

Mindfulness: Being Present

Module One

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THE SANCTUARY

INTRODUCTION

Set out below is an overview of the journey on which we are about to embark and the key themes that we will be addressing. As we make our journey we will be cultivating, step by step, the essential skills and experience we need to practice mindfulness.

1. Mindfulness – how to begin

We define mindfulness and describe the motivation that is needed to practice it effectively. We also identify the two aspects of mindfulness training: method and attitude. Having clarified our intention for practising mindfulness, we then observe how our mind operates on ‘automatic pilot’ – how we are habitually not present. Through doing the ‘body scan’ exercise we learn to investigate our experience more closely and gradually begin to wake up to our present moment reality.

2. Settling the Mind

As we wake up to the present moment, we begin to see how unsettled our mind is. Through doing the exercises of ‘recognizing the unsettled mind’ we begin to see for ourselves that our mind is not under our control – it is like a butterfly that flies off and does its own thing driven by habit. This is an important discovery because now we know what we are working with. However, before we can work with our mind in a constructive way, we need to settle the gross level of agitation and distraction that pulls us to and fro. For this reason we do the exercise of ‘settling the mind’. Here we introduce walking meditation to establish a balance between sitting still and moving. Walking meditation also settles the mind because it brings us home to our bodies and slows us down.

3. Mindfulness Support

Having begun to settle our minds, we now introduce the key elements of sitting practice - grounding, resting and mindfulness support. But first we attend to our posture because how we hold our body affects our mind. Posture is the container for our practice. We then practice the grounding phase, which draws our mind more fully into our body such that we feel rooted and embodied. This helps to anchor our attention in the present moment. We then move into the resting phase, which involves letting go of any sense of focus and resting in our present moment experience. This is the highest form of sitting practice, but given the power of distraction, our attention quickly moves away. So at this point we introduce the mindfulness support, which is a reference point for us to come back to the present moment. We will work with three mindfulness supports – body, sound and breath.

4. Mindfulness in Daily Life

We then introduce exercises for cultivating mindfulness in daily life so that when we get up from the cushion we carry our mindful awareness into everyday activities and do not leave it behind on the cushion! In our sitting practice we strengthen the ‘muscle’ of mindfulness and in daily life we exercise this muscle.

1. MINDFULNESS - HOW TO BEGIN

THE SUMMER DAY

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean -
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down -
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

Mary Oliver

1.1 Being mindful – being in touch

"The human condition - lost in thought." Eckhart Tolle

The moment we knowingly observe our thoughts or behaviour, we are mindful – we know what is happening in the moment. This simple fact transforms the way we live because it grounds us in the present. And the present is our only reality.

When we are out of touch with the present, we find ourselves out of touch with our inner and outer reality. Being out of touch outwardly leads to confused and possibly harmful behaviour because our actions can be inappropriate and destructive without our recognizing or acknowledging what we are doing. We are then able, for example, to ignore what we are doing to other living beings or to the environment, and thus persist with harmful activity. This is something we can all see in the world around us at an individual and political level. But there is more to it than this: any form of activity in the world is dependent for its success or failure upon the degree of attention and clarity we are able to bring to it. These are qualities of mindfulness, so a mindful person is more likely to be effective in the world than someone whose mind is scattered and distracted.

Being out of touch with our inner processes is the basis for a lot of psychological suffering because we are unaware of the many forces at play within our mind. While in this state, it is not possible for us to see and understand what is going on, so we don't know why we feel the way we do. We often won't even know why we think, react and behave the way we do. Many people are trapped in patterns of suppression, denial, projection, escapism or obsessive thinking in relation to their emotions. This results in the mind coming under the control of psychological complexes and a wide range of psychological 'disorders' like anxiety, depression, stress, tension or paranoia. We will experience these painful states without knowing why, and we will be bewildered about what to do about them. We may long to change, but find ourselves unable to do so because we are out of touch with what is going on in our minds and therefore don't see or understand the causes.

When we develop mindfulness we find that a natural process of learning and inner discovery opens up because mindfulness brings us into the moment. When we remain in the moment our inherent intelligence is revealed in the form of awareness, which leads to recognition, which in turn enables us to 'see' what we are doing at an intellectual and emotional level.

We may experience low mood, but not realize that we habitually dwell on negative, harmful or destructive thoughts. We may believe that low mood is simply a dark cloud that descends upon us for no apparent reason. When we see that we dwell on negative themes, we have a chance to recognize that there is a connection between our negative thinking and our moods. We are then ready and able to do something to free ourselves from a destructive pattern of behaviour, which will then free our minds from negative mood swings.

So mindfulness enables our inherent intelligence to manifest. This leads us to recognize what we are doing inwardly. Recognition blossoms into ever-deepening levels of awareness. Where there is awareness, wisdom and compassion naturally grow and transform us at every level. We find that our human potential progressively manifests and our lives become joyful and fulfilled.

1.2 What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a Faculty

We are offering simple steps for developing mindfulness based on the understanding that it is a faculty like our other faculties. If we neglect it, it remains dormant. If we work on it, it develops, grows and stabilises. When this happens our lives change for the better.

Most people fail to develop mindfulness for a variety of reasons, some of which are related to unresolved psychological issues. But more commonly it's because they simply do not know how to settle their mind and release their habitual grip on distraction.

Method and Attitude

Mindfulness is dynamic in the sense that it will reveal in a healthy and progressive way inner processes that we may prefer not to see. Sometimes this can be disturbing, especially if the discoveries are contrary to our image of ourselves. For this reason there is a lot of emphasis on the need to accept and come to terms with the way we are. If we do not do this there is a chance that we will become reactive and upset over our inner discoveries, and may even abandon our training.

So we can say that our mindfulness training proceeds at two levels:

Firstly, a technical aspect, which involves the method of how we train and what steps we learn in order to settle the mind, come into focus, remain in focus, recognize and avoid distraction.

Secondly, by developing an attitude of acceptance and kindness towards ourselves so that when the effects of mindfulness reveal deeper levels of psychological activity we are able to integrate these in a creative and non-reactive way.

Both levels are essential and should proceed side by side with one another.

Towards a Definition

Mindfulness is being in the moment, knowing we are in the moment, and knowing what is happening in the moment, both around us and within our own mind. It is a faculty that remains dormant if neglected, which is the case with most people. If developed, it leads to a limitless development of our human potential.

The first stage of mindfulness training leads to the development of tranquility. We find that our mind begins to settle down and become less wayward. Our tendency to jump around after random thoughts weakens. We find ourselves more able to abide in the present moment and be at rest. Distraction – a problem for most people – subsides and we find that peace of mind and relaxing in the moment become possible.

As our training progresses, we discover how reactive we are and how our mind is locked into habitual patterns that lead to compulsive and obsessive mind states and ways of thinking. We learn to free ourselves from these, thereby developing maturity and becoming responsive instead of reactive.

If we continue with mindfulness training, we naturally enter the second stage of the process: the development of insight. This is a natural and spontaneous 'seeing' into the workings of the mind that begins to reveal its depths. It shows us deeper and deeper levels of how the mind works and what is going on beyond the limits of normal conscious awareness.

As this phase develops we find that insight reveals and frees us from the roots of all our neurotic, painful and problematic mind states. We begin to experience true inner peace, stability and joy. We move towards true maturity. The process has been described as a 'natural unfolding', an unfolding that, remarkably, is all based on a very simple training:

Knowing what is happening, while it is happening, without preference.

