

Mindfulness: Being Present

Module 2

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THE SANCTUARY

1. WORKING WITH DISTRACTION

FROM: LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET

We have no reason to harbour any mistrust against our world,
for it is not against us.

If it has terrors, they are our terrors.
If it has abysses, these abysses belong to us.
If there are dangers, we must try to love them,
and only if we could arrange our lives,
in accordance with the principle that tells us
that we must always trust in the difficult,
then what now appears to us to be alien
will become our most intimate and trusted experience.

How could we forget those ancient myths
that stand at the beginning of all races –
the myths of dragons that at the last moment are transformed
into princesses?

Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are only princesses
waiting for us to act, just once,
with beauty and courage.
Perhaps everything that frightens us is,
in its deepest essence,
something helpless that wants our love.

So you must not be frightened if a sadness rises before you
larger than any you've ever seen,
if an anxiety like light and cloud shadows
moves over your hands and everything that you do.
Life has not forgotten you.
It holds you in its hands and will not yet you fall.
Why do you want to shut out of your life
any uneasiness, any miseries, or any depressions?
For after all, you do not know what work these conditions are
doing inside you.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Once we have learned to settle the mind and use the mindfulness support, we are ready to familiarise ourselves with the biggest challenge to mindfulness – distraction. This is the natural impulse within the mind to move away from the moment and thus prevent the development of mindfulness. It takes three forms – involvement with the future, the past or the present.

1.1 Distraction into the three times

Anticipating the Future

Much of our thinking in life involves the future. Some of it is practical and necessary – such as planning the day ahead, deciding how we are going to do things and so on. But the vast majority is not, and consists simply of idly daydreaming about things we would like to do, events and people we would like to be involved with, how we would like our lives to work out – “building castles in the air”.

When we train in mindfulness, the habit of thinking about the future will naturally influence us. We will rest with the mindfulness support, but before long find ourselves following our habitual tendency to think about the future and drift away into a daydream without realising it and without intending to do so. It will seem to happen naturally and effortlessly. This tendency is actually the product of several psychological factors. One is, as just mentioned, habit. Another could be related to an underlying issue of anxiety or insecurity that we have not recognised and come to terms with. This state is painful and uncomfortable, so in order to “get away from it” we drift away into some form of planning or fantasy that seems to offer a more comfortable way of being, or offers the promise of feeling more secure. There are many possibilities, but they don’t matter. The point is that when we drift into the future we lose mindfulness, idly feeding energy into the thinking habit, thereby losing focus. We waste time and weaken the mind. When our mindfulness develops a little bit, we begin to discover how extensively we tend to “get lost” in this way.

Dwelling on the Past

The principle for the past is the same. We find ourselves mulling over past memories, unearthing events that we enjoyed or that upset us, reliving old feelings and sometimes very powerfully finding ourselves “back in the past”. If we have painful unresolved events in our past, we will frequently find ourselves being drawn back to them, dwelling on them and reawakening old emotions. This is a very common human tendency and is a method many people use to make themselves constantly dissatisfied, unhappy and miserable – without realising what they are doing. It is also one of the ways we unwittingly reinforce negative emotions and self-pity.

When we realise we are dwelling on past painful events we may rationalise the action with: “... oh, I have to handle the memories and resolve the past ...” or similar ideas. This is usually not true or not why we are doing it. Dwelling on past hurts does not resolve anything. We are usually “going there” out of habit and because old pains have a strong pull. Another reason for dwelling on the past could be the opposite of the above – dwelling on happy memories because that makes us feel good.

There are many psychological issues associated with this aspect of distraction, and if one proceeds with mindfulness training they could well surface; but at this stage in our training our focus is to see and

clearly recognize the natural tendency within the mind to become involved with the past. We need to become clear in our understanding that the mind has this strong tendency to pull away from the present and dwell on past memories. When this tendency manifests, mindfulness is partially or fully lost, and the habit of thinking is reinforced.

Thinking in the Present

Our third avenue of distraction is to think in the present. This can take many forms, which will vary according to our mood, personality type and many other factors. Most commonly, people simply fantasise or “daydream”, mull over current problems and events, or spend time analysing. If you are an analysing type, you will analyse anything – why you feel the way you do, why someone behaved in a particular way towards you, what caused your mind to be the way it is ... the list of possibilities is endless. When I was on retreat, a friend and I shared notes on our favourite avenues of distraction. At that time mine was building, but his was far more exotic – he would travel. He could travel pretty well around the world, knowing exactly where each international flight departed and where and when it landed, in many cases complete with flight numbers! Then he knew where at each airport to catch transport into the city, the name and address of the hotel he would like to stay at, when he would have to leave for the airport the next day ... he should have been a travel agent!

