



MINDFUL  
PRACTICES  
WITH LEANDA

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction  
Programme  
(MBSR)

Workbook

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# Introduction

*'Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way:  
On purpose in the present moment and without judgement'*

(Kabat-Zinn, 1990)

## **What is Mindfulness?**

Mindfulness teaches us to direct our attention to what is happening right here, right now, with an attitude of kindness towards ourselves and our experience. This "being with" ourselves is in contrast to more habitual states of mind in which we are often preoccupied with memories, fantasies, and worries or planning. Although we are often unaware of the currency of our thinking, it has a profound effect on how we live our lives, as well as on our mental and emotional health.

In mindfulness we learn skills which support us in developing this quality of attention, and the capacity to come back, again and again, to this present moment, with patience and compassion. This programme is not group therapy, although there can be healing, but is very practical, educational and teaches us to apply the art of mindfulness to our day to day lives. Mindfulness promotes self-awareness, personal development and general well-being.

## **The importance of practice**

It can be challenging to find the time to do the home practice but it really is worth it. It is good to have an open mind going in to the source and judge if it was of benefit to you after or if this is something you would like to continue with. We have spent years developing habits of the mind which we are now working to change. We have to apply real commitment to unlearning our automatic habits of mind in order to form new habits of bringing mindful awareness more and more to aspects of our lives.

## **Facing difficulties**

A central aim of the approach is to learn how to be more fully aware and present in each moment of life. The good news is that this makes life more enjoyable, interesting, vivid and fulfilling. On the other hand, this means facing what is present, even when it is unpleasant and difficult. In practice you will find that turning to face and acknowledge difficulties is, in the long run, the most effective way to reduce unhappiness. In this course you will learn gentle ways to face difficulties and will be supported while doing this.

## **Patience**

We will be investing time and effort in our meditation practice and home practice exercises, the effects of which may only become apparent later. In many ways, this is much like gardening: we have to prepare the ground, plant the seeds and ensure that they are adequately watered and nourished and then wait patiently for the results.

## **Mindfulness Research Findings**

There has been lots of evidence based research carried out in the area of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) over the last 35 years which indicates that a regular mindfulness practice helps the body/mind respond rather than react to stress, leaving resources for taking care of our general health and well-being.

Extensive research in MBSR and MBCT has shown that developing mindfulness has a significant positive effect on:

- Reducing anxiety and depression
- Reducing tension, anger and fatigue
- Enhancing relationships
- Aiding better sleep
- Developing stronger immunity
- Developing greater self-awareness
- Increasing ability to manage stress
- Physical and psychological health
- Increasing vitality

Studies from the University of Wisconsin showed that mindfulness practices lead to an increased activation in areas of the brain responsible for positive emotions and lowered anxiety states (Davidson et al, Psychosomatic Medicine 2003, vol.65).

Mindfulness programmes are also being used to treat and support the treatment of: addiction, cancer, eating disorders, chronic pain, anxiety, suicide, borderline personality disorder, relationship enhancement in couples and many other areas. There is a growing problem of depression and anxiety worldwide. According to the World Health Organisation, it is estimated that by 2020, depression will be the second largest health issue globally. Zylowski et al., (2007) argue that mindfulness meditation "has emerged as a new approach to stress reduction and an important innovation in treating psychiatric disorders" (p.2).

Scientific studies have shown that mindfulness prevents depression and also positively affects the brain patterns underlying day-to-day stress, irritability and anxiety. Studies show regular meditators have improved attention, memory and faster reaction times, and even affects hypertension, the immune system, cancer and chronic pain (Williams, 2011).

Recent developments in neuroscience regarding the plasticity of the brain reveal that with mindfulness training the brain can change! Neuroplasticity, the rewiring that occurs in the brain as a result of experience, now explains how regular mindfulness meditation has numerous health benefits including increased immune functioning (Davidson et al., 2003; Lazar et al., 2005; Siegal, 2007) and has been shown to also improve wellbeing (Carmody & Baer, 2008) and reduce psychological distress (Coffey & Hartman, 2008; Ostafin et al., 2006). Mindfulness involves nonjudgmental attention to present-moment experience. In its therapeutic forms, mindfulness interventions promote increased tolerance of negative affect and improved wellbeing (Farb, N.A., Anderson, A.K., & Segal, Z.V., (2012).

## Why are we getting stressed?

- Evolutionary need for the Fight or Flight response (Sympathetic Nervous System versus the parasympathetic Nervous System (Rest & Digest))
- Unlike the wild gazelle, after surviving an attack by a leopard, we are not going back to grazing! Often we are in a constant state of Hyper Arousal



## How can we reduce these hormones in the body?

- Mindfulness is a technique to allow us to come into the present moment and move from the *fight or flight* response to the *rest and digest* response.
- Lowering hormones like adrenaline and cortisol in the body.
- This is done by bringing our attention to the breath, the body and the senses.
- As well as starting to approach rather than avoid what is happening with our thoughts, emotions and body sensations.

## Attention is like a puppy – It needs training

We ask the mind to 'sit' or 'stay' in a certain place – but it is not very good at staying for long! It wanders off.....

It keeps fetching things we didn't ask for and sometimes makes a real mess!



## **Motivational Reflections for doing this course:**

Before starting the course you may find it interesting and useful to write down your responses to the following questions. You can then reflect back on your original reasons for coming on the course when you have completed it.

What brought me to mindfulness?

What are my expectations of the course?

What am I hoping to get out of this course?

I hope you enjoy the course and that your commitment to developing mindfulness brings great benefits to your life.

## Week 1: Automatic Pilot

***Research shows the average person is in autopilot 47% of the time.....our attention is absorbed in our wandering minds and we are not really 'present' in our own lives***

*(Harvard Gazette, 2010)*

### **Awareness and Automatic Pilot**

In a car we can sometimes drive for miles "on automatic pilot," without really being aware of what we are doing. In the same way, we may not be really "present," moment-by-moment, for much of our lives: We can often be "miles away" without knowing it.

On automatic pilot, we are more likely to have our "buttons pressed": Events around us and thoughts, feelings, and sensations in the mind (of which we may only be dimly aware) can trigger old habits of thinking that are often unhelpful, and may lead to worsening mood.

By becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, from moment to moment, we give ourselves the possibility of greater freedom and choice; we do not have to go down the same old "mental ruts" that may have caused problems in the past. The aim of this program is to increase awareness, so that we can respond to situations with choice rather than react automatically. We do that by practicing to become more aware of where our attention is, and deliberately changing the focus of attention, over and over again. To begin with, we brought attention to eating the raisin to explore how to step out of automatic pilot. We then brought attention to different parts of the body as a focus to anchor our awareness in the moment. We will also be training ourselves to put attention and awareness in different places at will. This is the aim of the body scan exercise, which forms the main home practice exercise this week.

### **The Attitudinal Foundations of Mindfulness Practice include:**

**Non-Judgment:** Taking the stance of an impartial witness to your own experience; noticing the stream of a judging mind – not trying to stop it but just being aware of it.

**Patience:** Letting things unfold in their own time. A child may try to help a butterfly emerge by breaking open a chrysalis; but chances are the butterfly won't benefit from this help. Being completely open to each moment: accepting its fullness, knowing that like the butterfly, things will emerge in their own time.

**Beginner's Mind and Curiosity:** Too often we let our thinking and our beliefs about what we 'know' stop us from seeing things as they really are – cultivating a mind that is willing to see everything as if for the first time; being receptive to new possibilities. Each moment is unique and contains unique possibilities.

**Trust:** Developing a basic trust in yourself and your feelings means trusting in your own authority and intuition, even if you make some 'mistakes' along the way. On the other hand honouring your feelings means taking responsibility for yourself and your own wellbeing.

**Non-Striving:** meditation has no role other than for you to be yourself. The irony is you already are. Paying attention to how you are right now – observing this. The best way

to achieve your own goals is to back off from striving and instead start to really focus on carefully seeing and accepting things as they are, moment by moment.

**Acceptance:** Seeing things as they actually are in the present. If you have a sore foot, accept you have a sore foot. We often waste a lot of time and energy denying what is factual. We are trying to force situations according to how we would like them to be. This creates more tension and prevents positive changes from occurring. Acceptance is not passive; it does not mean you have to be resigned to tolerate things. Acceptance is a willingness to see things as they are. You are much more likely to know what to do and have an inner conviction to act when you have a clear picture of what is actually happening.

**Letting Go:** This is a way of letting things be, of accepting things as they are. We let things go and we just watch: if we find it particularly difficult to let go of something because it has such a strong hold on our mind, we can direct our attention to what 'holding' feels like. Every time we notice the mind wandering and come back to the breath or body, we are practicing letting go.

**Compassion and Kindness:** Bringing some compassion towards ourselves can have a very healing effect and can allow us to be more compassionate towards others. If we don't have feelings of kindness or compassion for ourselves right now, we can have the intention to feel compassion for ourselves in the future. Cultivating patience and non-striving requires kindness towards ourselves.

**Generosity and Gratitude:** Whether it's the need to give to others, or perhaps give to ourselves more, how is it to cultivate this. As well as bringing gratitude to some of the things in our life we often take for granted.