Other Definitions of Mindfulness

“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. This kind of awareness nurtures greater awareness, clarity and acceptance of present moment reality. It wakes us up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments. If we are not fully present for many of these moments, we may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives, but also fail to realise the richness and the depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation.” Jon Kabat-Zinn

“Mindfulness is a universal human capacity – a way of paying attention to the present moment unfolding of experience – that can be cultivated, sustained and integrated into everyday life through in-depth inquiry, fuelled by the ongoing discipline of meditation practice. Its central aim is the relief of suffering and the uncovering of our essential nature.” Saki Santorelli

“I have learned to be happy where I am. I have learned that locked into the moments of each day are all the joys, the peace, the fibres of the cloth we call life. The meaning is in the moment. There is no other way to find it. You feel what you allow yourself to feel, each and every moment of the day.” Russ Berrie

“Mindfulness is... a turning towards life.... To live life as if each moment is important, as if each moment counted and could be worked with, even if it is a moment of pain, sadness, despair or fear.” Jon Kabat-Zinn

“Mindfulness is loving all the details of our lives.” Pema Chödrön

1.3. Intention, Motivation and Dedication

It is helpful to explore the context for our mindfulness practice. Intention, Motivation and Dedication (sometimes called Sharing) help us do this. They can also frame our practice. We begin every mindfulness meditation session by visiting our intention and motivation. Then we end with a dedication. Having a clear beginning, middle and end to each session enables us to structure our practice and allows us to approach our practice in a positive, committed and genuine way. It also constantly reinforces our intention to keep practicing. Many people lose momentum and find their practice falling away because they don't attend to this fundamental need to remind themselves why they are doing it.

Intention

Before we do any activity we form an intention. If we want to go and make a cup of tea, it is our intention to do so that gets us to stand up and walk to the kitchen. In this way intention brings focus, direction and clarity into the mind. Then we are able to carry out what we wish to do effectively.

In our mindfulness training we harness the power of intention in order to maintain our commitment to a daily practice. We have made a choice to embark on this journey of mindfulness and if we repeatedly renew our intention we will find it easier to live out this choice. This is important as otherwise our practice can start to peter out.

So our intention is simply to be mindful.

Making an intention is like shooting an arrow. Once we have shot the arrow we can sit back and relax, allowing it to find its target. Whenever we practice mindfulness we begin by making a wholehearted intention to be mindful and then we relax and continue. From time to time, if we feel we have lost our sense of focus, we can revisit our intention as a way of realigning ourselves.

It's very common to find ourselves repeatedly lost in thought when we practice – planning, fantasizing, reliving memories. This is to be expected and is almost comical when you think about it. Our intention to be mindful brings us back to the present. Every time we return our attention to the support, it is our intention that brings us back. The faculty for mindfulness has been found to be reinforced by the intention to focus on the support.

Motivation: Two Aspects

Our motivation is the energy source behind our intention. It is like the muscle power in our biceps when we pull back the string of the bow in order to shoot the arrow of our intention. We need to explore and clarify our motivation to practice mindfulness on an ongoing basis, each time we practice, so that this source of energy is sustained and reinforced. If we can do this it will animate our practice and we will naturally want to keep going. Motivation to practice is like a deep reservoir of energy within us that rises and propels us, keeping us moving.

In order to get in touch with our motivation we reflect on what has brought us here – on what the hopes, needs, desires and expectations are around our practice. Perhaps we simply want to be happy, maybe we are suffering from chronic pain or low mood and wish for relief, maybe we want to be a better parent, friend or partner, maybe we want to learn how to relieve our stress, perhaps we would like to feel confident that we can grow old without fear. When we are familiar with these surface motivations we can continue reflecting and begin to find out what is underneath them. In this way we start to see how they are connected by threads of tender and sometimes passionate feeling, to our most deeply felt longings for our own lives, for our loved ones and for this world we live in. Over time we become familiar with the 'felt-sense' (emotional-physical feeling in the body) of this longing and we will find we can tap this reservoir deliberately. It becomes a resource.

In the beginning we may have a clear idea of why we are practicing mindfulness. Over time this clarity can be lost as we find ourselves losing momentum and giving up on our daily practice. Reflecting on motivation counteracts and this helps us maintain momentum and effort.

So what might the deep wishes for our life be? First of all we see that we all want to be happy and free from suffering. Then when we keep looking inwards most of us find that we carry a buried longing to become all that we can be, to live a meaningful life. Have you ever had the nagging feeling that there's more to life than this? Mindfulness meditation is a process which can help us find out who we really are, so that our lives are not just one long process of treading water or holding out, but a process of becoming more and more alive.

This is the first aspect of our motivation: the deeply held wish to be happy and to fulfil our potential.

If we left our motivation at that we might find that our lives become rather self-referencing and narrowed down. So we add a second aspect – to care for others. This not only benefits them, but also means we cultivate within ourselves a wider sense of connection and belonging within families, communities and the world at large. The mind that is open to others is a more spacious mind.

On some level we all wish to contribute to the world, to give, to be of benefit, to relate, to belong and to care. We want to help others be happy and not suffer. Many of us feel sad and powerless when we see suffering around us and want to help. Some of us may tend to feel disconnected from other people and therefore experience a lot of isolated feelings. Some people may not relate to their own caring nature, thinking the reality of their life does not testify to it, but somewhere deep down this wish is built into all of us. Just notice how good you feel when you know you have made a loved one's day or done a stranger a good turn. Even evolution has proved to us that compassion is innate, since as mammals we survive through the caring nature of the parent/child bond.

So this is the second aspect of our motivation: to be of benefit to others.

It is important that we find our own way to relate to motivation. It will be pointless if we just take the two aspects and remember them, without finding out how they relate to us and our particular experience, character and lifestyle. We may feel inauthentic, like we are contriving, if we don't find out what they mean to us personally. So when we reflect we mull our motivation over and we spend time processing and digesting these ideas. We question whether we feel comfortable with them. We find our own language to express them. Until eventually they can begin to sit right with us.

Dedication

When we have finished our mindfulness session we end by sharing with others, particularly those who are less fortunate than we are, whatever beneficial energy we have generated. This promotes generosity, that we always want to share what we have with others. It also promotes compassion, in that we think of the suffering of others and offer the beneficial energy to help alleviate this suffering. Finally, it cultivates our confidence in the practice, that what we are doing really does generate beneficial energy and that this benefits ourselves and others. That we really have generated something to give and share.

At the end of our practice we might also make the intention to carry our mindful awareness with us when we get up and go about our day. We hope to embody it in life as well as on the cushion. In this way we benefit from it ourselves and also share its benefits with all those we come into contact with.

Reflection: Intention and motivation?

What is my intention or purpose in doing this course?

What is my motivation in doing this course?

How do I hope to benefit from it?

How do I want it to change the way that I live my life?

How do I want it to benefit the people in my life and in the world?

1.4 Beginner's Mind

This section explores how we often live our lives on 'autopilot' - habitually distracted and not present - and invites us to investigate our present moment experience with an attitude of curiosity. This is explored through doing the body scan exercise.