Underlying Psychological Issues

A lot of this distraction is simply entertainment oriented and may not relate to any underlying psychological issue, but it seems possible that much of the force that prompts distraction can be traced to unresolved psychological factors. Typically, drifting back into the past can be connected to states like depression, feeling worthless, inadequate or humiliated. The tendency here will be to try somehow to “fix” things by reconstructing past events in a more favourable and acceptable way. This, of course, doesn’t work and simply leaves the mind unsettled, out of touch and more distracted. Excursions into the future might be related to anxiety, insecurity, paranoia and could reflect an underlying endeavour to suppress unwanted emotions that are beginning to surface during our mindfulness training.

1.2 Levels of Distraction

Partial and Complete Distraction

It’s important to understand that our level of distraction can be expressed somewhere along a continuum with complete distraction at one end and full mindfulness at the other. Only beginners are likely to manage total distraction for long periods of time. After a while we find that we maintain a modicum of mindfulness most of the time, periodically drifting away into thinking, but even as we do so part of our attention notices that we are distracted. In this case, we are partly distracted and partly mindful and can come back fully into mindful focus with a bit of effort.

Another common situation arises where an issue with a strong emotional content arises in the mind. We may be able to leave it and return to the mindfulness support, but it hovers on the edge of our awareness and acts like a magnet pulling us back to it. This is what can be called the ‘elastic band syndrome’ – we are attached to it and when we return to the support the band stretches and thus

retains enough tension to draw the mind back to it. Once again our level of mindfulness is likely to drop while the issue is present, so we recognise this with a sense of being OK with it and allowing the issue to just be there in our experience.

The important point to recognize at the outset of our training is that our minds are addicted to distractions and we will naturally and automatically go there. This does not mean we are bad or inadequate – it's simply the way we are due to our habit patterns. A significant part of our mindfulness training consists in recognising distraction and learning to let it go and return to the support.

“Becoming Worse”

When we first begin training, our mindfulness will probably be weak, so we will only pick up on a small percentage of our distraction. This means we will only notice a few of the thoughts milling around in our minds. As our mindfulness improves we will begin to detect an increasing range of mental activity. At this point people generally misread the situation thinking that they have “become worse” and have a more chaotic mind than when they began. This is usually not the case. Rather it is a case of “seeing” more of the chaos and beginning to detect activity that was formerly unseen. So, instead, this can be seen as a sign of improvement.

Exercise 1: Becoming Aware of Distraction

30 – 45 minutes

Follow the normal routine of settling, grounding, resting and mindfulness support - using either sound or breath as the support.

After ten minutes take a break and relax. Check where your mind was when you took your break. The chances are you were thinking about something – either mindfully or not. See whether the subject was past, present or future.

Then continue with your session. After five minutes stop again – where was your mind? Keep doing this throughout the session. After a while you will become quite good at detecting your mind's tendency to drift away into a particular area of distraction and you will discover where it normally goes. This discovery is helpful because it will give you a clue as to the possible underlying psychological forces too. But the main point at this stage is that you will become increasingly aware of distraction and realise how often you drift away without noticing it. This awareness will enable you to “catch” yourself sooner and sooner so that distraction gradually weakens and mindfulness strengthens.

Reflection afterwards

At the end of the session look back and see what pattern is emerging. If you like, categorise the places your mind tends to go to. See how many categories you can create and identify the main ones.

2. Mindfulness of Breath

It is useful to start with using body or sound as mindfulness supports before practising mindfulness of breathing. Focusing on the body as a support by doing the body scan practice can ground us more firmly within in the present moment if we are feeling very 'heady'. Mindfulness of sound has an expansive quality as there are many sounds occurring in space all around us. Also, sounds are external and 'tangible'. Therefore, we might find that in the beginning these three mindfulness supports can more easily hold our attention in place.

When we use breath as a mindfulness support, the experience is more subtle and inward; however, we are still working with the same principle, namely that when our attention drifts away and we become lost in thought, we notice this and use the mindfulness support as a reference point for coming back to the present moment.