### ***Befriend Who You Are***

*Loving-kindness toward ourselves doesn't mean getting rid of anything. It means that we can still be crazy, we can still be angry. We can still be timid or jealous or full of feelings of unworthiness. Meditation practice isn't about trying to throw ourselves away and become something better. It's about befriending who we are already. The ground of practice is you or me or whatever we are right now, just as we are. That's what we come to know with tremendous curiosity and interest. Pema Chodron, 'We Can Still Be Crazy'*

### **Home Practice for the Week following Session 1**

1. Body Scan meditation (6 of 7 days)
2. Choose one routine activity in your daily life and make a deliberate effort to bring moment-to-moment awareness to that activity each time you do it. Possibilities include waking up in the morning, brushing your teeth, showering, drying your body, getting dressed, eating, driving, taking out the rubbish, shopping etc. Simply zoom in on *knowing what you are doing as you are actually doing it.*
3. Eat at least one small meal 'mindfully' in the way that you ate the raisin.

## Home Practice Record Form: Week 1

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Form. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next class.

<i>Day/Time</i>	<i>Practice</i>	<i>Comments/Reflections</i>

## Week 2: Living in Our Heads

*'The present is the only time that any of us have to be alive – to know anything – to perceive – to learn – to act – to change – to heal'*

*(Kabat-Zinn, 1994)*

Often we think of meditation as taking place in a beautiful, still, quite place and that if the conditions are not right, we cannot meditate. But mindfulness is about becoming aware of what's happening right now; in the middle of 'the full catastrophe' that is life. It is wonderful that we have some beautiful places dedicated to meditation, but what we are about here is tuning into the life we are actually living, so that we can really live it and know that we are living it. That still, quite place can be found within each of us, and one of the ways to access it is through tuning into the breath which is with us all the time – the breath can act like an anchor!

### Summary of Session 2: Living in Our Heads

Our aim in this programme is to be more aware, more often. A powerful influence taking us away from being 'fully present' in each moment is our automatic tendency to *judge* our experience as being not quite right in some way, that it is not what should be happening, not good enough, or not what we expected or wanted. These judgments can lead to sequences of thoughts about blame, what needs to be changed, or how things could or should be different. Often these thoughts will take us, quite automatically, down some fairly well-worn paths in our minds. In this way, we may lose awareness of the moment and also the freedom to choose what, if any, actions need to be taken. We can regain our freedom if, as a first step, we simply acknowledge the actuality of our situation, without immediately being hooked into automatic tendencies to judge, fix, or want things to be other than they are.

### Working with Obstacles

Usually after the first week of practicing the daily meditations, we will start noticing the obstacles to doing this. Some obstacles to the practice are:

- **sleepiness** (falling asleep during the practice, too tired to do the practice)
- **Restlessness/Anxiousness** (difficulty moving from doing to being, jumping up in the middle of the practice to do things)
- **Doubt** (is this working? Am I doing this right? What's the point! I can't do this!)
- **Aversion** (I don't like this, I don't want.....)
- **Attachment/Desire** (I want the practice to be like it was before, I want.....)

The Body Scan meditation provides an opportunity to practice simply bringing an interested and friendly awareness to the way things are in each moment, without having to do anything to change things. There is no goal to be achieved other than to bring awareness to bear as the instructions suggest – achieving some special state of relaxation is not a goal of the exercise.

## Tips for the Body Scan

1. Regardless of what happens (e.g. if you fall asleep, lose concentration, keep thinking of other things or focusing on the wrong body part, or not feeling anything), persist with it! These are your experiences in the moment. See if it is possible to be aware of them all, just as they are.
2. If your mind is wandering a lot, simply note the thoughts (as passing events), then bring the mind back gently to the body scan.
3. Let go of ideas of 'success', 'failure', or 'doing it really well', or 'trying to purify the body'. This is not a competition. It is not a skill for which you will need to *strive*. The only discipline involved is regular and frequent practice. Just do it with an attitude of openness and curiosity, and then allow the rest to take care of itself.
4. Let go of any expectations about what the body scan will do for you: imagine it as a seed you have planted. The more you poke around and interfere, the less it will be able to develop. So with the body scan, just give it the right conditions – peace and quiet, regular and frequent practice. That is all. The more you try to influence what it will do for you, the less it will do.
5. Try approaching your experience in each moment with the attitude 'OK, that's just the way things are right now'. If you try to fight off unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or body sensations, the upsetting feelings will only distract you from doing anything else. Be aware, be non-striving, be in the moment, and accept things are as they are. (Adapted from Segal et al., 2013)

## Mindfulness of the Breath

1. Sitting in a comfortable position, with your spine in a dignified upright position, let the shoulders drop.
2. Closing your eyes if this feels comfortable.
3. Bringing your awareness to the feel of the body breathing each breath focusing your attention on the sensations of touch, contact and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and whatever you are sitting on. Spending a few minutes exploring these sensations, just as in the body scan.
4. Bringing your attention to your belly, feeling it rise or expand gently on the in-breath and fall or recede on the out-breath.
5. Keeping the focus on your breathing, 'being with' each in-breath for its full duration and with each out-breath for its full duration, as if you were riding the waves of your own breathing.
6. Every time that you notice that your mind has wandered off the experience of the breath, softly note what it was that took you away and then gently escort your attention back to your belly and the feeling of the breath coming in and out.
7. If your mind wanders from the breath a thousand times, then your 'job' is simply to bring it back to the breath every time, no matter what it becomes preoccupied with. It is just as valuable to become aware that your mind has wandered and to bring it back to the breath as it is to remain aware of the breath.

(Adapted from Kabat-Zinn, 1996)

## The Breath

*Breath is life. You could think of the breath as being like a thread or a chain that links and connects all the events of your life from birth, the beginning, to death, the end. The breath is always there every moment, moving by itself like a river.*

*Have you ever noticed how the breath changes with our moods – short and shallow when we are tense or angry, faster when we are excited, slow and full when we are happy, and almost disappearing when we are afraid. It's there with us all the time. It can be used as a tool, like an anchor, to bring stability to the body and mind when we deliberately choose to become aware of it. We can tune into it at any moment during everyday life.*

*Mostly, we are not in touch with our breathing – it's just there, forgotten. So one of the first things we do in mindfulness-based stress reduction is to get in touch with it. We notice how the breath changes with our moods, our thoughts, our body movements. We don't have to control the breath. Just notice it and get to know it, like a friend. All that is necessary is to observe, watch, and feel the breath with a sense of interest in a relaxed manner.*

*With practice, we become more aware of our breathing. We can use it to direct our awareness to different aspects of our lives. For example, to relax tense muscles, or focus on a situation that requires attention. Breath can also be used to help deal with pain, anger, relationship or the stress of daily life. During this programme, we will be exploring this in great detail.*

Karen Ryder, University of Massachusetts Medical Centre

## **The Mindful Minute**

*None of us is so busy that we can't spare a minute from time to time. Literally, one minute. Just one. When you're waiting for the train in the morning or waiting for the bus; when you arrive at your desk or you're waiting for your computer to boot.....Just one single minute.*

*There's a really effective meditation practice you can do that lasts exactly one minute. It's extraordinary, but this time, instead of just watching each breath, you set out to count them. You let the breath just breathe itself, in whatever way you normally breathe, and you pay particular attention to each breath – counting at the end of each in-breath and each out-breath. You just count each breath you take over the course of exactly one timed minute so that – at the end – you'll know precisely how many breaths you take in a minute.*

*Begin by sitting in a chair with your feet squarely on the floor in front of you and your body arranged more or less symmetrically. Find a posture that is relaxed, upright and dignified. Then, closing your eyes, bring your attention to the breath and begin to follow each in-breath and each out-breath. Do that for a few breaths and, when you feel you have a sense of the breath moving in the body, start your one-minute timer and begin to count your breaths. Breathe in, and (mentally) count 'one', breathe out, and count 'two'. Breathe in 'three', breathe out and count 'four'.....and so on. Keep going for exactly one minute. Then, when I call time, remember what number you were on. The main thing is to remember how many breaths you took in that minute: 14, 18, 20 or whatever. That way, when you've got a minute to spare and you want to become more mindful you can set out to count your 30 or 20 or 18 breaths – whatever you found. You can do this before an important phone call or before getting out of the car on your way to an important meeting. You can do it as a preparation for a presentation or as a way of getting yourself back to centre after a disturbing encounter. You can do it pretty much anywhere, any time and for whatever reason. If you do a few of these through your day it will make things run better – whatever you're doing.*

Based on Michael Chaskalson (2011), 'The Mindful Workplace'. Oxford

## 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 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 what exactly 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?*

By Mary Oliver (1992)

### Home Practice for the Week following Session 2

1. Do the Body Scan (6 out of 7 days)
2. Once a day practice mindfulness of 'breathing' for 10 minutes or do the Mindful Minute a couple of times a day. Being with your breath in this way each day provides an opportunity to become aware of what it feels like to be connected and present in the moment without having to do anything.
3. Do the Pleasant Events Diary each day.
4. Choose a new routine activity to be especially mindful of (e.g., brushing your teeth, washing dishes, taking a shower, taking out the rubbish, reading to kids, shopping, eating).

## Home Practice Record Form: Week 2

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Form. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next class.

<i>Day/Time</i>	<i>Practice</i>	<i>Comments/Reflections</i>

## Pleasant Events Diary – Week 2

Be aware of a pleasant event at the time it is happening. Use the following questions to focus your awareness on the details of the experience as it is happening. Write it down as soon as possible afterwards.