Sometimes, when practising mindfulness, it can feel as if we are seeing things for the first time with a freshness that can take us by surprise. This quality of mind has been referred to as "beginner's mind", and has some of the qualities of wonder and appreciation that a happy child can have in experiencing new things. When we walk past a tree, we are not stuck with the concept of "tree" that we hold in our minds ("I know what trees look like"); instead, we really see that particular tree with leaves, gnarled bark and unique individuality. In this way, mindfulness can help us to engage more fully with life, with its sheer impact and beauty, and can shake us from our habitual thinking, awakening a sense of awe and wonder. Even the most ordinary things can be seen with new eyes and we can appreciate the uniqueness and preciousness of all things.

When we are learning the practice of mindfulness, we are trying to foster this quality of "beginner's mind". A meditation teacher, Shunryu Suzuki, said that "in the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's mind there are few". He was describing how we can close down our experience when we think we know, when we engage in the world through our habitual thoughts and concepts, and when we have a jaded sense that we have seen it all before.

1.5 Practising Mindfulness of the Body

The Body Scan

As a way of entering beginner's mind we will now move our attention around the different parts of our body with an attitude of curiosity, exploring our feelings and sensations as if for the first time. We notice how complex the body is – a whole universe of sensation! The practice includes precise awareness of our detailed body parts, the sensations on the surface of the skin, the feelings from inside the body, including sensations perhaps of body organs and bones, and the integrated movements of the breath through the body. We may notice sensations of discomfort, sensations of intensity, or sensations which are very subtle or almost absent from our awareness. We may also become aware of emotional responses, thoughts or stories associated with different body parts – our bodies have histories and our relationship to our body can be complicated. In this way we can start to see how rich and illuminating this practice can be.

We may start to notice more about the different ways in which we pay attention and the different qualities of awareness that are possible. We will learn about how attention can be very flexible. At one moment we are paying detailed attention to a small body part, such as our big toe. At other moments we are holding larger areas of the body in our awareness, such as both of our legs, from the ankles to the hips. We may start to notice the differences in experience if we are holding a mental image of the body in our mind's eye (what we think our left arm looks like), or if we are just experiencing the pure sensations themselves.

Our aim here is to stay with the experience of the body in the present moment, allowing sensations to flow in and out of our awareness, as best we can. There is no right or wrong way for things to feel – there is no expectation that we will even feel relaxed. This is different to a relaxation exercise. We are just feeling what we are feeling in a simple and direct way.

Through this practice, we start to notice a lot about the habits of the mind. Yes, we will get distracted – many times! We start to notice that the mind is addicted to distraction. We may not even notice that we are distracted for some time. But, when we do, we can congratulate ourselves for noticing, and we can invite our attention back to the body, however many times is required. We may notice that the mind does not really want to be present a lot of the time – we may even find that we fall asleep! Sleepiness is commonly experienced when people start with this practice – perhaps we are just very tired, and we really notice this when we stop all of our activity for a while. It may also seem strange at first to practice wakefulness in this lying down position.

The body scan can be a difficult practice for many people, especially if their relationship to their body is complicated. However, if we choose to practice it on a regular basis, we will start to notice a positive shift in our relationship to our body. Through enhanced body awareness, we might notice more kindness developing towards ourselves and an appreciation of our body and what it does for us. We may find that we can develop a more positive response to experiences of pain or suffering in the body through the power of mindfulness. Simple awareness liberates our bodies from being the battle-ground of our anger, resentment, frustration and judgmental reactions.

As we continue to practice the body scan, we will find that we can enhance the awareness of our bodies at different times during our day. We can bring awareness to our posture, being aware of what position we are in and what our bodies are doing at any given time. We can do a brief body awareness scan, noticing any areas of tension and allowing them to release. We could try to ground ourselves in the present moment by bringing awareness to our feet as they touch the earth, and noticing parts of the body in contact with the furniture we rest upon. We could bring our attention to whatever tasks we are engaged in and notice how our bodies connect to those tasks through our senses: our sense of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing. These brief and grounding body awareness practices can be invaluable at times when we are feeling stressed. They only take a few moments and can bring us back in touch with ourselves.

Exercise 1: Body Scan

30 – 45 minutes

Ensure that you will be undisturbed for the duration of your practice. Find a comfortable place to lie down, on the bed or on the floor, remembering that your intention is to foster awareness and wakefulness and not to fall asleep. Make sure that you will be warm enough and cover yourself with a blanket if necessary.

Close your eyes and focus for a while on the rising and falling of the breath in your body. This breath renews our life with every in-breath. It lets go of what is no longer needed with each out-breath. Feel the letting go as each out-breath exits the body. Feel the flowing of the entire breath throughout the body – riding the sensations like surfing a wave. Take a few moments to have a sense of your body as a whole, from head to toe, the outline of your skin, the weight of your body with the sense of

gravity bearing down upon it. Notice the points where your body is in contact with the surfaces it rests upon.

Now bring your attention to the big toes of both of your feet and explore the sensations that you find here. Don't try to make anything happen – just feeling what you are feeling. Gradually broaden your awareness to include your other toes, the soles of your feet, the other parts of your feet, and allow your feet to soften and relax. Imagine that your breath is moving down to your feet, and that your awareness is like a warm light, a shaft of sunlight allowing your feet to relax and be held in awareness.

Gradually broaden this light of awareness to include your ankles, calves, knees and thighs, allowing the muscles to soften and become heavy. Imagine a sense of space in your joints and your muscles letting go of tension, falling away from the bones. Let your awareness include your buttocks and notice any holding of energy here. And again, bring the breath awareness into your legs, as if you could breathe into your legs, and broaden your awareness so you can hold the whole of your legs within this awareness.

And gradually in stages, allow the awareness to spread to your abdomen, lower and upper back, shoulders, rib-cage and chest. Bring awareness to your spine, gently curving through your body, and the point at which it meets the skull. Have a sense of the solid frame of your body. Breathe awareness into each of these body parts - feeling the motion of the breath through the body. Bring your awareness down your arms and into your hands, fingers, finger-tips. Notice the warmth and energy that is stored in the palms of your hands. Notice what the hands feel like at rest.

Gradually bring awareness to your head, neck, throat and face, noting any tension held in the muscles around the forehead, around the eyes, the jaw and the mouth. Notice how sensitive your face feels to the temperature of the air. Allow your face to soften with your awareness.

Now bring awareness to the rest of the head: to the skull, scalp and crown. Rest your attention at the crown for a while. Then simply scan down the body slightly more quickly than you came up and end at the base of the feet.

And now, bring your awareness back to your breathing and notice how the body tenses and relaxes as it rises and falls. Pay attention to the breath as it is felt in the body and try to maintain this awareness with an overall sense of your body – as if your whole body is breathing and held in awareness. Be aware of the quality of your experience and note any emotional tones present without judging them.

As you finish your practice, start by slowly moving the body, perhaps wiggling your toes, making sure not to jar yourself back into ordinary awareness. Turn over onto your side and gently lever yourself into a sitting position. Notice how you are feeling now. Give yourself a few minutes before you resume normal activity, remembering to carry bodily awareness forward with you into daily life as best you can.

2. SETTLING THE MIND

KEEPING QUIET

Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still.
For once on the face of the Earth,
let's not speak in any language,
let's stop for one second,
and not move our arms so much.
It would be an exotic moment,
without rush, without engines,
we would be all together
in a sudden strangeness.
Fishermen in the cold seas
would not harm whales
and the man gathering salt
would look at his hurt hands.
Those who prepare green wars,
wars with gas, wars with fire,
victory with no survivors,
would put on clean clothes
and walk about with their brothers
in the shade, doing nothing.
What I want should not be confused
with total inactivity:
Life is what it is about;
I want no truck with death.
If we were not so single-minded
about keeping our lives moving,
and for once could do nothing,
perhaps a huge silence
might interrupt this sadness,
of never understanding ourselves
and of threatening ourselves with
death.
Perhaps the Earth can teach us
as when everything seems dead
and later proves to be alive.
Now I'll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go.