When we practice mindfulness of breathing in sitting meditation, we don't alter the breath in any way - instead we allow our attention to flow with the natural rhythm of our breathing. There are various ways of doing it. We can focus on the coming and going of breath at the nostrils. We can become aware of our abdomen rising and falling as we breathe in and out. This is particularly good if we are feeling unsettled. If our mind is very scattered and distracted, we can follow the entire passage of the breath as it is drawn into the lungs and abdomen and then flows out of our body again. Or we can just focus on the out-breath – our attention flowing with the out-breath such that there is a sense of releasing and dissolving into space in front.

Whichever method we use, it is important to have a light touch and not to focus on the breath in a tight way, blocking out the rest of our experience. The skill we are working on is to rest our attention lightly on the breathing, while at the same time being open to the fullness of our experience, allowing thoughts, sensations and emotions to come and go like clouds passing through the sky. We are open to our experience as it is, but we do not get involved and identify with the content of the experience – this is the heart of the training.

Furthermore, we are not trying to attain a desired state of mind like 'being at peace' for example. The purpose of the mindfulness training is to allow the mind to settle with increasing clarity and awareness in the present moment – whatever the content of this moment might be. The aim is to learn about our mind as it is, not to attain a special state of mind. So we are not trying to change the content of our experience, but we are changing our relationship to what is there. Consequently, there are two aspects to the practice: firstly, a technical aspect of learning how to rest our attention on the breath, and secondly, an attitude of relaxed openness in which we allow whatever arises to flow through our awareness.

We can also use different supports at different times – stone, body, sound or breath – depending on what state of mind we are in. We are learning a repertoire of skills that we can use in different conditions and hone to our unique temperament or to the needs of the group we are working with. Sometimes we might find that sound works better when we feel contracted and tense because it opens up our experience, while at other times breath might work better because it is inwardly centering and calming. We need to experiment to see what works best. However, it is generally recommended to stick to one support in any given session of practice.

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

The breath is always with us and is the thread that connects every moment of our lives. We have been breathing since we were born, and will continue to breathe until we die. The breath is an exchange of energy and nourishment between the environment “outside” of us and the “internal” environment of our own body. Every living being has its own way of breathing and manifesting this exchange. It is as if the whole planet is breathing.

Each breath has its own flow and rhythm. It flows through us like a river, or like a wave undulating up and down, in and out. What we often think of as the breath, is actually the movement of the body as it accommodates to the process of breathing – the rhythm of the breathing body. We will start to notice how the breath changes with our moods. There are times when it feels rapid, shallow, tight or restricted. There are times when it feels slow, deep and full. There are times when we hold the breath and it feels as if it momentarily stops. There are times when we try to control or interfere with the breath. There are times when we can just allow it to happen by itself, when we can trust the wisdom of the body. Sometimes, even bringing awareness to the breath may make us feel anxious, particularly if we have had any experience of breathing problems or symptoms of panic.

The breath can be a barometer as to how we are in any given moment. It can be used as a tool for tuning in to our experience, our body and our emotions. It can be used as an anchor to bring us back into the present moment. It can be a support for our mindfulness practice – it is always there – like a friend we return to again and again, whenever we are getting lost in our experience. All we need to do is to come back to our awareness of the breath: the sensations of the breath, the quality of the breath, the taste, the sound, the wonder of the breath.

Mindfulness of breathing can be practiced in a number of ways and situations, from an informal checking in with the breath at occasional moments throughout the day to the formal practice of meditation on the breath. Breathing with awareness or conscious breathing is a lifesaver. With practice we will find that we can apply it to a number of difficult situations: in managing anxiety and anger, in facing illness or pain, in dealing with the very real challenges of our everyday lives. Each time we bring awareness to our breathing, whatever we are doing, we will immediately be more present with our experience.

Quotes on Mindfulness of Breath

“Our breath is like a bridge connecting our bodies and our minds. In our daily lives, our bodies may be in one place and our minds somewhere else – in the past or in the future. This is called a state of distraction. The breath is a connection between the mind and the body. When you begin to breathe in and out mindfully, your body will come back to your mind, and your mind will go back to your body. You will be able to realize the oneness of body and mind and become fully present and fully alive in the here and the now. You will be in a position to touch life deeply in the moment. This is not difficult. Everyone can do it.” Thich Nhat Hanh from “Be Here Where You Are”

“When we practice meditation our mind always follows our breathing. When we inhale, the air comes into the inner world. When we exhale, the air goes out to the outer world. The inner world is limitless, and the outer world is also limitless. We say “inner world” or “outer world”, but actually there is just one whole world. In this limitless world, our throat is like a swinging door. If you think, “I breathe”, the “I” is extra. There is no you to say “I”. What we call “I” is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale. It just moves; that is all. When your mind is pure and calm enough to follow this movement, there is nothing: no “I”, no world, no mind nor body; just a swinging door.”