Day	What was the experience?	How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?	What thoughts and images accompanied this event?	What moods, feelings, emotions accompanied this event?	What thoughts are in your mind now as you write this down?
Example:	Heading home after work-hearing a bird sing	Lightness across face, aware of shoulders dropping, uplift of corners of mouth	"That's good", "How lovely" (the bird), "It's so nice to be outside"	Relief, pleasure, contentment	"It was such a small thing but I'm glad I noticed it"
Day 1					
Day 2					
Day 3					
Day 4					
Day 5					
Day 6					
Day 7					

## Week 3: Gathering the Scattered Mind

### Mindfulness of the Breath and the Body in Movement

***'Mindfulness provides a simple but powerful route for getting ourselves unstuck, back in touch with our own wisdom and vitality.....The most important point is to be really yourself and not try to become anything that you are not already....being in touch with your deepest nature, and letting it flow out of you unimpeded'***

(Kabat-Zinn, 1986)

This week we practiced resting awareness on the breath and the body in movement. The mind is often scattered and lost in thought because it is working away in the background to complete unfinished tasks from the past and strive for goals for the future. We need to find a reliable way intentionally to “come back” to the here and now. The breath and body offer an ever-present focus on which we can reconnect with mindful presence, gather and settle the mind, and ease ourselves from **doing** into **being**.

Focusing on the breath:

- Brings you back to this very moment – the here and now
- Is always available as an anchor and haven, no matter where you are
- Can actually change your experience by connecting you with a wider space and broader perspective from which to view things.

***Doing and Being: Two different modes of mind – 2 different tools to approach different tasks, one is not better than the other***

**The Doing Mode:** It is the logical and problem solving way of approaching the world. Keeps in mind what we want and tries to get rid of what we don't want. This is the mode of mind we access when we have a project in hand or when we are planning a holiday.

**The Being Mode:** It is intuitive. It is in the present. This is the mode of mind we access when we fall in love, or enjoy a beautiful sunset. In this mode of mind we are connected with our body sensations and what the sense perceptions are bringing to us. Meditation practice gives us the opportunity to access the 'being mode' independently of external circumstances.

### **Sitting Meditation**

It helps to adopt a dignified and upright posture, with your head, neck and back aligned vertically – the physical counterpart of the inner attitudes of self-reliance, self-acceptance, patience and alert attention that we are cultivating. Practice on a chair or on the floor. If you use a chair, choose one that has a straight back and allows your feet to be flat on the floor. If at all possible, sit away from the back of the chair so that your spine is self-supporting. If you choose to sit on the floor, do so on a firm, thick cushion (or a pillow

folded over once or twice), which raises your buttocks off the floor 3-6 inches. Whatever you are sitting on, see if it is possible to sit so that your hips are slightly higher than your knees.

### **Mindful Movement allows us to:**

- Build on the foundation of the Body Scan in learning how we can bring awareness to and “inhabit” body experience/sensations
- See old habitual patterns of the mind – especially those that emphasise striving
- Work with physical boundaries and intensity and learn acceptance of our limits
- Learn new ways of taking care of ourselves

The movements provide a direct way to connect with awareness of the body. The body is a place where emotions are often expressed, under the surface and without our awareness. So becoming more aware of the body gives us an additional place from which to stand and look at our thoughts. (Adapted from Kabat-Zinn, 1996)

### **The 3-Step Breathing Space: Instructions**

#### **Step 1: Becoming Aware**

...of how things are in this moment by deliberately adopting an upright and dignified posture, whether sitting or standing. If possible, close your eyes. Then, bringing your awareness to your inner experience and acknowledging it, ask, “**what is my experience right now?**”

- What *THOUGHTS* are going through the mind? As best you can, acknowledge thoughts as mental events, perhaps putting them into words.
- What *FEELINGS* are here? Turn toward any sense of discomfort or unpleasant feelings, acknowledging them
- What *BODY SENSATIONS* are here right now? Perhaps quickly scan the body to pick up any sensations of tightness or bracing, acknowledging the sensations.

#### **Step 2: Gathering**

Then redirect your attention to focus on the physical sensations of the breathing itself. Move in close to the sense of the breath in the abdomen....feeling the sensations of the abdomen wall expanding as the breath comes in....and falling back as the breath goes out. Following the breath all the way in and all the way out, using the breath to anchor yourself into the present.

#### **Step 3: Expanding**

Now expand the field of awareness around the breathing so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expression. If you become aware of any sensations of discomfort, tension, or resistance, take your awareness there by breathing into them on the in breath. Then breathe out from those sensations, softening and opening with the outbreath. As best you can, bring this expanded awareness to the next moments of your day.

# Autobiography in Five Chapters

1. *I walk down the street  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk  
I fall in  
I am lost...I am hopeless  
It isn't my fault  
It takes forever to find a way out.*
2. *I walk down the same street  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk  
I pretend I don't see it  
I fall in again  
I can't believe I'm in the same place  
But it isn't my fault  
It still takes a long time to get out.*
3. *I walk down the same street  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk  
I see it is there  
I still fall in....it's a habit  
My eyes are open  
I know where I am  
It is my fault  
I get out immediately*
4. *I walk down the same street  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk  
I walk around it.*
5. *I walk down another street*

By Portia Nelson from 'There's a Hole in My Sidewalk', 1994

## Home Practice for the Week Following Session 3

1. Alternate the BODY SCAN practice or the MINDFUL MOVEMENT each day.  
The point of movement is to provide a direct way to connect with the body. *The body is a place where the emotions often get expressed, under the surface and without our awareness. Thoughts and emotions also affect our bodies.* Working with our bodies directly gives us a place to experience more of ourselves, and to connect with our experience of body, feelings and thoughts. The movements activate the body and mind, provide a direct way to connect with awareness of the body, and can dispel tiredness. Record any reactions on your record form if you wish to.

*If you have any back problems or other health issues that may cause difficulties, make your own decision as to which (if any) of these exercise to do, taking good care of your body.* You can make a mindfulness practice out of any movements you do, by bringing full attention to them.

2. THREE-MINUTE BREATHING SPACE – Regular:  
Practice using the 3-step breathing space 3 times a day for about 3 minutes each time, do this at times you have decided in advance.
3. Complete the UNPLEASANT EVENTS DIARY use this as an opportunity to become really aware of the thoughts, feelings and body sensations that are around in one unpleasant event at the time that they are occurring. Notice and record as soon as you can, in detail e.g. put the actual words or thoughts that come in, and the precise nature and location of bodily sensations.

## Home Practice Record Form: Week 3

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Record Form. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next class.

Day/Date	Practice	Comments/Reflections

## Unpleasant Events Diary – Week 3

Be aware of an unpleasant event at the time it is happening. Use the following questions to focus your awareness on the details of the experience as it is happening. Write it down later.

Day	What was the experience?	How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?	What thoughts and images accompanied this event?	What moods, feelings, emotions accompanied this event?	What thoughts are in your mind now as you write this down?
Example:	Waiting for the Boiler Repair Company to come and knowing I'm late for work	Temples throbbing, tightness in my neck and shoulders, pacing back and forth	"Is this what they mean by service?", "this is one meeting I didn't want to miss!"	Anger, helplessness, irritation, impatience, loneliness, agitation, sadness	"I hope I don't have to go through this again soon"
Day 1					
Day 2					
Day 3					
Day 4					
Day 5					
Day 6					
Day 7					

## Week 4: Recognising Aversion

*'A great deal of our suffering comes from an expectation that life should be different from how we find it'*

*(Dharma Wisdom)*

### Recognising Aversion

Stressful things are part and parcel of life itself. It is how we handle these things that makes the difference between whether they rule or control our lives, and whether we can relate more lightly to them. Becoming more aware of the thoughts, feelings and body sensations evoked by events gives us the possibility of freeing ourselves from habitual, automatic, ways of reacting, so that we can, instead, mindfully respond in more skilled ways.

In general, we react to experience in one of three ways:

- **With Indifference or Boredom:** so that we switch out from the present moment and go off somewhere else "in our heads".
- **With Attachment:** wanting to hold on to experiences that we are having right now, or wishing we were having experiences that we want rather than what we are experiencing
- **With Aversion:** wanting to get rid of the experiences that we are having right now, or avoid experiences that may be coming along that we do not want.

Each of these ways of reacting can cause problems, particularly the tendency to react to unpleasant feelings with aversion. ***For now, the main issue is to become more aware of our experience as we react automatically (this awareness is the first essential step towards responding mindfully).***

Regularly practicing Sitting Meditation gives us many opportunities to notice when we have drifted from awareness of the moment, to note with a friendly awareness that whatever it was that took our attention away, and to gently and firmly bring our attention back to our focus of attention, reconnecting with moment-by-moment awareness. At other times of the day, deliberately using the Breathing Space whenever we notice unpleasant feelings or a sense of "tightening" or "holding" in the body provides an opportunity to loosen the grip of habitual, automatic reactions to stress.

