



## SESSION 1: WAKING UP FROM AUTOMATIC PILOT

### A DEFINITION OF MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges when we pay attention in a particular way: in the present moment, with curiosity and kindness, to things as they are.

### AWARENESS AND AUTOMATIC PILOT

Contrast these two situations:

- Scenario 1: you're going for a walk with a young child in the woods. You move slowly, stopping often, seeing through his or her young eyes the extraordinary richness of simple objects. Seeing as if for the first time.
- Scenario 2: you're driving your car on a familiar route. You suddenly realise that, for miles, you have been quite unaware of your surroundings, totally lost in thoughts about other things. You have been driving on automatic pilot.

The two scenarios illustrate the difference between really living life as it happens and our more usual way of rushing through life without seeing, tasting, smelling, or touching it. Just as we often drive on automatic pilot, careful observation reveals that we actually live on automatic pilot much of the time.

On automatic pilot we are not really present, not really tuned in, only dimly aware of the richness and fullness of life. When we are 'out of touch' in this way, the mind may slip into unhelpful habits of thinking and feeling. We may react to situations without really noticing what is happening.

When we practise mindfulness, we intentionally bring awareness to our moment-to-moment experience. We notice thoughts, feelings, and body sensations as they arise. In doing so, we step out of automatic pilot and become more fully present, more in touch with ourselves and the world around us. When we live with more awareness, we are less likely to react to life and we are more able to respond to it... with choice and with freedom.

### SMALL FRUIT – BIG MESSAGE

Did you notice how your experience of eating the raisin was transformed by the simple act of focusing on it? Many people say that they 'got their money's worth' out of eating for the first time in years. What normally happens to all that taste? It just disappears. Unnoticed. Raisins are so insignificant; we tend to eat them by the handful while doing something 'more important'. And if it was only the taste we were missing, this might not matter too much. But once you see the difference that paying full attention can make to the small things in life, you start to get an inkling of the cost of inattention. Just think of all the pleasures of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching that are drifting by you unnoticed. You may

well be missing vast portions of your daily life. You only ever have a moment to live, this moment, and yet we all tend to live in the past or in the future. We only rarely notice what is arising in the present moment.

From: Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World

## **ATTITUDES THAT CAN SUPPORT OUR MINDFULNESS PRACTICE**

Learning mindfulness does involve following guidance and mastering 'techniques' but the approach that we bring to our practice is just as important, or more so. The following attitudes are seen as some of the essential foundations that can help our mindfulness practice to flourish.

**Non-judging** - we tend to constantly judge our experience (as right or wrong, good or bad, etc.) and this can make it hard for us to see what is really here. Bringing a non-judging attitude to our practice enables us to observe, allow and be with whatever arises. It does not mean letting go of discernment and judgement about ourselves and the world.

**Patience** - being in a rush to achieve results from our practice will tend to take us out of the present moment and thereby undermine our mindfulness. An attitude of patience helps us to allow things to unfold in their own time.

**Beginner's mind** - it is easy for our beliefs about what we know to get in the way of seeing things as they really are. When we bring an attitude of beginner's mind, we experience things as if for the first time. We ask ourselves "what is actually here right now?"

**Trust** - many of us tend to trust the judgement of authority figures and look outside of ourselves for 'the truth' and for guidance. It is important in our practice that we learn to listen to our own feelings and intuitions and begin to honour and trust what we hear. Our mindfulness practice becomes our teacher.

**Non-striving** - in our everyday lives, many of our actions are done in order to achieve something or get somewhere. In many situations, the harder we try, the more likely we are to succeed. This approach tends to be counter-productive in cultivating mindfulness and it is usually more helpful to bring a non-striving attitude to our practice. We learn to let go of trying to make things happen.

**Acceptance** - we often waste a lot of energy refusing to see what is here and struggling against the way things are. In our mindfulness practice we cultivate acceptance by being with each moment as it is. This does not mean that we have to like or accept everything about ourselves and the world. A willingness to see and accept the reality of how things are is often a necessary first step before taking action that may lead to change.

**Letting go** - when we look inward, we soon notice how the mind wants to hold on to what is pleasant in our experience and reject what is unpleasant. Our practice will benefit from us learning to sometimes let go of these tendencies and instead to simply observe, allow, let be.

**Befriending** - Befriending involves being curious, friendly and kind, and is a capacity that we can all develop towards ourselves and our experiences. It is available to all of us, and extends kindness and warmth to all our experience, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant.

## TIPS FOR THE BODY SCAN

1. Regardless of what happens, "just do it!" (e.g. if you fall asleep, lose concentration, keep thinking of other things, keep focusing on the wrong bit of body, not feeling anything). These are your experiences in the moment, just be aware of them.
2. If your mind is wandering a lot, simply note the thoughts (as passing events) and then bring the mind gently back to the Body Scan.
3. Let go of ideas of "success", "failure", "doing it really well", or "trying to purify the body". This is not a competition. It is not a skill you need to strive for. The only discipline involved is regular and frequent practice. Just do it with an attitude of openness and curiosity.
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 and influence what it will do for you, the less it will do.
5. Try approaching your experience in each moment with the kindly attitude: "OK, that's just the way things are right now". If you try to fight off unpleasant thoughts, feelings, or body sensations, they will only distract you from doing anything else. Be aware, be non-striving, be in the moment, see things clearly, just do it.