Shunryu Suzuki from “Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind”

“Use the breath as an anchor to tether your attention to the present moment. Your thinking mind will drift here and there, depending on the currents and winds moving in the mind until, at some point, the anchor line grows taut and brings you back.” Jon Kabat-Zinn

Exercise 2: Mindfulness Support using Breath

30 – 45 minutes

Start by settling into your posture, which is like a container for your practice. Ensure that your back is straight, your shoulders are relaxed and your chest open and that you are sitting in a way that is comfortable. With the posture comes a sense of being alert and at ease. If your mind is feeling agitated or unsettled then do the settling exercise; if not move into the phase of grounding, noticing what sensations are present in your body and relaxing around them, so that there is a sense of being rooted and embodied. Then let go of any sense of focus and enter the stage of resting, simply being present with all your senses awake and open.

When your mind starts to drift off into thinking, dreaming or planning, turn to the mindfulness support as a way of lightly anchoring you in the present moment. In this exercise you will use breathing as a support. Become aware of the natural rhythm of your breathing, not influencing it or controlling it, but lightly flowing with the sensation of breathing. It is like a feather landing on a gently flowing stream - your attention like the feather and your breathing like the stream. Rest your attention on the breath coming and going through your nostrils, your abdomen rising and falling, the sensation of the breath leaving your body or the feeling of your whole body breathing. It does not matter where you rest your attention, what is important is to have a light touch – not shutting out thoughts and emotions, but allowing them to come and go. So the practice is simple – breathing in, you are aware you are breathing in; breathing out, you know you are breathing out.

You will notice your attention drifting off into thoughts and daydreams – this is OK, you have not failed or got it wrong. Just notice what ‘mental video’ you have become involved with and then gently bring your attention back to the breath.

As you practice in this way you begin to realize that mindfulness is a process of losing it and finding it – you get lost in distraction, notice this and then come back to the present moment, resting your attention on the breathing. It does not matter how many times you get lost in thought – the only important thing is to notice this and come back to the breath. In so doing, you gradually strengthen the muscle of mindfulness.

3. UNDERCURRENT AND OBSERVER

THE JOURNEY

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice -
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do -
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Mary Oliver

3.1 Introducing Undercurrent and Observer

When we begin to practice mindfulness it soon becomes clear that there are always two processes going on: the arising of thoughts and our awareness of these thoughts. Rob Nairn has coined the term *undercurrent and observer* to describe these two processes. The undercurrent refers to the continuous stream of thoughts, emotions, images and story lines that move through our minds on a moment by moment basis. It is like a constant stream of chatter going on in the back of the mind. Often this chatter is not very pleasant and carries a negative emotional charge, like critical self talk for example. The observer is that part of us that notices and sees the undercurrent. But it tends to observe with attitude, liking some of what it sees, disliking other parts and ignoring what does not fall into its narrow band of likes and dislikes.

A useful analogy for explaining the undercurrent and observer is someone sitting on the bank of a river and watching the water flow by. The river is like the undercurrent and the observer is the one who sits on the bank. Sometimes the river is turbulent and other times it flows smoothly; sometimes it washes logs and debris downstream, whilst other times the water is clear and translucent. Our minds are like this. The key instruction in mindfulness practice is to remain sitting on the bank of the river, watching the changing flow. The various mindfulness methods are ways of assisting us in remaining grounded in this observing mode and staying on the bank. When we become distracted and involved with what is flowing by it is like jumping into river and being carried along in its flow, sometimes tumbling over waterfalls, other times caught amongst the swirling debris, while other times basking in a still, clear pool. The key point is that we are caught in the flow and vulnerable to where it takes us, sometimes in a desirable direction, while other times in the direction of confusion and suffering. What pulls us into the river are the likes and dislikes of the observer - the one sitting on the bank. We like some things and grasp at them and we dislike other things and push them away. Either way we fall in.