## Mindful Walking

1. Find a place where you can walk up and down, without feeling concerned about whether people can see you. It can be inside or outside – and the length of your “walk” may vary perhaps between 7 and 10 paces.
2. Stand at one end of your walk, with your feet parallel to each other, about 4 to 8 inches apart, and your knees “unlocked” so that they can gently flex. Allow your arms to hang loosely by your sides, or hold your hands loosely together in front of your body. Direct your gaze, softly, straight ahead.
3. Bring the focus of your awareness to the bottoms of your feet, getting a direct sense of the physical sensations of the contact of the feet with the ground and the weight of your body transmitted through your legs.
4. When you are ready, transfer the weight of the body into the right leg, noticing the changing pattern of physical sensations in the legs and feet as the left leg “empties” and the right leg takes over the support of the rest of the body.
5. With the left leg “empty,” allow the left heel to rise slowly from the floor, noticing the sensations in the calf muscles as you do so, and continue, allowing the whole of the left foot to lift gently until only the toes are in contact with the floor. Aware of the physical sensations in the feet and legs, slowly lift the left foot, carefully move it forward, feeling the foot and leg as they move through the air, and place the heel on the floor. Allow the rest of the bottom of the left foot to make contact with the floor as you transfer the weight of the body into the left leg and foot, aware of the increasing physical sensations in the left leg and foot, and of the “emptying” of the right leg and the right heel leaving the floor.
6. With the weight fully transferred to the left leg, allow the rest of the right foot to lift and move it slowly forward, aware of the changing patterns of physical sensations in the foot and leg as you do so. Focusing your attention on the right heel as it makes contact with the ground, transfer the weight of the body into the right foot as it is placed gently on the ground, aware of the shifting pattern of physical sensations in the two legs and feet.
7. In this way, slowly move from one end of your walk to the other, aware particularly of the sensations in the bottoms of the feet and heels as they make contact with the floor, and of the sensations in the muscles of the legs as they swing forward.
8. At the end of your walk, stop for a few moments, then turn slowly around, aware of and appreciating the complex pattern of movements through which the body changes direction, and continue walking.
9. Walk up and down in this way, being aware, as best as you can, of physical sensations in the feet and legs, and of the contact of the feet with the floor. Keep your gaze directed softly ahead. When you notice that the mind has wandered away from awareness of the sensations of walking, gently escort the focus of attention back to the sensations in the feet and legs, using the sensations as the feet contact the floor, in particular, as an “anchor” to reconnect with the present

moment, just as you used the breath in the Sitting Meditation. If you find your mind has wandered, you might find it helpful to stand still for a few moments, gathering the focus of attention before resuming your walking.

10. Continue to walk for 10 to 15 minutes or longer, if you wish.

11. To begin with, walk at a pace that is slower than usual, to give yourself a better chance to be fully aware of the sensations of walking. Once you feel comfortable walking slowly with awareness, you can experiment as well with walking at faster speeds, up to and beyond normal walking speed. If you are feeling particularly agitated, it may be helpful to begin walking fast, with awareness, and to slow down naturally as you settle.

12. As often as you can, bring a gentle awareness that you cultivate in walking meditation to your normal, everyday experiences of walking.

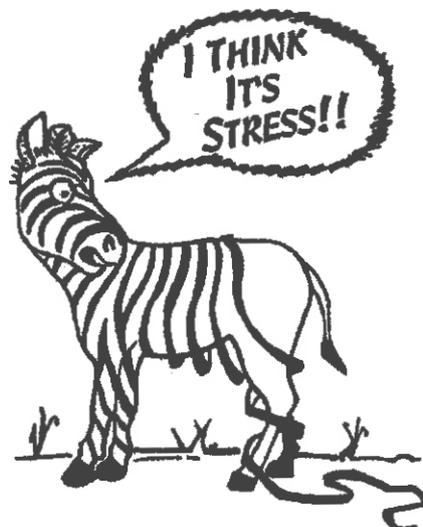
## Staying Present

*Remember to use your body as a way to awareness. It can be as simple as staying mindful of your posture. You are probably sitting as you read this. What are the sensations in your body at this moment? When you finish reading and stand, feel the movements of standing, of walking to the next activity, of how you lie down at the end of the day. Be IN your body as you move, as you reach for something, as you turn. It is as simple as that.*

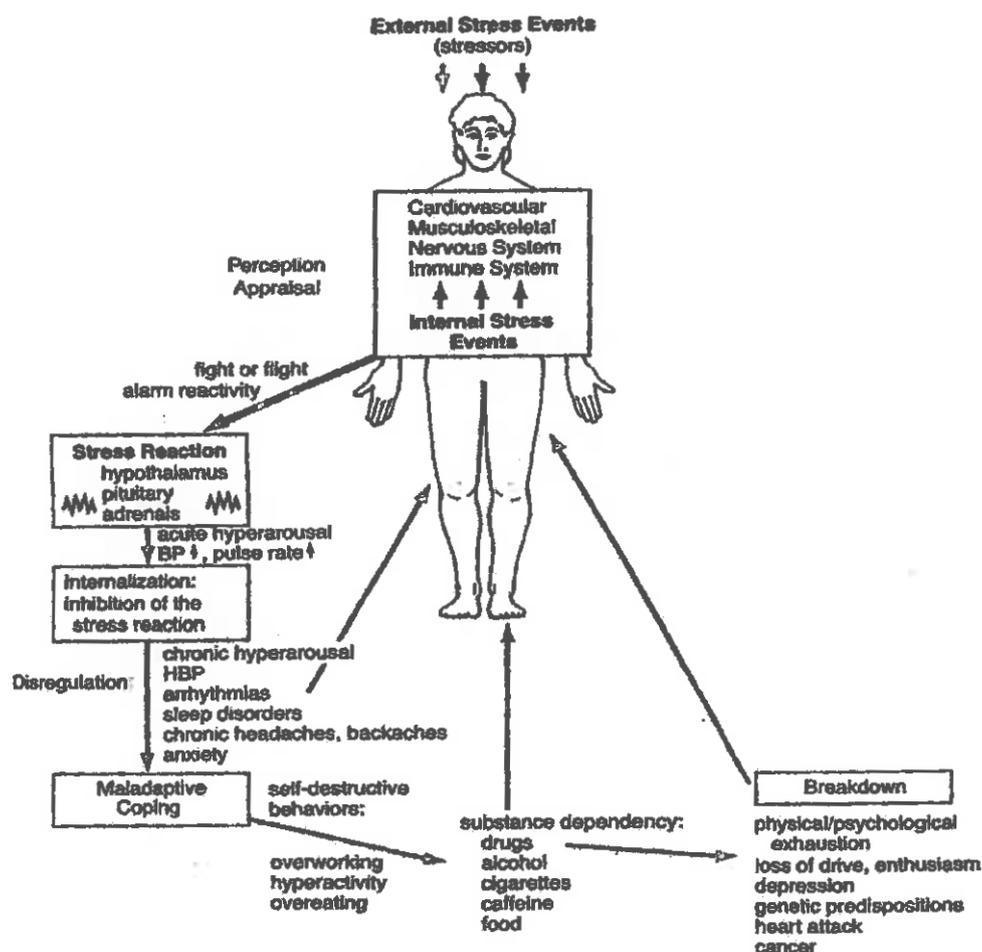
*Just patiently practice feeling what is there – and the body is always there – until it becomes second nature to know even the small movements you make. If you are reaching for something, you are doing it anyway; there is nothing extra you have to do. Simply notice the reaching. You are moving. Can you train yourself to be there, to feel it?*

*It is very simple. Practice bringing your attention back to your body again and again. This basic effort, which paradoxically is a relaxing back into the moment, gives us the key to expanding our awareness from times of formal meditation to living mindfully in the world. Do not underestimate the power that comes to you from feeling the simple movements of your body throughout the day.*

(Adapted from Joseph Goldstein 'Insight Meditation', 1993)



## THE STRESS.REACTION CYCLE



Jon Kabat-Zinn. 'Full Catastrophe Living, Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness', Piatkus:London, 1994, p.249

### The Stress-Reaction Cycle

(Adapted from Full Catastrophe Living, Kabat-Zinn, Ch.19) Human beings are remarkably resilient to stress. We are expert copers and problem solvers, using our own internal resources, pleasurable and meaningful activities, and encouragement and support from family and friends, to deal with stress. But it's also true that our usually stable balance can be pushed over the edge into deregulation and disorder if it is taxed beyond its capacity to respond and adapt. Health can be undermined by a lifetime of ingrained behaviour patterns that compound and exacerbate the pressures of living we continually face. Our automatic reactions to stress, triggered without awareness, often exacerbate the stress, making simple problems into worse ones, and largely determining how much stress we experience. A lifetime of unconscious reactivity to stress significantly increases our risk of eventual breakdown and illness.

Like the person depicted in the Stress Reaction Cycle, we all experience external stressors (shown as small arrows above the head) from the biological, physical, social, economic and political forces that bear on us and generate changes in our bodies, our

social status and our lives generally. From the inside, our thoughts and emotions are strongly affected by our perception of these outside forces, and also generate their own stressful reactions, producing another whole set of pressures and demands (shown as the arrows inside the box, labeled 'Internal stress events').

Some stressors affect us over extended periods of time – we call these chronic stressors. For instance, taking care of a family member who is disabled is a form of chronic stress. Other stressors come and go over relatively short periods of time — an example is getting something done by a deadline – these are called acute stressors. We react to stressors in different ways, depending on how far we perceive them as threats to our wellbeing or sense of self. Our reaction can range from minimal (where little or no threat is perceived) to an automatic alarm reaction where the stressor is highly charged for us emotionally, or is perceived as being a definite threat in some way.

This alarm reaction is our body's way of clearing the decks for defensive or aggressive action, to protect ourselves in life-threatening situations, and to maintain or regain control. People, in common with animals, go through a physiological reaction when feeling under threat, called the fight-or-flight reaction. This leads to a state of physical and psychological hyper arousal, which is characterized by muscle tension, strong emotions, a rapid cascade of nervous-system firings, and release of stress hormones such as adrenaline. We become very alert and attentive. The heart beats faster raising the blood pressure, and blood is redirected from digestion (causing feelings of 'butterflies in the stomach') to the large muscles of the arms and legs – if you are about to be eaten by a tiger, there's no point continuing to digest food, you need to have as much energy as possible to run or fight! This activity is regulated by the autonomic nervous system.

The fight-or-flight reaction helps us to survive when we find ourselves in life-threatening situations, but it can become a problem. Much of our stress comes from threats, real or imagined, to our social status, rather than to our lives. But the fight-or-flight reaction kicks in even when there is no life-threatening situation facing us. It is sufficient for us just to feel threatened. Our body and mind react automatically, whether the threat is real or not. If this happens often enough, unfortunately hyper-arousal can become a permanent way of life. This can manifest in chronic muscle tension, shakiness, faster heart rate, and frequent urges to flee or to 'lash out' in anger or get into arguments or fights.