## LOOKING BACK: A PARTICIPANT'S EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING THE BODY SCAN

'For the first few days I wasn't sure what I was doing and the practice felt like a burden. While I was listening to the body scan I kept wandering off, and then I would worry about whether I was doing it right. My mind was all over the place. I tried too hard to stop it, I think.

Another problem at the start was the message about accepting things as they are now. I thought that was totally unreasonable. I thought to myself "I can't do that" and got it into a whole debate with myself.

Slowly I learned to just put the body scan audio track on and, as best I could, follow the instructions. I didn't worry if concerns came in, I did as the teacher suggested, noticing this and coming back to my body, many hundreds of times! Gradually my mind seemed to get a bit steadier, and I was able to follow the instructions and see what was happening in my body and mind a bit better.

After a few days, I relaxed more, I stopped worrying if I was thinking about anything else. When I gave up worrying about it, I actually stopped the flights of fantasy. If I did think of something else, I just

noticed it, picked up the track again, and came back to my body, like I said it seemed like lots of times. Gradually the flights of fantasy reduced. I was happy to listen to the instructions and then I started to get some value from it.

Soon I had developed it so that I could actually feel the breath going down to the base of my foot. Sometimes I didn't feel anything, but then I thought "If there's no feeling then I can be satisfied with the fact there is no feeling."

It's not something you can do half a dozen times. It's got to be a daily thing. It becomes more real the more that you try it. I began to look forward to it.'

## **PRACTISING APPRECIATION AND GRATITUDE**

Attention is like Teflon for pleasant experiences but like Velcro for unpleasant experiences. Our brains evolved for survival and reproduction, rather than for happiness and peace of mind. This biological heritage seems to have left us with a natural tendency to give plenty of attention to what's wrong and to what might be a threat. Noticing and giving time to what is lovely doesn't flow so easily for most of us, especially when we're under stress, but there are steps we can take to train ourselves to bring awareness to the lovely and nourishing aspects of our lives.

Just making a mental note that something is pleasant, uplifting, or beautiful can be helpful. Much more powerful is to pause and appreciate and bring awareness to the details of physical sensations, feelings, thoughts and impulses that arise. By learning to 'turn good facts into good experiences' in this way, we can deepen the appreciation and gratitude that we have for these enjoyable moments and thus increase the nourishment that they give us. The intention is that this can become a part of your everyday life.

### **ON WASHING THE DISHES**

To my mind, the idea that doing the dishes is unpleasant can occur only when you are not doing them. Once you are standing in front of the sink with your sleeves rolled up and your hands in warm water, it really is not so bad. I enjoy taking my time with each dish, being fully aware of the dish, the water, and each movement of my hands. I know that if I hurry in order to go and have a cup of tea, the time will be unpleasant...

Washing the dishes is at the same time a means and an end. Not only do we do the dishes in order to have clean dishes, we also do the dishes just to do the dishes, to live fully in each moment while washing them.

If I am incapable of washing dishes joyfully, if I want to finish them quickly so I can go and have a cup of tea, I will be equally incapable of drinking the tea joyfully. With the cup in my hands I will be thinking about what to do next, and the fragrance and the flavour of the tea, together with the pleasure of drinking it, will be lost. I will always be dragged into the future, never able to live in the present moment.

Thich Nhat Hanh

## HOME PRACTICE INVITATION

### 1. FORMAL PRACTICE:

Practice a Body Scan, using the audio track, every day this week. Don't expect to feel anything in particular from doing the practice. In fact, as best you can, give up all expectations about it. Just let your experience be your experience. Don't judge it, just keep doing it, and we'll talk next week about how it went.

### 2. INFORMAL PRACTICE:

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, just as we did in the raisin exercise. Possibilities include waking up in the morning, brushing your teeth, showering, drying your body, getting dressed, eating a meal or a snack, taking out the rubbish, shopping, and so forth. Just like during the raisin exercise, 'zero in' on knowing what you are doing as you are doing it. Notice body sensations, thoughts and feelings as they arise.

### 3. NEW HABITS IN EVERYDAY LIFE:

Five Finger Gratitude Practice: bring to mind ten things for which you are grateful, counting them on your fingers and opening to and savouring the sensations of gratitude in the body as best you can.

Note: Feel free to use the Home Practice Notes page to make a note of anything that comes up for you, either as a reflection or as a reminder for discussion at our next session.

You will be given information about how to access the audio recordings that you will need for the home practice during the course.

*It's important to practise being mindful in our everyday lives  
because that is where we need it most.*

### HOME PRACTICE NOTES

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