At this stage of the training it may be useful to explore the undercurrent in a little more detail because this is what we first encounter when we sit down and practice mindfulness. When we go about our lives we are accustomed to focusing our minds in different ways. For example, when we attend a meeting we use our mental capacities to analyse and evaluate, and argue our point of view. However, running just below this focus on the meeting is a stream of repetitive thoughts, images and emotions that seem to have a life of their own. To continue with our example, once we have finished the meeting and skilfully negotiated an agreement, we walk back to our car and then begin driving home. What happens then? Initially our mind might be preoccupied with the issues raised in the meeting, but after a while it falls back into a stream of old stories, day dreams, repetitive mental loops, self critical thoughts, fantasies and so on. As we drive we may find ourselves slipping into automatic pilot mode, carried along by this stream of thinking, and we might be entirely unaware of the journey home. When we walk into our house and greet our family it is as if we are jolted back to reality and find ourselves establishing a sense of focus around relating to our loved ones. This experience of falling back into a stream of repetitive thinking that runs below our intentional focus is what we mean by the undercurrent.

One might then ask why it is important to become aware of the undercurrent. The following quote by Mark Williams pinpoints this very clearly:

"A century ago, Sigmund Freud popularised the idea that we all have an unconscious that lies deep below the surface of our awareness, motivating our actions in ways that are highly complex

and that take considerable time to unearth and understand. Those in mainstream academic psychology rejected such ideas as unprovable and focused instead on observable behaviour (in a movement known as 'behaviourism'). So fierce was the reaction against Freud that it was only in the late 1960s and the 1970s that behaviourally oriented psychotherapists started to take seriously the interior world of their patients: the subjective domain of thoughts, memories, ideas, projections, and plans. And they made a remarkable discovery: most of what drives our emotions and behaviour is not deeply unconscious, but just below the surface of our awareness. Not only that, but this rich interior world, with its motivations, expectations, interpretations, and story lines, is accessible to all of us if we dare to look. We can all become more aware of the 'stream of consciousness' going on in our minds, moment by moment. It often takes the form a running commentary. If it is potentially damaging to us, it is not because it is buried deep in the psyche but because it is left virtually unattended. *We have gotten so used to its whisperings that we don't even notice it is here. And so, it shapes our lives."*

From *The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness*; Guilford Press (2007) by Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn; page 163

The key point is the last section in italics. What is important is not so much that the undercurrent is flowing by but the fact that we are constantly jumping into it and identifying with it and giving our energy to it - without even realising that we are doing this. This is how it shapes our lives. Through mindfulness practice, however, we learn to notice the undercurrent and accept it, while at the same time we learn not to be seduced by its whisperings. This balance between noticing and allowing it on the one hand and not becoming involved with it on the other hand is the very heart of mindfulness training.

In the fourth module we will explore the characteristics of the undercurrent in more detail and we will also look more closely at the observer and its attitudes. At this stage in the training it is useful simply to become aware of the undercurrent and become acquainted with it in a general way. The following exercise facilitates this process.

Exercise 3: Noticing the Undercurrent - 30 minutes

Start with settling, grounding resting and breath or sound support. Then focus on your mindfulness support in a very relaxed way and be careful not to obstruct thoughts. In fact, develop an interest in the fact that thoughts, emotions, images and physical sensations keep arising in your mind. Learn to watch them so that gradually the existence of the undercurrent becomes clear to you. You can do this by deliberately switching attention from the support to whatever thought, image or storyline is arising in the moment, noticing what chain of thoughts and feelings it comes from, and then returning to the normal support after a few moments.

4. Three Minute Breathing Space

This practice was developed by Mark Williams, John Teasdale and Zindel Segal, who put together Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy. In essence, it is a mini-meditation, an opportunity to become mindful in the midst of our lives. It provides a bridge between the formal practice of meditation which we will usually do on our own with time set aside, and the informal practice of mindfulness in our everyday lives as we go about our business.

The breathing space is not to be seen as “taking a break” or taking time-out from whatever is going on. Instead, it can be seen as encouraging a shift in mode, from doing to being, from automatic pilot to awareness and deliberately changing our relationship to whatever we are experiencing.