What do we do when the fight-or flight reaction is building up inside us, but we feel unable to fight or run because both are socially unacceptable, and we know neither will solve our problems? The common way to deal with these feelings is to suppress or deny them, hiding them from others and sometimes even from ourselves. We internalise our stress reaction and carry on as usual, holding it all inside.

## **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 about 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 clear 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.*

By Mary Oliver, 'Dream Work', Atlantic Monthly Press, NY, 1986

### **Home Practice for the Week following Session 4**

1. Sitting Meditation (6 out of 7 days)
2. Three Step Breathing Space: at least three times a day, taking around 3 minutes for each breathing space. Either practice it when you think of it, or connect it to 3 regular activities you do or places you are everyday (e.g. on waking up and/or going to bed, before a programme you regularly watch, before eating, after washing your hands, on first sitting down in your car or on the bus or at your desk).
3. Three Step Breathing Space: use when facing difficulties: Practice the breathing space whenever you notice unpleasant feelings.

## **Week 5: Allowing/Letting Be**

### **'Bringing Awareness to the Body offers us an alternative way for learning to relate differently to difficult experience'**

(Segal et al 2013)

#### **Summary of Session 5: Turning Towards the Difficulty**

(Adapted from Segal et al, 2013)

In Session 5 we extended our formal practice to begin deliberately to turn toward and approach painful experiences with kindness. The basic guideline in this practice is to become mindfully aware of whatever is most predominant in our moment-by-moment experience.

So the first step, if the mind is repeatedly drawn to a particular place, to particular thoughts, feelings, or body sensations, is deliberately to take a gentle and friendly awareness to whatever is pulling for our attention, noting the sense of being pulled again and again to the same place.

The second step is to notice, as best we can, how we are relating to whatever is arising in the body or mind. Our reactions to our own thoughts and feelings may determine whether they are passing events or persist. Often we can be with an arising thought, feeling, or body sensation but in a non-allowing, reactive way. If we like it, we may become attached to it, and try to hold on to it. If, on the other hand, we dislike it because it is painful, unpleasant, or uncomfortable in some way, then we may experience fear or irritation, tense up and contract, or try to push it away. Each of these responses is the opposite of allowing.

#### **Letting Go and Letting Be**

The easiest way to relax is, first, to let go of trying to make things different. *Allowing experience means simply allowing space for whatever is going on, rather than trying to create some other state.* Through cultivating a "willingness to experience," we settle back into awareness of what is already present. We let it be – we simply notice and observe whatever is already here. This is the way to relate to experiences that have a strong pull on our attention, however powerful they seem. When we see them clearly, it helps prevent us from getting pulled into brooding and ruminating about them, or trying to suppress or avoid them. We begin the process of freeing ourselves from them. We open up the possibility of responding skilfully and with compassion rather than reacting, in knee jerk fashion, by automatically running off old (often unhelpful) strategies.

## **A New Practice**

In the class, we explored together this new way of approaching the difficult. If we noticed that our attention kept being pulled away from the breath (or another focus) to painful thoughts, emotions, or feelings, the first step was to become mindfully aware of any physical sensations in the body that were occurring alongside the thought or emotion; we then deliberately moved the focus of awareness to the part of the body where those sensations were strongest. We explored how the breath could provide a useful vehicle to do this – just as we practiced in the Body Scan, we can take a gentle and friendly awareness to that part of the body by “breathing into” it on the inbreath, and “breathing out” from it on the outbreath.

Once our attention had moved to the body sensations, and they were in the field of awareness, the guidance was to say to ourselves, “It’s OK. Whatever it is, it’s OK to allow myself to be open to it.” Then we just stayed with the awareness of these body sensations and our relationship to them, breathing with them, accepting them, letting them be. It may be helpful to repeat “It’s OK. Whatever it is, it’s OK. Let me be open to it,” using each outbreath to soften and open to the sensations. “Allowing” is *not* resignation – it allows us, as a vital first step, to become fully aware of difficulties and to respond to them skilfully.

## **Using the 3 Step Breathing Space to Face Difficulties (Coping)**

You have been practicing the Breathing Space regularly and whenever you need it. Now we suggest that whenever you feel troubled in body or mind, the first step is always to take a breathing space. Here is some extra guidance that may help at these times.

### **1. Awareness of the Difficulty**

Acknowledging. Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately adopting a dignified posture. Then ask: “what is going on with me at the moment?” Notice, acknowledge and identify what is happening for you. Observe your inner experience, and notice what is happening in your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations. Describe your experiences in words, e.g. say in your mind: “Feelings of anger are arising” or “Self-critical thoughts are here.”

### **2. Redirecting Attention**

Gathering your full attention onto the breathing, experience fully each inbreath and each outbreath as they follow one after the other. You may find it helps to note at the back of your mind: “Breathing in ... Breathing out ...”, or to count the breaths. The breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and to help you tune in to a state of awareness and stillness.

### **3. Expanding Awareness**

Expand your awareness around the breathing to the whole body, and the space it takes up, as if the whole body is breathing. Especially take the breath to any discomfort, tension or resistance you experience, 'breathing into' the sensation. While breathing out, allow a sense of softening, opening, and letting go. You can also say to yourself: "it's okay to feel whatever I'm feeling," "I don't like it but I can be with it." Include a sense of the space around you, too. Hold everything in awareness. As best as you can, bring this expanded awareness into the next moments of your day. Carry on holding any difficult experiences in a wider awareness when you notice them – rather than the mind being in battle with them.

This use of the breathing space gives a way to step out of 'automatic pilot' mode when dealing with difficulties, and to reconnect with the present moment and our own inner wisdom.

## Responding to Stress

(Adapted from Full Catastrophe Living, Kabat-Zinn, Ch.20)

The very first and most important step in breaking free from a lifetime of stress reactivity is to be mindful of what is actually happening while it is happening. This creates an alternative pathway, which we call the stress response (see the side of the figure above) to distinguish it from the automatic stress reaction. In the *stress response*, we use mindfulness to create strategies to cope with stress in healthy ways. Moment-to-moment awareness allows us to exert control and to influence the flow of events at those very moments when we are most likely to react on automatic pilot, and where before we would have plunged into the fight-or-flight reaction, and hyperarousal.

As soon as you bring awareness to what is going on in a stressful situation, you are not on automatic pilot anymore, and have already changed the situation dramatically. Just becoming aware takes only a split second, but it gives you a range of options for influencing what will happen next. You now don't have to suppress your thoughts and feelings associated with heightened arousal to prevent yourself from going out of control. You can actually allow yourself to feel threatened or fearful or angry or hurt, and to feel the tension in your body. You can easily recognise these agitations for what they are – thoughts and feelings and sensations.

We have been training mind and body to respond in this way in the formal meditation practice. Only through this regular training could our calmness, and awareness start to become strong and reliable enough to help us respond in a balanced, imaginative way when we are stressed. The capacity to respond mindfully develops each time we experience discomfort or pain or strong feelings during meditation, and we just observe them and work at letting them be the way they are, without reacting to them. We have learned that control can come out of inner calmness, acceptance and openness – we don't have to struggle with thoughts or feelings, or try to force things to be how we want them to be. We can decide to do things differently.

When you bring awareness to stressful moments, you might see if you're overreacting to the situation, and remind yourself to try letting go of your own self-limited view, just to see what would happen. Making the effort to meet the situation with calmness and clarity might help things become more harmonious. When you experiment in this way, you may be surprised at how many things that used to 'push your buttons' no longer get you aroused. They may no longer even seem stressful to you, not because you have given up and become helpless and defeated, but because you have become more relaxed and trusting of yourself. Responding in this way under pressure is an empowering experience. What do you have to lose by trying it? How do we consciously cultivate the stress response in daily life? The same way we cultivate mindfulness in the formal meditation practice: moment by moment, grounding ourselves in our body and our breathing. When your buttons are pushed or you find yourself feeling stressed, you might try bringing your awareness to your face and shoulders as they tense up, to your heart beginning to pound, to how your stomach is feeling, or to whatever you might notice about how your body feels at that moment. See if you can be aware of your feelings of anger or fear or hurt as you feel them arising in you.

You might even try saying to yourself, “This is it” or “Here is a stressful situation” or “Now is the time to tune into my breathing and centre myself.” It takes practice to catch stress reactions as they are happening. But don’t worry, if you are like most of us, you will have plenty of opportunities to practice. It is unrealistic to expect yourself to respond in this way to every situation, but just by trying to bring a larger view to each moment, you are transforming the stressors into challenges and pathways for growth.

The place to start, of course, is with your breathing. If you can manage to bring your attention to your breathing for even the briefest moment, it will set the stage for facing that moment and the next one mindfully. The breath itself is calming, especially when we can tune into it at the belly. It’s like an old friend; it anchors us, gives us stability, like the bridge piling anchored in bedrock as the river flows around it. The breath reconnects you with calmness and awareness whenever you lose touch. It brings you to an awareness of your body in that moment, including any increase in muscle tension. It can also remind you to check your thoughts and feelings. Perhaps you will see how reactive they are. Perhaps you will question their accuracy. Maintaining your own centre in the face of stress helps you to look for the whole context, and recover your inner balance more quickly if it is thrown off initially by your reaction.

When you channel your energies in this way, you will experience a quicker recovery of your mental equilibrium, even in very stressful situations, and also of your physiological equilibrium as your bodily reactions calm down. Notice in the Figure on the previous pages that, unlike the path of the stress reaction, the stress response doesn’t generate more stress. It doesn’t feed-back more stress arrows into the person. You respond and then it’s finished. You move on. Responding to stress requires moment-to-moment awareness, taking each moment as it comes, trusting in your ability to come up with new ways of seeing and responding in every moment. You will be charting new territory each time you encounter stress in this way. At the very least you will have all resources at your disposal, and you will have the freedom to be creative.

