around a narrative about the other person and shutting them out, do nothing. Just refrain.
4. **Breathe deeply into the sensations in your body.** When you refrain from your habitual reaction, you are left with an energy in your body that still *really wants* to do the habitual thing. It will be a strong urge. You just sit still. You do nothing. But you breathe deeply and relax around the energy in your body. Notice how it feels, in your torso. Be curious about it. Stay with it. Be present with it. Welcome it. Give it compassion.
5. **Now, move closer.** Someone else stressing you out? After refraining from complaining about them, move closer to them. Open your heart and be fully present with them. Be completely loving. Yes, sometimes you have to physically protect yourself — but that doesn't mean you have to shut down your heart. You can love the person who has hurt you, without letting them continue to hurt you. Maybe it's not a person but a situation (or yourself) that's stressing you out. You are filled with discomfort and uncertainty. You refrain from your habitual reaction, and instead you move closer to the direct experience of this moment. You open your heart to the world, and love it as it is. You love yourself as you are.

Continue to move closer. Continue to reopen your heart. From this place, see what action you need to take. Not from the place of habitual reaction.

It's an incredibly beautiful practice. And yes, it's filled with shakiness. That makes it even more courageous.