It is traditionally seen as encompassing three distinct stages, which we can envisage in the form of an hourglass. The first stage is becoming aware: we stop, we notice whatever is going on in our inner experience, in our thoughts, in our feelings and emotions, and in our body sensations – without trying to change anything. This is like the wide neck of the hourglass. The second stage is gathering: we draw our attention close to the breath and the breath sensations, experiencing fully the in-breath and the out-breath, using the breath to anchor us to the present moment, and we stay here for a little while (perhaps at least a third of the time we are practicing). This is like the narrow neck of the hourglass. The third stage is expanding outwards: from the breath, we expand our awareness to include the body sensations and anything we are experiencing physically, emotionally or within the mind. We also bring our awareness to the space around us and whatever we can experience there through our senses. We breathe into whatever is there, with a sense of acceptance - allowing ourselves to experience it, before moving on with the activities of our day. This is like the wide base of the hourglass – expanding, open and held in awareness.

Although it is called a three minute breathing space we need not get caught up in timing ourselves. You can think of the practice as a three stage breathing space, with each stage taking up a period of time dependent on circumstances. For example, the life situation you find yourself in may determine how long you have to practice the breathing space. In general, first practice the becoming aware stage until you have a good idea of how your inner experience is, secondly practice the gathering stage until you feel collected or grounded, and thirdly practice the expanding stage until you feel ready to mindfully move into the next activity of your day.

We can practice scheduling the three minute breathing space into our lives, in the midst of our daily activities. In time, we will be able to introduce the breathing space more spontaneously, at times when we are feeling stressed or experiencing something unpleasant. In these situations, we are not using the breathing space to block out or to get rid of these difficult experiences. Instead, we will be learning to bring more awareness to our reactions and to notice how we may have a habit of resisting and fighting against what is happening at these times. The breathing space can help us to befriend and to accept these unpleasant experiences that are there already and to enhance our ability to cope with them.

Exercise 4: Three Minute Breathing Space

At various times during the course of your day, see if it is possible to step out of “automatic pilot” for 3 minutes or thereabouts, in the following way:

1. Becoming aware – what’s here?

Notice your posture. Straighten your spine and generally relax the body.

With your eyes either open or closed, silently ask yourself:

"What is my experience right now ... in my thoughts ... my feelings ... and my bodily sensations?"

Recognise and accept your experience, even if it is unwanted.

2. Gathering - breathing

Then, gently redirect your full attention to your breathing, to each in-breath and to each out-breath as they follow, one after the other. Try noting at the back of your mind:

"Breathing in ... breathing out" or counting the breaths.

Do this for one or two minutes as best you can, using the breathing as an anchor to bring you into the present and help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness.

3. Expanding outwards

Open the field of your awareness around your breathing, so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expression. Allow your attention to expand to the whole body - including any sense of discomfort, tension, or resistance. If these sensations are there, then bring your awareness to them by "breathing into them" on the in breath. Then, breathe out from those sensations, softening and opening with the out breath. If you wish, you can say to yourself on the out breath, "It's OK. Whatever it is, it's OK. Let me feel it. It is here already so I may as well be present for it." As best you can, bring this expanded awareness to the next moments of your day.

5. MINDFUL MOVEMENT

Hokusai says look carefully.
He says pay attention, notice.
He says keep looking, stay curious.
He says there is no end to seeing...

He says everything is alive –
Shells, buildings, people, fish
Mountains, trees. Wood is alive.
Water is alive.

Everything has its own life.
Everything lives inside us.
He says live with the world inside you...

It matters that you care.
It matters that you feel.
It matters that you notice.
It matters that life lives through you...
Look, feel, let life take you by the hand.
Let life live through you.

Roger Keyes

Mindful movement is really just a meditation practice that involves moving the body mindfully. We learn a new way of 'being with' experience through experiencing how it manifests itself in the body. During the course, you will have a chance to experience movements that are drawn from simple yoga and walking, but mindful movement can be based on other movement practices, such as Qigong and Tai Chi.

We have already learnt mindfulness of the body through the body scan in which we are becoming more familiar with sensations and feelings that arise in our bodies. We now bring the same attention to mindful movement, which is simply being present in the body as we move.

5.1 Why practice Mindful Movement?

In our mindfulness training we acknowledge the deep connection between the body and the mind and introduce practices which develop mindfulness of both. During mindful movement we can reconnect with the experience of being embodied (mind and body fully connected) and can begin to experience ourselves holistically. Different practices suit different people and so we introduce two body based practices: bodyscan and mindful movement.