## **The Guest House**

*This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture.*

*Still, treat each guest honourably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice.  
Meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.*

*By Rumi, 12<sup>th</sup> Century Poet*

## **Home Practice for the Week Following Session 5**

1. Sitting Practice, alternate with Movement or Body Scan (6 of 7 days)
2. Three-Step Breathing Space – Regular: Practice three times a day at times that you have decided in advance. Note any comments /difficulties.
3. Three-Step Breathing Space – Coping, if you choose: Practice whenever you notice unpleasant feelings.
4. Fill in Stressful Communications Calendar.

## Stressful Communications Calendar

Be aware of a stressful communication at the time it is happening. Use these questions to focus your awareness on the details of the experience as it is happening. Write it down as soon as possible afterwards.

	How did the difficulty come about?	What did you really want from the person or situation? What did you actually get?	What did the other person want? What did they actually get?	How did you feel (physical sensations, emotions and thoughts)	Have you resolved this issue yet, if so, how?
Day 1					
Day 2					
Day 3					
Day 4					
Day 5					
Day 6					
Day 7					

## Home Practice Record Form - Session 5

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Record Form. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it next class.

Day/Time	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments

## Week 6: Thoughts are not Facts

**'From thoughts come actions. From actions come all sorts of consequences. In which thoughts will we invest? Our great task is to see them clearly, so that we can choose which ones to act on and which simply to let be'**

(Joseph Goldstein)

### Thoughts Are Not Facts

Our thoughts can have very powerful effects on how we feel and what we do. Often those thoughts are triggered and run off quite automatically. By becoming aware, over and over again, of the thoughts and images passing through the mind and letting go of them as we return our attention to the breath and the moment, it is possible to get some distance and perspective on them. This can allow us to see that there may be other ways to think about situations, freeing us from the tyranny of the old thought patterns that automatically "pop into the mind." Most important, we may eventually come to realise "deep in our bones" *that all thoughts are only mental events* (including the thoughts that say they are not), *that thoughts are not facts, and we are not our thoughts.*

Thoughts and images can often provide us with an indication of what is going on deeper in the mind; we can "get hold of them," so that we can look them over from a number of different perspectives, and by becoming very familiar with our own "top 10" habitual, automatic, unhelpful thinking patterns, we can more easily become aware of (and change) the processes that may lead us into downward mood spirals and stress.

It is particularly important to become aware of thoughts that may block or undermine practice, such as "There's no point in doing this" or "It's not going to work, so why bother?" Such a pessimistic, hopeless thought pattern is one of the most characteristic features of highly stressed states, and one of the main factors that stop us from taking actions that would help us get out of those states. It follows that it is particularly important to recognise such thoughts as "negative thinking" and not automatically give up on efforts to apply skilful means to change the way we feel.

### Ways You Can See Your Thoughts Differently

Here are some of the things you can do with your thoughts:

1. Just watch them come in and leave, without feeling that you have to follow them.
2. See if it is possible to notice the feelings that give rise to the thoughts: the "context" in which your thoughts are but one link in a chain of events.
3. View your thought as a mental event rather than a fact. It may be true that this even often occurs with other feelings. It is tempting to think of it as being true, but it is still up to you to decide whether it is true and how you want to deal with it.

4. Write your thoughts down on paper. This lets you see them in a way that is less emotional and overwhelming. Also, the pause between having the thought and writing it down can give you a moment to respond to it differently.
5. For particularly difficult thoughts, it may be helpful to take another look at them intentionally, in a balanced, open state of mind, as part of your sitting practice. Let your “wise mind” give its perspective, perhaps, labelling the feeling of which, arises, and holding a sense of curiosity, as best you can: “Ah, here is sadness”: “Here is the familiar harsh and critical voice:” *The keynote attitude to take with your thoughts is gentle interest and curiosity.*”

## Stepping Back from Thoughts

It is remarkable how liberating it feels to be able to see that your thoughts are just thoughts and not “you” or “reality.” For instance, if you have the thought that you must get a certain number of things done today and you don’t recognise it as a thought but act as if it’s “the truth”, then you have created in that moment a reality in which you really believe that those things must all be done today.

This liberation from the tyranny of the thinking mind comes directly out of the meditation practice itself. When we spend some time each day in a state of non-doing, observing the flow of the breath and the activity of our mind and body, without getting caught up in that activity, we are cultivating calmness and mindfulness hand in hand. As the mind develops stability and is less caught up in the content of thinking, we strengthen the mind’s ability to concentrate and to be calm. And if each time we recognise a thought as a thought when it arises and register its content, and discern the strength of its hold on us and the accuracy of its content, then each time we let go of it and come back to our breathing and a sense of our body, we are strengthening mindfulness. We come to know ourselves better and become more accepting of ourselves, not as we would like to be, but as we actually are.

## Mindful Communication (Adapted from Kabat-Zinn, 1990)

Other people can be a big source of stress in our lives. Our relationships with others give us unending opportunities for practicing mindfulness and so reducing “people stress”. Psychological stress arises from the *interaction* between us and the world, so we need to take responsibility for our part in relationships with people who “cause us stress” – responsibility for our own perceptions, thoughts, feelings and behaviour. If we react unconsciously when we are having a problem with another person, just as with other forms of stress, this usually makes matters worse in the long run.

The deeply automatic impulse to fight-or-flight influences our behaviour even when our lives are not in danger. When we feel our interest or social status is threatened, we can react aggressively to protect our position before we know it. Alternatively we may act submissively at the expense of our own views, feelings, and self-respect. Since we also have the ability to reflect, think and be aware, we have a range of other options available to us.

But we need purposefully to cultivate these other options. They don't just magically surface, especially if our way of relating interpersonally has been dominated in the past by automatically defensive or aggressive behaviour. We can choose a response, rather than being carried away by a reaction.

Even when we are feeling threatened, angry, or frightened, we have the potential to improve our relationships dramatically if we bring mindfulness into the domain of communication itself. To communicate is to unite, to have a meeting or union of minds. This does not necessarily mean agreement. It does mean seeing the situation as a whole, and understanding the other person's view as well as one's own.

When we are totally absorbed in our own feelings, view and agenda, it is virtually impossible to have a genuine communication. When we react by feeling personally threatened, it is easy to draw battle lines, and have the relationship degenerate into "us" against "them", making the possibility of communication very difficult. When we lock into certain restricted mind-sets, we cannot go beyond and perceive the whole systems of which we and our views are only a part. But when both sides in a relationship expand the domain of their thinking and are willing to consider each other's point of view and the system as a whole, then extraordinary new possibilities emerge, as imaginary but all-too-limiting boundaries in the mind dissolve.

Even when one party takes responsibility for thinking of the whole system and the other does not, the system is altered and new possibilities for conflict resolution and understanding may emerge. This response requires us to be centred, awake and mindful. We become grounded in our breathing and in seeing the situation as a whole without reacting totally out of fear, even if fear is present as is likely in our real-life encounter with people. It means that we are willing to see things from the other person's perspectives, which we are receptive, and willing to look and listen. This allows the other person to maintain his integrity, and for both to become partners rather than adversaries, whether the other person wants to or not. In this position, though you don't know what will happen next, you've many options. By maintaining your centre, you are in control of yourself and much less vulnerable, to harm. If you are committed to meeting each moment mindfully, with as much calmness and acceptance as you can muster and with a sense of your own integrity and balance, new and more harmonious solutions often come to mind as you need them.

The patience, wisdom and firmness that can come out of a moment of mindfulness in the heat of a stressful interpersonal situation yield fruit almost immediately, because the other person usually senses that you cannot be intimidated or overwhelmed. He or she will feel your calmness and self-confidence and will probably be drawn toward it because it embodies inner peace. When you are willing to be secure enough in yourself to listen to what other people want and how they see things without *constantly reacting, objecting, arguing, fighting, resisting, making yourself right and them wrong*, they will *feel heard, welcomed, accepted*. This feels good to anybody. They will then be much more likely to hear what you have to say too, maybe not right away, but as soon as emotions calm. There will be

more chance for communication and a meeting of minds, and an acknowledging and coming to terms with difference. In this way, your mindfulness practice can have a healing effect on your relationships.

The most effective way to communicate with others is by being assertive (rather than either submissive or aggressive). This comes from giving yourself and others equal rights, and respecting both your own and other's boundaries. Assertiveness involves clear, calm thinking and respectful negotiation, where each person is entitled to their opinion. It requires you to have an awareness of your feelings as feelings, so you can break out of the passive or hostile modes that so automatically rear up when we feel put upon or threatened. The first step towards becoming more assertive is to practice knowing how you are actually feeling. This may not be so easy, especially if you have been conditioned all your life to believe that is wrong to have certain kinds of thoughts or feelings, which can lead to unconscious suppression of feelings, or alternatively to feeling guilty about what you are feeling.

The first lesson in assertiveness is that your feelings are simply your feelings! They are neither "good" nor "bad" – these are just judgements that you or others impose onto your feelings. When you know what you are feeling and have practised reminding yourself that feelings are just feelings and it's okay to feel them, you can begin to explore ways of being true to your feelings without letting them create more problems for you by becoming passive or aggressive. When being assertive, it is very helpful to say how you are feeling or seeing things by making "I" statements rather than "you" statements. "I" statements convey information about your feelings and views, rather than saying things like "You make me so angry" or "You are always making demands on me." Can you see that this is saying that the other person is in control of your feelings, so handing power over your feelings to another person? The alternative is to say something like "I feel so angry when you say this or do that." This is more accurate. It says how you feel in response to something. This leaves the other person room to hear what you are saying about how you see and feel without feeling blamed or attacked, and without being told he has more power than he does.