Pablo Neruda

2.1 The Unsettled Mind

The untrained mind has difficulty coming to rest. It is flighty and always on the move. If we wish to relax and simply be at ease, we can put our bodies down and remain in one place, but the mind will not follow suit. We may have noticed this during the body scan exercise. It immediately moves away into thinking and roves randomly from one thought to another, one theme to another, one emotion to another - ceaselessly. This won't be experienced as particularly problematic if the thoughts and emotions involved are pleasant and harmonious, but this is often not the case. Most people seem to have a catalogue of negative and disturbing emotional themes filed in the back of their minds. When they are not involved in something that holds their attention, these files automatically drift to the fore and provide themes for thinking negative or disturbing thoughts. Sometimes these themes are strongly activated by life events that upset us. On these occasions, extra energy is fed into them and we find ourselves thinking a lot about painful or disturbing subjects even though we don't want to. When this happens we discover the problem of the unsettled mind - it is so accustomed to being wayward and following its own direction that even when we do not want to think about something, it does so regardless and causes us to suffer. We do not have control over our thinking process.

At a simpler level, the unsettled mind makes it difficult for us to focus on studying or working when the topic is not particularly interesting. We try to focus, do so for a bit and then find ourselves drifting away into thinking about something else. In short, the unsettled mind is like a butterfly - it won't stay in one place for long and insists on flitting from one thing to another continuously. The first step in the process is to recognize the unsettled mind. This is easy enough to do as you will see with the following exercises:

Exercise 2: Recognising the Unsettled Mind [doing nothing]

5 minutes

Sit comfortably with your back straight. If you are used to sitting cross-legged on a cushion you can do that, but it is not necessary. For a beginner, a straight-backed chair is probably best. It's not advisable to sink into a luxurious easy chair because you might fall asleep.

Once you are sitting comfortably, simply relax - with your eyes open if possible – and experience being where you are. Feel the pressure of your body resting on the seat and ground; become aware of the space around you; notice how a panoramic visual experience is there and how you naturally become aware of sounds and other sensory stimuli - perhaps a smell of cooking wafts in from next door and maybe a breeze brushes your skin. So this practice is very simple: just allow yourself to be there, experiencing whatever happens when you sit and do nothing. Decide to sit and do nothing.

In a surprisingly short time you will find that you are thinking about something, even though you had decided to do nothing. When you realise you are thinking, simply bring your attention back to being there doing nothing. Once again, before you know it you will have drifted away following some random thought. So once again, when you realise this, bring your attention back to being there doing nothing.

Reflection after the Exercise

Stop and reflect in the following way on what has been going on - I sat, relaxed and became aware of what was happening in the moment; I made a decision to relax and do nothing; this

"doing nothing" included not chasing after thoughts, but despite this decision, I almost immediately found myself thinking; thinking began by itself despite my decision to do nothing. What does this tell me? It seems that there is a strong habit constantly active within my mind that automatically carries me away into thinking whenever my mind is not actively focused on a chosen topic. This habit is strong and has the power to override my conscious decision-making process. This is the unsettled mind. Now I know what the term means, and I realise that my mind is unsettled.

Do this exercise several times at the beginning of your training, until you are completely clear about what is meant by the unsettled mind. It is the mind that does not want to stay put, but automatically jumps around from thought to thought due to force of habit.

This exercise lends itself well to doing with someone else or in a group.

Through these simple exercises we have demonstrated how our minds are unsettled and not under our command, how our minds are ruled by habit and how feeding this habit traps us in a self-perpetuating cycle that causes suffering. Consequently, this provides a good reason to practice mindfulness.

2.2 Settling the Unsettled Mind

We now know that our minds are unsettled due to force of habit, and therefore we can do something to change the situation.

At this early stage in our training we don't yet realise that the mind is naturally inclined to settle – just as water will settle if left undisturbed. Our incessant involvement with thinking is what keeps it unsettled. Most people feel encouraged when they realise this because it shows the way forward – if we do something about all this thinking, then the mind's potential to be tranquil will manifest itself. Unfortunately when people arrive at this realisation they almost invariably move on to draw the worst possible conclusion – "I must get rid of thoughts, empty the mind, make the mind go blank." None of these options is possible because the tendency to think is deeply rooted in powerful habit patterns. If we attempt to stop thinking and empty our minds we will simply end up suppressing thought, deceiving and deluding ourselves, and ultimately creating rigidity and tension in our minds. So we don't go that route.

Instead, we set out to remove the cause of the disturbance, which is *being involved with our thoughts*. We do a simple exercise to settle the mind. The exercise is based on a principle that underpins all our training: *energy follows focus*. When we focus on thoughts and emotions and become involved with them, we feed energy into them without realising it. This reinforces the tendency to think and be involved, which is why the habit is so strong.

The exercise we are about to do introduces an alternative point of focus upon which we rest our attention. In doing this we withdraw focus, and thus energy, from the thoughts that keep popping into our minds.

Exercise 3: Settling the Mind

5 - 10 minutes

Sit as before, making sure you are comfortable and have your back straight. Also, if possible, keep your eyes open. Focus in a very relaxed way on your breath. Breathe in a little more deeply than normal and then gently release the breath. Both in-breaths and out-breaths are gentle, so should not be audible. Try to keep in- and out-breaths equal in length, so you may find it useful to count. You may find you breathe in to a count of 3 or 4, in which case your out-breath will be to the same count. So you are now doing two things: following your breathing and counting. Despite this, thoughts will continue to pop into your mind, which is totally OK and natural. Don't worry about it. You are not attempting to get rid of thoughts or make your mind go blank - by now you know that is not possible. You are in fact not doing anything besides focusing on breathing and counting. The only difference now is that you do not become involved with the thoughts that pop into your mind. You let them go free, without attempting to suppress or become involved with them.

For example, you are sitting there with breath as your focus, feeling relaxed, and then you remember that you are having guests to dinner tomorrow. That is a thought. Normally you would become involved and begin planning a menu, deciding where to buy fresh vegetables and so on. If you followed this route you would quickly be lost in a tangle of thinking. Because you are settling your mind and following your breath, you don't do that. The memory of your dinner party will pop into your mind and you will realise that the thought is there, but you simply leave it alone and maintain your focus on breathing and counting. This may seem surprising at first, but you will soon discover that you can do it.

So your attention is with the breath and simultaneously you know that the thought is there. You will also realise that you could at any moment switch your focus to the thought, become involved with it and thus be actively thinking. But you don't do that. Instead you remain relaxed and gently focused on the breath.

If you do this, the thought will fade away and your mind will begin to relax because you are letting go of the idea that you have to do something. You are letting thoughts come and go freely without chasing after them. You will begin to discover that thinking disturbs the mind and thinking happens when you engage and develop thoughts.