By developing our awareness of body sensations we can more easily notice and recognize feelings in the body, which can tell us how we are in a particular moment. Feelings in our body can alert us to automatic reactions of attachment to perceived positive experience, aversion to perceived negative experience and ignorance towards perceived neutral experience. Often these feelings are connected with an emotion we are experiencing and so noticing the feelings can be a good way of tuning into our emotional state in any particular moment. The body doesn't lie about the emotion it is experiencing and so noticing feelings in the body can guide us to a true experience of our emotions, rather than the story our mind may be telling us.

Feelings in the body, if we notice them, can alert us when we are angry or frustrated, which are generally the times when we are more reactive to the people or environment around us. This can enable us to choose to be mindful in those moments thereby giving us the opportunity to respond skillfully rather than reacting in a less skilful way, driven by our emotions. Movement practice can release tightness in the muscles that are holding some emotional content that we did not know we had. When we do mindful movement we can shift emotional blocks.

If we can be present in our bodies, then the body becomes a valuable place to 'come back to' when our mind wanders or when we get very 'heady' and caught up in thinking. We can be grounded and present, with stability, if we rest the focus of our attention on body sensations.

Mindful movement gives us an opportunity to work with present moment acceptance of our physical limitations. This can help us to develop an attitude of acceptance in other areas of our lives. It is also a good bridge into practicing mindfulness in our daily life, where naturally we are moving about.

In addition a regular movement practice such as yoga, Qigong or Tai Chi has been shown to promote physical and mental wellbeing. Through our mindful movement practice we can develop good posture that carries through into our daily life and our posture in our sitting practice.

5.2 Technique and Attitude

As with any mindfulness practice the technique is to be aware of what is happening while it is happening, that is, to be aware of your movement while you are moving. As with the body scan you will move the focus of your attention around the body, for example to areas where movement or stretching can be felt, noticing the patterns of physical sensations that are there. After a while you may notice that your mind has wandered and that you are lost in thought. When you notice this, acknowledge where your mind has wandered to and then very gently focus your attention once more on your movement practice.

As we do our movement practice we notice any thoughts or emotions arising as we move letting go of the stories we tell ourselves about our experience. Instead we tune into the bare sensations of our present moment experience. We explore the patterns of sensation which make up a stretch or a feeling of tightness, or whatever else it is we are experiencing.

It is a good idea to approach mindful movement with an attitude of gratitude for what our bodies do for us day after day with an attitude of being kind to and taking care of our bodies as we move. Our mindful movement practice is a way of befriending our bodies.

When practicing mindful movement, as best you can, develop a spirit of enquiry - an openhearted awareness - engaged in purposefully experiencing the body moment by moment and movement by movement. We work with an intention to experience our body just as it is, without preference or judgment. We aim to cultivate an attitude of approaching difficulty within our bodies rather than avoiding it. Trust your body to find its own way and practice feeling the movements from the inside.

Many people notice a competitive streak when they practice mindful movement and strive to hold a pose the longest or with the best posture. Striving in movement practice can lead to injury and so, as best you can, notice any striving and let it go. Striving is a habitual pattern in many people's lives and so this is an opportunity to see it played out moment by moment.

For some people mindful movement can be a challenging practice and you may notice some resistance to engaging in it wholeheartedly. If you notice this, then take time to notice how this resistance feels in the body and any emotions or thoughts that are connected to this resistance. Experiment with noticing your preconceptions of how a session of mindful movement is going to be before you begin and then at the end of the session reflect back on how it actually was.

Working the Edge

In some of the mindfulness practices you may experience difficulties, such as physical discomfort. Typically, our reaction to physical discomfort is to try and get rid of it.

The mindfulness approach is to 'work the edge'. The 'edge' is the point where you are becoming uncomfortable or where you are not yet ready to go or the place where some resistance can be found. We approach physical discomfort, noticing exactly what we feel, where we feel it, whether it moves or has a boundary, etc. We explore our physical discomfort with an attitude of open curiosity and kindness. We experiment with visualising breathing in to the part of our body where we feel the discomfort and then breathing out from that area of the body into the region surrounding it. We do this without any expectations and we try to let go of any agenda to get rid of the discomfort.

However, if the discomfort becomes too much, we are kind to ourselves and, while acknowledging the discomfort, we move or take action to sooth or distract ourselves. This is working the edge between approaching our physical discomfort and being kind to ourselves and our bodies.