**The most important part of effective communication is to be mindful of your own thoughts, feelings and speech as well as of the whole situation. Most of the time, cultivating this approach will resolve potential conflicts and create greater harmony and mutual respect. In the process you are much more likely to get what you want and what you need from your encounters with other people – and so are they!**

### **The ten-finger gratitude exercise**

*To come to a positive appreciation for the small things in life, you can try the gratitude exercise. It simply means that once a day you bring to mind ten things which you are grateful for; counting them on your fingers. It is important to get to ten things, even when it becomes increasingly harder after three or four! This is exactly what the exercise is for – intentionally bringing into awareness the tiny, previously unnoticed elements of the day.*

### **Two Kinds of Intelligence**

*There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired, as a child in school memorises facts and concepts from books and from what the teacher says, collecting information from the traditional sciences as well as from the new sciences.*

*With such intelligence you rise in the world. You get ranked ahead or behind others in regard to your competence in retaining information. You stroll with this intelligence in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more marks on your preserving tablets.*

*There is another kind of tablet, one already completed and preserved inside you. A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness in the centre of the chest. This other intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid and it doesn't move from outside to inside through conduits of plumbing-learning.*

*This second knowing is a fountainhead from within you, moving out.*

From the translations of Rumi by Coleman Barks

## Home Practice Week 6

1. BODY SCAN, MINDFUL MOVEMENT AND SITTING MEDITATION. You could experiment with different practices on different days; different times of the day; and perhaps working at times in silence without a recording.
2. THREE-STEP BEATHING REGULAR – practice three times a day. Either practise it when you think of it or connect it to 3 regular activities you do or places you are everyday (e.g. on waking up and/or going to bed, before eating, when you get to your desk).
3. THREE-STEP BREATHING: COPING – practice whenever you notice yourself starting to feel stressed and explore options of responding with greater mindfulness and in a more friendly way to yourself and the situation.
4. Do the Ten Finger Gratitude Exercise each day – don't stop until you have reached the ten things to be grateful for.
5. Choose a Habit Releaser – some examples below could be ...

### **a. Going for a walk**

Walking is one of the finest exercises, a brilliant stress reliever and mood booster. A good walk can put the world in perspective and soothe your frayed nerves. There's no need to feel that you have to rush anywhere; the aim is to walk as mindfully as you can, focusing your awareness on your feet as they land on the ground, and feeling the fluid movements of all the muscles and tendons in your feet and legs. You might even notice that your whole body moves as you walk, not just your legs. Pay attention to all of the sights, sounds and smells. If you're in a city you'll still see and hear a surprising number of birds and animals flapping and scurrying about. See if it is possible to open to all your senses; smell and scent of flowers, the aroma of freshly cut grass. See if you can feel the breeze on your face or the rain on your head or hands; listen to the air as it moves; see how the patterns of light and shade can shift unexpectedly.

### **b. Do a good-natured deed for someone else**

Why not carry out a random act of kindness? It needn't be something big. Think about your friends, family and workmates. How can you make their lives a little bit better? Perhaps a colleague is hard pressed on a particular job and you could cheer them up by leaving a little treat on their desk first thing in the morning. There's no need to tell anyone else about it. Give for the sake of giving and imbue it with warmth and empathy. Once again, you don't need to wait until you feel like doing it – see the action as a meditation in itself, an opportunity for learning and exploring your reactions and responses.

### **c. Do Something nourishing for yourself**

If you find you are always giving to others and not to yourself, see how it is to do something nice for yourself. This might be taking a nice walk followed by lunch, spending some time by yourself reading a book, making an appointment for a massage, treating yourself to something you enjoy or perhaps reconnecting with an old hobby.

## Home Practice Record Form: Session 6

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Form. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next class.

Day/Date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments

# Week 7: How can I best take care of me

*'You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf'*

(Kabat-Zinn)

## Bringing awareness to times of difficulty

What we actually do with our time, from moment to moment, from hour to hour, from one year to the next, can be a very powerful influence affecting our general wellbeing and our ability to respond skilfully to the challenges of our lives.

You might like to try asking yourself these questions:

1. Of the things that I do and take in, what **nourishes** me? What energises me, makes me feel calm and centred? What increases my sense of actually being alive and present, rather than merely existing? (**N** activities)
2. Of the things that I do and take in, what **depletes** me? What pulls me down, drains my energy makes me feel tense and fragmented? What decreases my sense of actually being alive and present, what makes me feel I am merely existing, or worse? (**D** activities)
3. Accepting that there are some aspects of my life that I simply cannot change, how can I consciously choose to increase the time and effort I give to the things that nurture me, and to decrease the time and effort I give to the things that deplete me?
4. And how could I learn to approach the things at present I find depleting in a different way? To practice being fully present with them, even if I find them boring or unpleasant – to bring the same curiosity and attention to them that I did to the raisin, instead of judging them or wishing that they were not there?

By being present in more of our moments, and making mindful decisions about what we really need at each of those moments, we can use activity, and the choices we make about what we take in, to become more aware and alert. This is true both for the regular pattern of our daily lives and for times of difficulty in our lives. We can use day-by-day experience to discover and cultivate activities that nourish us, which we can use as tools to cope with periods of challenge. Having these tools already available means that we will be more likely to persist with them in the face of difficulty and of our habitual way to respond to these times.

For example, one of the simplest ways to take care of your physical and mental well-being is to take **daily physical exercise** – as a minimum, aim for three brisk 10 minute walks a day – and also, if at all possible, other types of exercise such as mindful movement, yoga, qigong, swimming, cycling, etc. once exercise is part of your daily routine, it is readily available as a way of responding to external and internal difficulties as they arise.

## **USING THE BREATHING SPACE: THE ACTION STEP**

The Breathing Space provides a way to remind us to use activity to deal with unpleasant feelings as they arise. After reconnecting with an expanded awareness in the Breathing Space, it may feel appropriate to take some CONSIDERED ACTION. In dealing with difficult times the following activities can be particularly helpful:

### **Doing Something Pleasurable**

*Be kind to your body.* Have a nice hot bath; have a nap; treat yourself to some of your favourite food without feeling guilty; have your favourite hot drink.

*Engage in enjoyable activities.* Go for a walk (maybe with the dog or a friend); visit a friend; do your favourite hobby; do some gardening; take some exercise; phone a friend; spend time with someone you like; cook a meal; go shopping; watch something funny or uplifting on TV; read something that gives you pleasure; listen to music that makes you feel good.

*Be aware of barriers to pleasure.* Be aware of 'killjoy thoughts' that tell you won't enjoy a pleasure you have planned, that you don't deserve it, that you should be enjoying it more, thoughts that distract you from fully experiencing what you are doing.

### **Doing Something That Gives You a Sense of Satisfaction, Achievement or Control**

Clean the house: clear out a cupboard or drawer, catch up with letter writing, do some work, pay a bill, do something that you have been putting off doing, take some exercise.

Be aware of over-high standards and "it should be different" thinking. They may make it hard for you to feel you have achieved anything worthwhile. Notice thoughts like "I should be doing this better/faster/more easily," recognise them for what they are, and let them be.

When we are faced with different times it may well be helpful to break tasks down into smaller steps and only tackle one step at a time. Make sure you treat yourself kindly and with respect, and congratulate yourself whenever you complete a task or a part of a task.

### **Acting Mindfully**

When we are faced with difficulties or are feeling stressed our minds tend to be preoccupied with worries. We may be going over and over things that have happened in the past, trying to make sense of why we feel the way we do, or anxiously wondering about the future. The end result is that our attention is not really on what we are doing – we are lost in our heads, rather than focused on what is happening right here and now. This means that activities that might nourish us become depleting. Notice if your mind has been hijacked by thoughts or feelings that tend to take you away from being present. Instead, have an intention to focus your entire attention on what you are doing right now. Keep yourself in the very moment you are in; put your mind in the present (e.g. "Now I am walking down the stairs ... now I can feel the banister beneath my hand ... now I'm walking into the kitchen ... now

I'm turning on the light ..."). Be aware of your breathing as you do other things; be aware of the contact of your foot with the floor as you walk.

The more powerful your thoughts and feelings, the more difficult this may be. But, with practice, you will find that your capacity to be more fully present in each moment will grow.

## **Remember:**

### **Be Open-Minded**

Whatever you choose, treat it as an experience. Don't pre-judge how you will feel afterwards. Keep an open mind about whether doing this will be helpful in any way.

### **Aim for a Broad Range**

Consider a range of ways of taking care of yourself and don't limit yourself to a favourite few. Sometimes trying new behaviours can be interesting in itself.

### **Don't Expect Miracles**

Carry out what you have planned to do as best you can. Putting extra pressure on yourself by expecting a single activity to alter things dramatically may be unrealistic.

### **When Things Feel Difficult...**

The mindfulness skills we have been developing day by day are particularly relevant to these times. As Jon Kabat-Zinn said ... "Don't start weaving your parachute when you are just about to jump out of the airplane."...

When we are under pressure we are more likely to revert to old habits of mind. The more 'tuned in' you are to yourself and the world around you the wiser your decisions, choices and actions will be. This is particularly helpful when you are facing challenges. At these times ... try asking yourself: **'What do I need to help me get through this time?'**

# The Paradox of Noise

It is a paradox that we encounter so much internal noise  
When we first try to sit in silence

It is a paradox that experiencing pain releases pain.