Continue focusing on breathing and counting and allow yourself to become an impartial observer of your own experience. At first you will notice the coming and going of thoughts, as already mentioned, but soon you will begin to notice more. For example, you may detect a subtle belief that you have to do something or strive in some way. There may be a feeling that you have to succeed or gain something or achieve. This would be accompanied by an uneasy feeling that you are failing or doing it wrong or not trying hard enough. There may even be a feeling that you are not good enough to do it. These feelings, which are subtle attitudes and expectations, could quite possibly float into the background of your mind and subtly influence and control the way you feel about what you are doing. With practice you will begin to detect these and recognize that they are no more than thoughts. But they are surprisingly powerful thoughts because they lurk unseen in the back of the mind and are thus able to take control of the way you feel about yourself, determining what you believe you can or cannot do.

So just relax, focus on the breath and let go of any sense of doing or striving, gaining or losing, succeeding or failing, or anything. Let yourself be at ease, resting in the moment with a gentle focus on the breath, allowing thoughts to come and go freely without attempting to block them or becoming involved in developing them.

Towards the end of the exercise you can focus more on the out-breath, imagining that you are releasing involvement with thoughts as you breathe out. Notice that as you release the breath the body relaxes a little. See if the mind can learn from the body – the body releases breath and relaxes, the mind releases thoughts and begins to settle down.

Do this exercise for 5 minutes at the beginning of a session of mindfulness training. Then, once you have completed the settling exercise, relax and allow your normal breathing rhythm to re-establish itself. Stop counting and stop breathing slightly deeper. Breathe normally. The only time you regulate the breath and count is during this settling exercise.

2.3 Walking Meditation

It is healthy to incorporate elements of mindful movement as we progress through our training so that there is a balance between sitting and moving. Walking meditation is a useful way to settle the mind because it grounds us in our bodies and slows us down. When we practice walking meditation, we do not need to be going anywhere, and it can be helpful to let go of any sense of a destination or a purpose to the walking. The intention of walking meditation is just to walk!

When we practice walking meditation we are bringing awareness to the whole experience of walking: the lifting and placing of the feet, the sensations of the soles of the feet touching the ground, with shifting sensations of pressure and touch; the shift in balance of the body from one side to the next; the movements throughout the whole body as we move; the flowing of the breath. There will also be awareness of the space in which we move, the varying surfaces upon which we step, the touch of the air on our skin, the changing views and sounds and smells coming through our senses: moment to moment experiences, constantly flowing and changing.

There will be moments when we will notice that our mind has wandered into thinking, perhaps distracted by some of the sense experiences, or by some inner thought activities. Just as we would in the other mindfulness practices, we bring awareness to the fact that we are distracted, and gently bring our awareness back to the walking.... *lifting and placing; lifting and placing; breathing in and breathing out*

We can let our body do the walking, trusting that the body knows what to do – we do not need to guide it with the mind. We can just allow the mind to observe and gently notice the changing flow of experience. We can simply enjoy our walking.

Walking meditation can be practiced slowly and purposefully, and can involve choosing a path where we may walk back and forth or in a circle. We can bring awareness to the most subtle movements involved in walking. It can also be practiced at a natural pace where we can bring more awareness to a sense of movement in space and the energy of the body as we move. There may be other times when we can choose to bring awareness to walking when we are simply going about our lives: walking down

the corridors in our place of work; walking through the car park; walking to our terminal at the airport; walking through a busy high street or down the aisles in the supermarket. We can help ourselves to stay present in the mundane aspects of our lives, which we may otherwise regard as uninteresting or frustrating.

For Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese mindfulness teacher, walking meditation is a key mindfulness practice that helps us to engage fully with our lives. It is a practice that connects us to ourselves, to nature, to each other and to all of life:

“Walking in mindfulness brings us peace and joy, and makes our life real. Why rush? Our final destination will only be the graveyard. Why not walk in the direction of life, enjoying peace in each moment with every step? There is no need to struggle. Enjoy each step. We have already arrived. Walking meditation helps us regain our sovereignty, our liberty as a human being. We walk with grace and dignity, like an emperor, like a lion. Each step is life... If your steps are peaceful, the world will have peace. If you can make one peaceful step, then peace is possible.”

Exercise 4: Walking Meditation

10 – 20 minutes

Find an appropriate place to do your walking meditation, either inside or out. Start by consciously bringing your attention out of your head and into your feet. Allow your gaze to be soft, not looking down at your feet, but far enough ahead so that you are aware of your surroundings. Allow your shoulders to be relaxed and keep your knees soft and hips fluid. Your hands can be gently held together in front of you, just below the navel, or simply hanging by your sides.

Then lift one foot slowly so you feel the heel lifting off the floor, and then lift the ball of the foot so that the leg follows moving through the air. Then the heel comes down to ground and the whole foot makes contact. Be aware of how the other foot is stationary and then gradually starts to move - lifting off the ground, moving through the air and then making contact with the ground again. Be aware of each stage of walking in a relaxed, flowing way.

As you are walking be aware of your surroundings: the smells outside, perhaps the warm glow of sunlight on your face, the sounds of birds in the trees, thoughts passing through your mind. All your sense doorways are open, but at the same time your attention is lightly flowing with the simple action of walking.

In order to deepen the experience and settle the mind, you can synchronise your breathing with the walking: as you lift your foot you breathe in and as you place your foot down you breathe out. Notice what effect the dual focus of walking and breathing has on the mind.

3. MINDFULNESS SUPPORT

STAND STILL

Stand still. The trees ahead and the bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are in called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you,
If you leave it you may come back again, saying Here.

No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

David Wagoner

3.1 Posture

Once we have settled the mind we can begin actual training in mindfulness, which we will do in three stages: grounding, resting and mindfulness support. But before we consider these three stages, we need to attend to our posture. In meditation it is said that our posture reflects our intention and our state of mind. If we can develop a correct posture then we will find it easier for our minds to settle and calm down. We will also feel stable and comfortable enough in our bodies to maintain a meditation posture for a longer period of time.

We can choose to practice sitting in a chair or using one of the floor based meditation postures that are illustrated below. If you choose a chair, try one which is relatively upright and which allows you to place your feet flat upon the floor. Try to sit a little away from the back of the chair so your back is self-supporting. It may help to place a small cushion at the small of the back for some support.

If you choose to sit on the floor, it will help to have a meditation cushion or bench to raise your buttocks off the floor. It is important that the knees are close to the ground, are not higher than the buttocks and that the thighs are sloping down toward the ground. This will support your back and maintain the hollow in the small of your back. These postures involve either crossing your legs in front of you with one heel drawn towards the body and the other leg in front of it, or kneeling using a cushion or stool with your feet behind you.

The most important thing is to find a posture which is comfortable and which also supports a wakeful and alert state of mind. We do not want to doze or to fall asleep. Jon Kabat-Zinn usually talks of sitting with a sense of dignity and reminds us to sit “as if our life depends upon it”. He usually adds “...and it probably does!” This reminds us again of the importance of what we are doing – learning to come home

to ourselves and to witness ourselves fully, as if for the first time. So we sit, as if what we are doing is important to us, and to all of life, and to the whole universe. So we find a posture that reflects this – upright, with the spine erect, but not rigid. Shunryu Suzuki says we should sit as if we are supporting the sky with our head. Other teachers remind us to sit as if we are a majestic mountain. We can really try to feel the grandeur and stability of the mountain in our posture. We feel our connection to the ground that supports us as we sit.