We practice this in our mindful movement so that we can also take this approach of working the edge with psychological discomfort. This is very helpful in the process of developing an attitude of acceptance.

A Session of Mindful Movement

The mindful movement practice, presented in Exercise 5 in the attached Annex, and in the recorded practice, has been devised to be simple and safe for the majority of people to do.

Some useful precautions:

Do only what is OK for your body. Remember you are the expert when it comes to knowing your body's limitations.

Breathe gently through the nostrils. If your breath becomes laboured or you notice you are holding your breath, stop and rest.

6. KINDNESS

WILD GEESE

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Mary Oliver

Felt Sense of Kindness

We have learned that there are two aspects to training in mindfulness: method and attitude. We have talked a lot about method 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.

Following on from the memories of kindness exercise, we can do the following exercise to touch in with the loving kindness we have for the loved one in our lives and perhaps experience a felt sense of kindness. This exercise then forms the basis from which we can spread out our loving kindness from our loved ones, to ourselves, to strangers, to those who we find difficult and finally to all beings everywhere.

Exercise 6: Loving Kindness for others

10 minutes

The practice involves repeating three or four phrases or wishes for a person or animal towards whom we feel genuine kindness. Often our relationships with our loved ones are complicated and so try and pick someone or an animal with whom you have a fairly straightforward relationship. Family pets can be useful for this exercise.

As you say the phrases, you imagine the person or animal sitting before you. Some examples of traditional phrases include:

May you be well;
May you be happy;
May you be free from suffering;
May you be free from danger (including dangerous mind states); and
May you live with ease (may life go easily).

Pick three or four of the above phrases which are meaningful to you. If these phrases are not meaningful to you, then make up your own set of phrases.

Choose a person or animal for whom you feel genuine concern as you say these phrases. You might not feel this towards them all of the time, and this is OK. In doing this practice we are connecting with feelings of kindness we have already, however intermittent or conditional. You might choose, for example, a dear friend, a family member, a teacher, someone who has helped or been kind to you, or a family pet. The person or animal you choose may change from time to time.

We are not trying to force anything or to squeeze out any particular feeling from our hearts. If things feel dry or distant, that is fine. That is our experience. We can allow whatever is there just to be there as it is. We can think of the practice as planting seeds of intention - cultivating kindness.

We might find that, through this practice, our hearts open allowing sensations of warmth and connection to arise and grow. If this is the case then from time to time during the practice, move your awareness into your body to sense how kindness feels in your body. We might find that, through this practice, blocks to kindness, such as fear, anxiety or anger arise. This is OK too and provides us with an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and our habitual patterns of thought and behavior. If such blocks arise, then from time to time during the practice, move your awareness into your body to sense how the block feels in your body. Work with the attitude, that whatever arises is OK and just allow thoughts, emotions and physical sensation to come and go in their own good time.

HOME PRACTICES

Formal Practice

30-45 minutes formal practice each day using the recordings of the exercises where useful. You might find it helps to begin or end your session with 10 - 15 minutes of walking meditation or mindful movement.

Please contact your tutor if you encounter any problems with the home practice:

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

The home assignments until module three are:

29 Nov – 5 Dec	Becoming Aware of Distraction (<i>exercise 1</i>)
6 Dec – 12 Dec	Mindful Movement (<i>exercise 5</i>)
13 Dec – 19 Dec	Mindfulness Support using breath (<i>exercise 2</i>)
20 Dec – 26 Dec	Noticing the Undercurrent (<i>exercise 3</i>)
27 Dec – 2 Jan	Alternate doing Loving Kindness for Other (<i>Exercise 6</i>) at the beginning of a longer period of sitting practice with Mindful Movement (<i>exercise 5</i>)

Informal Practice

20 Dec – 26 Dec	Do the 3-minute breathing spaces at set times, 3 times a day.
27 Dec – 2 Jan	Continue to do the breathing space at least 3 times a day either at set times, or whenever a natural pause occurs in your day, or when you find yourself in a difficult situation.

Also, continue to be especially mindful during chosen daily activities, adding another activity every so often, perhaps each week or once a fortnight. Refer to module one.

Keeping a Journal

Continue your 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.

Recommended Reading

Brach, T. (2003). *Radical acceptance: Embracing your life with the heart of a Buddha*. New York: Bantam/Dell.