It is a paradox that keeping still can lead us  
So fully into life and being.

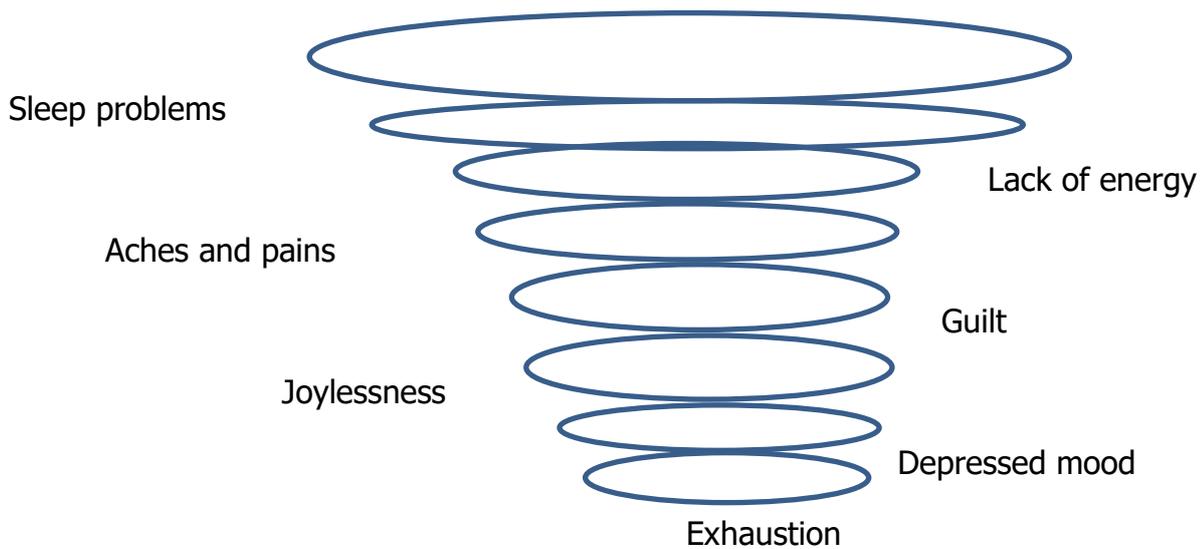
Our minds do not like paradoxes. We want things  
To be clear, so we can maintain our illusions of safety.  
Certainty breeds tremendous smugness.

We each possess a deeper level of being, however,  
which loves paradox. It knows that summer is already  
Growing like a seed in the depth of winter. It knows  
that the moment we are born, we begin to die. It knows  
that all life shimmers, in shades of becoming –  
that shadow and light are always together,  
the visible mingled with the invisible.

When we sit in stillness we are profoundly active.  
Keeping silent, we hear the roar of existence.  
Through our willingness to be the one we are,  
We become one with everything

By Gunilla Norris

# The Exhaustion Funnel (By Professor Marie Asberg)



The narrowing area of the circles illustrates the narrowing of our lives as we give up the things that we enjoy but that seem “optional.” The result is that we stop doing activities that would nourish us, leaving only work or other stressors that often deplete our resources. Professor Marie Asberg suggests that those of us who continue downward are likely to be those who are the most conscientious workers, those whose level of self-confidence is closely dependent on our performance at work (i.e. those who are often seen as the best workers, not the lazy ones). The diagram also shows the sequence of accumulating “symptoms” experienced by the participant as the funnel narrowed and he became more and more exhausted.

## Home Practice Following Week 7

1. From all the different forms of formal mindfulness practice that you have experienced in the course, settle on the practice(s) that you intend to use on a regular, daily basis for the next few weeks (up to and after the end of the course). Try your practice with and without recordings. Also practice informally by being as aware and awake as possible throughout the day. Look for ways to make the practice your own. Record your reactions if you wish.
2. THREE-STEP BEATHING SPACE – REGULAR – practice three times a day at times that you have decided in advance.
3. THREE-STEP BREATHING SPACE – COPING plus ACTION – practice whenever you notice unpleasant thoughts or feelings.
4. Spend some time finding out what are your warning signs that you are feeling stressed and that things are difficult. Using the form on the previous page if you wish, develop a list of the range of unhelpful actions and strategies that you find yourself slipping into at difficult times – having an awareness of these will help you to spot them when they are present. If you want to, include those people you share your life with, in a collaborative effort to notice and respond rather than to react to.

## Home Practice Record Form: Session 7

Record each time you practice on the Home Practice Form. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next class.

<b>Day/Date</b>	<b>Practice (Yes/No)</b>	<b>Comments</b>



## Week 8: Acceptance and Change

*'Mindfulness provides a simple but powerful route for getting ourselves unstuck back in touch with our own wisdom and vitality ...*

*The most important point is to be really yourself and not try to become anything that you are not already ... being in touch with your deepest nature, and letting it flow out of you unimpeded'.*

(Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

### Acceptance and Change

The advantages of awareness, acceptance, and mindfully *responding* to situations rather than immediately running off pre-programmed "automatic" reactions have been a theme throughout this course. Acceptance may often be the springboard to some form of skilful action directed at achieving change in the inner or outer worlds. However, there are also situations and feeling that it may be very difficult, or actually impossible, to change. In this situation, there is the danger that by carrying on trying to solve an insoluble problem or by refusing to accept the reality of the situation one is in; one may end up "banging one's head against a brick wall," exhausting oneself, and actually increasing one's sense of helplessness. In these situations – you can still retain some sense of dignity and control by making a conscious, mindful, decision not to attempt to exert control and to accept the situation as it is, if possible, with a kindly attitude to the situation and your reactions to it. **Choosing** not to act is much less likely to increase a sense of helplessness and stress, than being forced to give up attempts at control after repeated failures.

#### The Serenity Prayer

*Give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which must be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

By Reinhold Niebuhr

Where do we find this grace, this courage, and this wisdom? At some level, we already have all of these qualities – our task is to realise them (make them real), and our way is none other than moment-by-moment mindful awareness.

#### The Future

Decide, right now, what your regular pattern of practice will be over the next weeks, and stick to it as best you can. Also, remember the breathing space – regular practice provides a way of "checking in" with yourself a few times a day – let it also be your first response in times of difficulty, stress, or unhappiness – whatever happens.

## Use Your Umbrella

*A young woman, studying in India, undertook to develop love, kindness, and goodwill through her meditation practice. Sitting in her small room, she would fill her heart with loving-kindness for all beings. Yet each day, as she went to the bazaar to gather her food, she would find her loving-kindness sorely tested by one shopkeeper who would daily subject her to unwelcome caresses. One day she could stand it no more and began to chase the shopkeeper down the road with her upraised umbrella. To her mortification she passed her teacher standing on the side of the road observing this spectacle. Shame-faced she went to stand before him, expecting to be rebuked for her anger.*

*"What you should do," her teacher kindly advised her, "is to fill your heart with loving-kindness, and with as much mindfulness as you can muster, hit this unruly fellow over the head with your umbrella."*

*Sometimes that is what we need to do. It would be easy enough to hit the man over the head with the umbrella. The difficult part is to do it with all the loving-kindness in our heart. That is our real practice.*

Adapted from Christian Feldman & Jack Kornfield: *Stories of the Spirit, Stories of the Heart*, Harper, San Francisco 2001

***Remember to weave your parachute every day, rather than leaving it to the time you have to jump out of the plane!***

(Kabat-Zinn)



## Daily Mindfulness

- When you first wake up in the morning before you get out of bed, bring your attention to your breathing. Observe 5 mindful breaths.
- Notice changes in your posture. Be aware of how your body and mind feel when you move from lying down to sitting, to standing, to walking. Notice each time you make a transition from one posture to the next.
- Whenever you hear a phone ring, a bird sing, a train pass by, laughter, a car horn, the wind, the sound of a door closing – use any sound to be like the bell of mindfulness. Really listen, being present and awake.
- Throughout the day – take a few moments to bring your attention to your breathing. Observe 5 mindful breaths.
- Whenever you eat or drink something, take a minute and breathe. Look at your food and realise that the food was connected to something which nourished its growth. Can you see the sunlight, the rain, the earth, the farmer, the trucker in your food? Pay attention as you eat, consciously consuming this food for your physical health. Bring awareness to seeing your food, smelling your food, tasting your food, chewing your food, and swallowing your food.
- Notice your body while walking or standing. Take a moment to notice your posture. Pay attention to the content of the ground under your feet. Feel the air on your face, arms, and legs as you walk. Are you rushing?
- Bring awareness to listening and talking. When listening, can you listen without agreeing or disagreeing, liking or disliking or planning what you will say when it is your turn? When talking, can you say what you need to say without overstating or understanding? Can you notice how your mind and body feel?
- Whenever you are waiting in a queue, use this time to notice standing and breathing. Feel the contact of your feet on the floor and how your body feels. Bring attention to the rising and falling of your abdomen. Are you feeling impatient?
- Be aware of any tightness in your body throughout the day. Breathe into it and as you exhale let go of excess tension. Is there tension stored anywhere in your body? For example – your neck, shoulders, stomach, jaw, or lower back. If possible stretch or do yoga once a day.
- Focus attention on your daily activities – such as brushing your teeth, brushing your hair, washing up, putting on your shoes, doing your job. Bring mindfulness to each activity.
- Before you go to sleep at night, take a few minutes and bring your attention to your breathing. Observe 5 mindful breaths.

(Adapted from Saki Santorelli, EdD, University of Massachusetts Medical School)

## **This Workbook has adapted extracts from Kabat Zinn (1990) and Segal, Williams & Teasdale (2013) sited below:**

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