So, our back is upright, and we can become aware of the natural curvature of the spine and the soft arch in the lower back. The head is gently poised at the top of the spine, with our chin tucked in slightly. We relax our shoulders. We lower and soften the gaze of our eyes at about a 45-degree angle, or we gently close our eyes. The head, neck and shoulders are vertically aligned. The chest does not sink in, but gently lifts. We can imagine a golden thread pulling us up slightly from the top of our head. Our hands rest in our lap and our elbows are below our shoulders, hands down on our thighs, or facing palm upwards, cupped one inside the other. It can be helpful to place the tongue on the ridge behind the upper front teeth. If we lose our posture, it is very likely that our mind has wandered. We will have lost contact with the present moment. Correcting our posture will bring the mind back home to the body.

Posture Images



3.2 Grounding

Even though we may have settled the gross level of agitation in our mind and found a supportive posture, the tendency to move away from this time and this place will remain strong; so we add an additional element to our training - grounding. This involves creating a sense of being rooted and embodied that will keep our attention in place. The following exercise focuses on the body and follows on directly from the Settling the Mind exercise. In practice, it will be useful first to find one's posture, then settle the mind and then move into the grounding phase.

Exercise 5: Grounding

Focus on your body and become progressively aware of all the sensations being experienced. Do this in a relaxed, open way, not as though you are a stock taker compiling an inventory that has to be absolutely correct. Allow the sensations to present themselves to you. So, for example, you may become aware of the pressure where you rest against the seat or the ground. Notice what temperature you are feeling – warm, cold or neutral. There might be a slight pain in your left shoulder and a feeling of tension in one of your knees. There may be discomfort in your stomach because you ate too much, but an overall feeling of being relaxed and at ease because you have settled your mind and let go of any feeling that you have to struggle or strive in any way.

Find out for yourself how best to do this stage. Some people might find that a systematic scanning of the body works for them. If this is the case, begin at the feet and move progressively up through the body, becoming aware as you go of whatever sensations are present. End up with the head, then return to the feet and begin again. Others might find that a random approach suits them better, in which case simply sit there and allow sensations to command your attention as they arise. Note the presence of the sensation and then relax around it until the next one appears and commands your attention. This stage does not involve analysis or investigation. So for example, if you have become aware of a pain in your back, don't try to diagnose the cause and work out what you should do about it. Simply acknowledge its presence and relax around it, allowing it to be as it is. Notice how doing this holds your attention in place.

Once you have scanned your body or allowed your attention to be drawn to particular sensations, then become aware of your body in its entirety, as if you were holding your whole body within your awareness.

Every now and again, stop focusing on the body and become aware of the space around you. Allow yourself to experience how the body exists in space and is surrounded by space. There is something quite liberating and expansive about space awareness, so if your mind is tense or uptight you could spend a fair amount of time on this stage.

3.3 Resting

Now we move on to resting, which is a continuation of what we began learning when we settled the mind. Remember that the mind has a natural tendency to be at rest and become tranquil. This may be difficult to believe because it is normally so stirred up and turbulent as a result of all our thinking. But once we have settled and grounded the mind we have a chance to get a little glimpse of its potential for being at rest.

Exercise 6: Resting the Mind

Once you have grounded your mind you move on to resting without interrupting your session. During grounding your focus was on the body and its sensations, with periodic focus on the space around you.

Now, let go of any sense of focus and just simply sit there. Keep your eyes open and give up any idea of trying to do or be anything. In a very relaxed, casual way allow yourself to experience whatever comes to you via your senses. But you don't look at anything or listen for anything or seek a preferred smell. Simply be where you are and in touch with whatever comes to you. So, for example, you may become aware of the room. You are not looking at anything, but because your eyes are open and visual consciousness is present, you realise you are seeing in a somewhat panoramic way.

Objects are there so they are seen without being looked at. The same is true of sounds – you hear them because they are present without listening in a particular way. The point of resting is to allow the mind to relax deeply and let go of any sense of striving, struggling or trying to achieve. It is not directed in any way, but involves simply being in the moment, where you are without any purpose or goal. As your training progresses, this quality becomes increasingly important – resting in the moment, knowing you are there, fully experiencing what is there; but free from any sense of doing, striving, needing to achieve, fearing failure and so on.

See if you can rest in this way for 2 or 3 minutes. When you notice that your mind is beginning to move away and become involved with thoughts - which is what will soon happen - then you know that it is time to move on to the next stage, which is using a mindfulness support.

Recollection

Settling, grounding and resting the mind all involve "recollection". This is remembering what we are doing and using our faculty of memory to help us remain in focus without forgetting what we have decided to do. We remember that we are training in mindfulness so that we don't forget and drift away into daydreaming or thinking about the past. This is a constant feature of our training and is always in the background as a stabilising factor. To help us with this we use a mindfulness support.

3.4 Mindfulness Support

When settling and resting the mind, we noticed that thoughts, feelings and emotions kept arising in the mind and we were not able to stop becoming involved with them. When this happens we get caught up in thinking and this carries us away from the moment into distraction (we will investigate distraction more fully later). When we are distracted we are not mindful – mindfulness and distraction are polar opposites. We have defined mindfulness as knowing what is happening while it is happening. When we become distracted and lost in thought, we lose touch with the moment, which is where life happens, and we lose mindfulness – we are no longer in touch with what is happening while it is happening.

It is likely in the beginning of our training that our mindfulness will be so weak that we will drift away into distraction without realising it. We may “come to” after 10 or 15 minutes of thinking or daydreaming and wonder how we got there and what happened to the time. We could draw the analogy of a wayward puppy that is let loose and wanders off to become lost. That is how our minds are - if you have no objection to being compared to a puppy!

In view of this tendency to become distracted, we need a support – a reference point upon which we can rest our attention and to which we can return when we drift away. If we may continue with our puppy analogy, it’s like having a rope fixed to a peg at one end and tied to the puppy at the other. This will obviously limit the scope of our puppy’s roaming. However, just as we would reel the puppy in with gentleness and kindness, in a similar way we bring our attention back to the support in a way that is kind and gentle.

We do the same with our minds and use what we call it a mindfulness support in place of the rope. A mindfulness support relies on one of the senses, so there are several options. We are going to use sound to start with.

Mindfulness of Sound

The following extract from the Mindfulness Scotland manual is quoted here as a way of expanding our understanding of using sound as a support in sitting meditation:

When you include sound into the landscape of your awareness you may be aware of sounds far away from you giving you an expansiveness of awareness. You may be aware of sounds very close to you – even the sounds of your own body breathing. Sounds may be loud or subtle; they may be experienced as pleasant or unpleasant, jarring or calming. They may be continuous or intermittent. Be aware of the spaces between the sounds and the whole of the sound-scape. See if you can experience sound as pure sensation, without judging it and without getting caught in thinking about the sounds. We do not need to name what we are hearing, or get lost in thoughts about liking or disliking. If we find that sound has acted as a trigger into any train of thought, once aware we can simply come back to hearing and let the hearing be our anchor in the present moment.

We do not need to chase after the sound or to push it away. We do not need to strain for sound, but simply to notice what sounds come to us as we bring awareness to hearing. We can note the qualities of the sound and notice how it touches us as we hear. Perhaps we will be aware of

emotions arising in response. Perhaps we will be aware of the hairs standing up at the back of our necks.

We can allow our awareness of sound to become expansive, broadening our awareness from the intimate sounds from the body, to sounds within the room or building, to sounds further and further away, or we can bring our awareness of sound gradually back to ourselves and our bodies, until we hear once again the subtle sounds of our body breathing.

