

How Should a Meditator Express Emotion?

	INTERNAL SUPPRESSION	INTERNAL EXPRESSION
EXTERNAL SUPPRESSION	Internal suppression with external suppression "Stoicism"	Internal expression with external suppression "Theravada-style transcendence"
EXTERNAL EXPRESSION	Internal suppression with external expression "Blowing off steam"	Internal expression with external expression "Zen-style transcendence"
Arbitrary choice dictated by culture, personality, and circumstances	Always unhealthy	Always healthy

Definitions

INTERNAL: Relating to your subjective state of body sensation, mental imagery and internal talk.

EXTERNAL: Relating to the objective manifestation of your subjective state as "affect" (i.e., sounds and gestures – laughing, crying, shaking, grimacing, etc.)

INTERNAL SUPPRESSION: Mental imagery, internal conversation and body sensation, subject to:

- Gaps in continuity of awareness and/or
- Interference with their natural flow

In other words, a subjective state not experienced with:

- Mindfulness
- Equanimity

EXTERNAL SUPPRESSION: Not manifesting your subjective state as "affect" (i.e., sounds, gestures, etc.)

Notes

1. "Theravada-style transcendence"

Here, non-expression of affect should not be taken to imply non-expression of purposeful words and actions appropriate to the situation. But because there is no internal suppression, the subjective state motivates and directs such words and actions as opposed to driving and distorting them as may happen when there is internal suppression.

2. "Zen-style transcendence"

The above remarks covering purposeful words and actions apply here as well. But in addition, the "affect" is also motivated and directed by the subjective state. This makes it subtly but significantly different from the kind of "affect" which is driven and distorted by internal suppression. Thus, this style doesn't merely produce transcendence, it also subtly communicates it.

3. External expression may...

- Hinder internal expression by distracting one from precise contact with the body sensation, imagery and talk that underlie the external display.
- Facilitate internal expression by continuously reflecting the energy fluctuations (i.e., impermanence) of the underlying body sensations, imagery and talk.

4. Those who are unfamiliar with the internal skills of mindfulness and equanimity may...

- Mistake Theravada-style transcendence for psychological repression, suppression, or denial.
- Mistake "blowing off steam" for true psychotherapeutic catharsis.
- Mistake "blowing off steam" for "Zen spontaneity."

5. Some people who practice in the Theravada (Vipassana) lineage prefer to express themselves in the Zen way and conversely.

6. The original Stoic philosophers of ancient Greece advocated something called *ataraxia* which probably covered a range of practices from "biting the bullet" to true equanimity in the sophisticated Buddhist sense of the word.