We can practice mindfulness of sound as a formal meditation with sound as the anchor to the present moment. Or we can use mindfulness with sound at moments during our everyday lives when we choose to stop – listening to a piece of music, the sounds of nature, or even the silence. Or, as Rumi says:

*But listen to me for one moment,
Quit being sad
Hear blessings dropping their blossoms
All around you*

Exercise 7: Mindfulness Support using Sound

30 – 45 minutes

Focusing on a support flows on naturally from the stages of settling, grounding and resting your mind. So start your session by going through these stages. During the resting of your mind, you may find your attention drifts away, so then you use a support as a way of anchoring you in the present moment.

In a simple and relaxed way focus your attention on sound. Don't seek a preferred sound or try to avoid those you don't like – just open up to whatever sounds are naturally present around you. For example, as I am sitting here writing, I can hear a dog barking intermittently, the wind rustles the trees outside, a car goes by and a bird calls sleepily to the approaching dawn. All these sounds come to me effortlessly and hold my attention without my making any effort. So what I realise is that there is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is the relaxed and open state I have described where no effort is needed to become aware of sound. Listening by contrast requires effort and choice. I choose to listen to a sound I have selected and thus of necessity exclude others.

So the element of concentration, and potentially tension, is greater. So we hear. We are sitting there, relaxed, hearing whatever sounds come to us. This keeps us in the moment at this place – knowing what is happening while it is happening, both in our minds and around us.

Soon we drift away into thought and become partially or completely lost in distraction. This is OK because we are beginners, so don't worry. After a time we realise that we are lost in thought. Interestingly, when this happens we are likely also to lose touch with sound. So we realise "oh, I am thinking!" very gently, and without wrenching the mind or becoming tense, we return our attention to sound. Straightaway, I can hear a motorcycle in the distance and a rush of wind in the trees outside.

Now I am back in the moment, knowing what is happening while it is happening. What is important is to let go of any judgment of having made a mistake, failed or got it wrong. We are not involved in a competition or a test where we have to “get it right” or might get it wrong. There is no right or wrong – we are simply training ourselves to be in the moment and allow thoughts to go by. We are certainly not trying to get rid of thoughts, make our minds go blank or anything like that.

This stage – training our mind to be present by using a support – is the main part of our mindfulness training. Right at the outset, however, it is essential to understand that this training is focused entirely on developing a quality of knowing. We do not in any way interfere with that which is known, namely thoughts. We are training ourselves to let them go free. Many people have a hard time understanding this principle and doggedly attempt the impossible – trying to get rid of thoughts. You cannot do this. You cannot make your mind go blank – unless you get someone to hit you over the head with a heavy object! And you cannot empty your mind. So please be kind to yourself, relax and allow thoughts to go free.

Felt Sense of Kindness

We have learned that there are two aspects to training in mindfulness: technique and attitude.

We have talked a lot about technique so now we will give some guidance on attitude. The consistent theme running throughout our training is that we work with an attitude of kindly curiosity towards our experience with a willingness to stay present and open to whatever arises.

In order to help you to develop a kindly attitude to yourself and your practice, you can periodically practice the following exercise, especially if you notice that you are being hard on yourself.

Exercise 8: Kindness Exercise

5-10 minutes

Sit in a relaxed and dignified posture and begin by settling your mind. Then bring to mind a memory of when someone was kind to you. Recall the detail of what happened and go through it in your mind. Remember how you felt when this person was kind to you. Notice how this act of kindness feels in your body now and allow yourself to experience these feelings for a couple of minutes, becoming familiar with this felt sense of kindness.

Now bring to mind a memory of when you were kind to someone. Recall the detail of what happened and go through it in your mind. Recall how you felt when you were kind to this person. Allow yourself to feel this sense of kindness in your body for a couple of minutes. Then spend a couple of minutes just resting in this felt sense of kindness. You might imagine resting within a warm glow of kindness.

In your daily life, notice acts of kindness that are done to you or that you do to others, however small these kind acts may be. Tune in to how these acts of kindness feel in your body. Take time to bathe your mind and body in kindness whenever the opportunity presents itself. Once you become familiar with this felt sense of kindness, see whether you can bring this to your mindfulness practice and to your daily life so that you practice and live with an attitude of open and kindly curiosity towards whatever arises.

Increasing Awareness of Pleasant Events

Regardless of the circumstances, there are always pleasant moments to be experienced. Our minds have evolved to attend to and remember threatening situations as a means of survival. This means that unpleasant events can stick to the mind like Velcro while pleasant events can slide off the mind like silk. This natural tendency can be reinforced by our mindfulness practice in daily life in which we practice becoming present when a difficult situation arises, so as to create space to respond skilfully rather than reacting automatically. To counteract this tendency to focus on unpleasant events, we practice attending to pleasant events in our daily life. The pleasant event might be anything from sipping a nice cup of tea, to feeling the sun on your face, to swimming with turtles in Barbados, or to seeing a child at play.

Along with bringing to mind memories of kindness on a regular basis we can also attend more closely to pleasant events. In order to do this, we can use the pleasant events calendar below. In daily life we can have the intention to become aware of at least one pleasant event every day, as the event is happening. Then later we can fill out the details of the event in the pleasant events calendar. By living our lives with the intention to become mindful of pleasant events, we gradually develop the habit of becoming more aware during the pleasant moments in our day. This enables us to deeply experience the pleasant events in our lives and the thoughts, physical sensations and emotions that go along with them.

Pleasant Events Calendar

| | <i>Example</i> | <i>Day/date</i> | <i>Day/date</i> | <i>Day/date</i> |
|--|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <i>What was the experience?</i> | Meeting a good friend while shopping who I hadn't heard from in a long time | | | |
| <i>Were you aware of the pleasant feelings while the event was happening?</i> | Yes | | | |
| <i>What sensations did you experience in the body during the experience?</i> | Smiling across mouth; aware of some excitement in the chest; a lot of energy in the body | | | |
| <i>What moods, feelings and thoughts accompanied the event?</i> | Surprise and mild excitement at speaking to her; felt happy talking to her again | | | |
| <i>What's in your mind now as you write this down?</i> | It was a short meeting and I'm surprised how good it made me feel to see her | | | |

Adapted from *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn

A Mindfulness Session

We are now at a point where we have practiced all the individual parts that together make up a mindfulness session. Since we have recognised and familiarised ourselves with the unsettled mind, we can now begin our training of the mind in earnest. While we are at the beginning of our training process, it is useful to follow these stages:

- Intention and Motivation
- Settling
- Grounding
- Resting
- Mindfulness support

We suggest you follow it in the order in which it is laid out so that you understand each of the stages involved. In doing this, we begin to see that the understanding that emerges grows out of an experiential process. We are learning to observe our own experience and allow it to reveal to us the truth of how we are and how our minds work.

Once our minds begin to settle and the gross level of distraction subsides, it is fine to omit the settling stage. When we are learning to walk we pay attention to each of the steps as we walk up a staircase, but once we know how to walk, we simply walk up the staircase. The stages outlined above are like steps; they lead us into the meditation before we know how to do this naturally.

4. MINDFULNESS IN DAILY LIFE

FROM: LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart
and to try to love the questions themselves
like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue.
Do not now seek the answers,
which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them.
And the point is, to live everything.
Live the questions now.
Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day
into the answer.

Rainer Maria Rilke

At this point it is useful to introduce exercises for mindfulness in everyday life so that we maintain the awareness developed in sitting practice in daily life situations.

Mindfulness in everyday life requires us to break out of the pattern of automatic pilot through a process of stopping and waking up. When we stop, we remind ourselves to come back to mindful awareness, and back to the present moment. This usually means bringing our mind back to our body and to what we are doing and what is happening right now. It means opening up to what is already there – without preference and without judgment. Whatever is happening is happening anyway, so we may as well be present for it.

When we recognize that we have drifted away from the present moment, we can:

- Bring our attention to our posture, whether sitting, standing, lying or walking
- Feel our feet on the ground
- Tune into the sensations in the body
- Bring awareness to the movements of the body
- Take a few conscious breaths
- Be aware of what is coming in through our senses: seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching

4.1 Mindfulness Triggers

Anything in our lives can be an opportunity to practice mindfulness, but it can be useful to identify a number of helpful triggers to remind us to come back to the present moment. This only needs to take a few moments, but such moments of mindfulness can have a calming and grounding influence in our lives. Mindfulness triggers give us the chance to catch up with ourselves with a single breath and simple

tuning-in to how we are, wherever we are and whatever we are doing. Here are a few examples of mindfulness triggers:

- Passing through a door way
- Stopping at traffic lights
- Waiting for the kettle to boil
- Hearing the sound of the telephone ringing
- Standing in a queue
- When we are feeling angry or irritated
- When we first wake up in the morning
- Lying down before sleep

4.2 Opportunities for Mindfulness Practice

Everyday life also gives us ample opportunities to practice mindfulness with more extended periods of time, in which we can choose to bring mindful awareness to any of the everyday ordinary activities we usually perform on automatic pilot and without a great deal of awareness. This can transform mundane tasks into something much more fulfilling, and offer a chance to switch off from the stresses of rushing and trying to get things over with, or doing things with our minds on something else. Instead, we can practice being truly present in whatever we are doing and bring some sense of stillness into the heart of our doing.

The following are some examples of activities we can choose to perform with mindful awareness. Unlike the mindfulness triggers, they involve practices that can endure for a number of minutes, or for more extended periods of time. The aim, wherever possible, is to just do one thing at a time, and to pay full attention to whatever you are doing. In a similar way to formal meditation practice, when you notice that your mind has wandered, or if you have drifted into multi-tasking, you can gently bring the attention back to the activity, over and over again until you have finished. See if any of the examples would fit into your own life, or come up with some examples of your own:

- Brushing your teeth
- Preparing and drinking a cup of tea or coffee
- Taking an early morning walk
- Having a conversation
- Listening to music
- Preparing a meal
- Eating
- Household tasks
- Walking up or down stairs
- Driving the car
- Greeting your family when you come home
- Taking a shower or bath

4.3 Mindfulness in the Work Place

Our work environment is often a place of great deal of stress and distraction. Many people find it very hard to maintain mindfulness once they are at work because of pressures and pulls within this environment. However, we can work creatively with this part of our lives by incorporating mindfulness into specific activities that make up our working day. This allows us to enjoy mindful breaks and to use different parts of our working day as triggers for practicing mindfulness. Here are some suggestions:

- Spend some time in the morning being quiet and meditating: sit or lie down and be with yourself, gaze out of the window, listen to the sounds of nature or take a slow quiet walk
- Before you start the car, take a minute quietly to pay attention to your breathing
- While driving, become aware of body tension, e.g. hands wrapped tightly around the steering wheel, shoulders raised, stomach tight, etc. consciously working at releasing and dissolving that tension. Does being tense help you to drive better? What does it feel like to relax and drive?
- Experiment with deciding not to play the radio and instead being with yourself
- Try driving a little slower than you might usually do
- Enjoy the space a red traffic light can give you: there is time to pay attention to your breathing, to the sky and trees or the quality of your mind
- Take a moment to orient yourself to your work day once you park your car. Use the walk across the car park to step into your life: to know where you are and where you are going
- While sitting at your desk or computer pay attention to bodily sensations, consciously attempting to relax and let go of excess tension
- Try closing your door (if you have one) and take some time to consciously relax
- At regular intervals become aware of your breathing and bodily sensations, allowing the mind to settle
- Use the everyday cues in your environment as reminders to centre yourself, e.g. the telephone ringing, sitting at the computer, etc
- Use your breaks to truly relax rather than simply pausing. For instance, instead of having coffee, a cigarette or reading, try taking a short walk
- At lunch, changing your environment can be helpful
- Take some time at lunchtime or other moments in the day to speak with close associates. Try choosing topics that are not necessarily work related.
- Experiment with eating one or two lunches per week in silence. You can use this time to eat slowly and be with yourself
- At the end of the work day, try retracing the day's activities acknowledging and congratulating yourself for what you've accomplished and then make a list for tomorrow. You've done enough for today!
- Pay attention to your walk back to the car – breath in the air, feel the cold or warmth of your body. Can you open to and accept these environmental conditions and body sensations rather than resisting them? Listen to the sounds. Can you walk without feeling rushed? What happens when you slow down?
- Before you start the car, sit quietly and consciously make the transition from work to home – take a moment to simply be – enjoy it for a moment

- While driving, notice if you are rushing. What does it feel like? What could you do about it? Remember you've got more control than you might imagine
- When you pull into the driveway of your home, take a minute to orient yourself to being with your family and entering your home
- When you get home, change out of work clothes, and say hello to each of your family members or to the people you live with. Take a moment to look into their eyes
- If you live alone, feel what it is like to enter the quietness of your environment
- If possible, make the time to take 5-10 minutes to be quiet and still

HOME PRACTICES

Formal Practice

30 - 45 minutes formal practice each day using the downloadable guided practices where useful.

Please contact your tutor, initially via e-mail, if you experience any problems with the home practice.

Tutor e-mails are: Jane Negrych: janenegrych@sanctuary.ie / Prof Graeme Nixon: g.nixon@abdn.ac.uk

The home assignments are:

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 1 – 7 Nov | Settling the mind (Exercise 3) |
| 8 – 14 Nov | Bodyscan (Exercise 1) |
| 15 – 21 Nov | Settling, grounding, resting and sound support (Exercise 7) |
| 22 – 28 Nov | Walking meditation (Exercise 4) followed by kindness exercise (Exercise 8) |

Remember always to begin your formal practice with reflecting on intention and motivation and to end with a sharing/dedication. For the period between November 8-21, alternate between the Bodyscan and the SGRS practice.

Informal Practice

Be especially mindful during chosen daily activities, such as having a shower or walking to work. Add another activity every so often, perhaps each week or once a fortnight. Refer to the section on mindfulness in daily life.

Pleasant Events Calendar

Choose one week each month to fill out the pleasant event calendar.

Keeping a Journal

Start a daily mindfulness journal. You don't have to write much, but see if you can write a few words down after your formal session. Once a week you can look back at what you've written and write a more in-depth entry. This will help you to gain an overview of your own process. Keep a record of the formal and informal practices you do and reflect on how things are going. Also record any classes or workshops you attend and relevant books you are reading. You do not have to hand in the journal; it is your own private record.

Directed Reading

- "Diamond Mind – Psychology of Meditation" by Rob Nairn, Kairon, 1998
- "Full Catastrophe Living" Jon Kabat Zinn, Piatkus, 1990
- "Mindfulness for Benigners" by Jon Kabat Zinn, Sounds True, 2012