



SESSION 2: LIVING IN OUR HEADS

SUMMARY OF SESSION 2

Our aim in this program 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, action needs 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. The body scan exercise 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—specifically, trying to achieve some special state of relaxation is *not* a goal of the exercise.

THE WALKING DOWN THE STREET EXERCISE: POWER OF INTERPRETATIONS

In the ‘walking down the street’ exercise, in the class, we looked at the way we interpret events and experiences and how powerfully our thoughts and interpretations can influence our emotional reactions, physical sensations and behaviour. We saw how:

- Different people interpret the same event differently
- Each of us might interpret the same event differently at different times (depending on what mood we’re in or what has just happened before, for example)
- Our interpretations are often shaped by old habits of mind and by the views that we have about ourselves and the world

We try to make sense of events and experiences by thinking about them and giving them meaning. We are unaware of many of our thoughts and interpretations, but they play a major role in determining our reactions to events, situations, and people. We may find ourselves feeling anxious or getting snappy but, because we haven’t noticed our thoughts about what was going on, have no idea why! Becoming more aware of our thoughts can help us to make more sense of how we feel, how we behave, and how we react to the world around us.

As we become more aware, we may notice some habitual patterns of thinking. One pattern that many of us have is to judge our experience as being not quite right, not good enough, not what we wanted. It's all too easy to get lost in powerful patterns of judgemental thinking that can take us down well-worn paths which lead to us feeling bad, reacting in unhelpful ways and losing awareness of the moment. Becoming more aware of our habitual patterns of thinking is a crucial first step in moving towards freeing ourselves from their powerful grip.

HOME PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK FOLLOWING SESSION 2

1. **Body Scan Practice** - Do the body scan for 6 out of 7 days and record your reactions on the Home Practice Record Form
2. **Mindfulness of Breathing** - At different times, practice 10 minutes of mindfulness of breathing for 6 out of 7 days. 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. **The Pleasant Experiences Calendar** - Start to become more aware and interested in pleasant experiences as they unfold. **What are the pleasant events that “steady you” or “warm your heart” or “lift your spirits” (no matter how big or small)?** Record one pleasant experience each day in the 'Pleasant Experience Calendar'. Use this as an opportunity to become really aware of the thoughts, feelings, and body sensations around each pleasant experience, at the time it is happening. Notice and record as soon as you can, in detail, the precise nature and location of bodily sensations and use the actual words or images in which the thoughts came.
4. **Routine Activity** - 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).

THE BREATH

Breath is life. You could think of the breath as being like a thread or 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're tense or angry, faster when we're excited, slow and full when we're happy, and almost disappearing when we're 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're not in touch with our breathing -- it's just there, forgotten. So one of the first things we do in mindfulness 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, relationships or the stress of daily life. During this course, we will be exploring this in great detail.

Karen Ryder

MINDFULNESS OF THE BREATH

1. Settle into a comfortable sitting position, either on a straight-backed chair or a soft surface on the floor, with your buttocks supported by cushions or a low stool. If you use a chair, it is very helpful to sit away from the back of the chair, so that your spine is self-supporting. If you sit on the floor, it is helpful if your knees actually touch the floor; experiment with the height of the cushions or stool until you feel comfortably and firmly supported. Whatever you sit on, arrange things so that your knees are lower than your hips.
2. Allow your back to adopt an erect, dignified, and comfortable posture. If sitting on a chair, place your feet flat on the floor, with your legs uncrossed. Gently close your eyes.
3. Bring your awareness to the level of physical sensations by focusing your attention on the sensations of touch and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and whatever you are sitting on. Spend a minute or two exploring these sensations, just as in the body scan.
4. Now bring your awareness to the changing patterns of physical sensations in the lower abdomen as the breath moves in and out of your body. (When you first try this practice, it may be helpful to place your hand on your lower abdomen and become aware of the changing pattern of sensations where your hand makes contact with your abdomen. Having “tuned in” to the physical sensations in this area in this way, you can remove your hand and continue to focus on the sensations in the abdominal wall.)
5. Focus your awareness on the sensations of slight stretching as the abdominal wall rises with each inbreath, and of gentle deflation as it falls with each outbreath. As best you can, follow the changing physical sensations in the lower abdomen all the way through as the breath enters your body on the inbreath, and all the way through as the breath leaves your body on the outbreath, perhaps noticing the slight pauses between one inbreath and the following outbreath, and between one outbreath and the following inbreath.
6. There is no need to try to control the breathing in any way—simply let the breath breathe itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience. There is nothing to be fixed, no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply allow your experience to be your experience, without needing it to be other than it is.
7. Sooner or later your mind will wander away from the focus on the breath in the lower abdomen to thoughts, planning, daydreams, drifting along—whatever. This is perfectly OK—it’s simply what minds do. It is not a mistake or a failure. When you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath, gently congratulate yourself—you have come back and are once more aware of your experience! You may want to acknowledge briefly where the mind has been (“Ah, there’s thinking”). Then, gently escort the awareness back to a focus on the changing pattern of physical sensations in the lower abdomen, renewing the intention to pay attention to the ongoing inbreath or outbreath, whichever you find.
8. However often you notice that the mind has wandered (and this will quite likely happen over

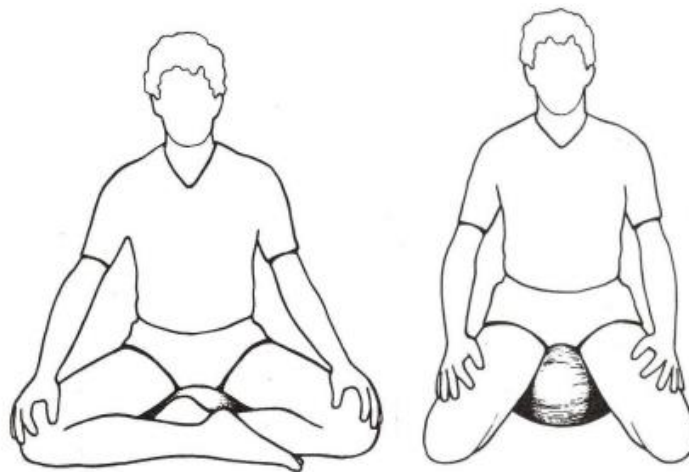
and over and over again), as best you can, congratulate yourself each time on reconnecting with your experience in the moment, gently escorting the attention back to the breath, and simply resume following in awareness the changing pattern of physical sensations that come with each inbreath and out-breath.

9. As best you can, bring a quality of kindness to your awareness, perhaps seeing the repeated wanderings of the mind as opportunities to bring patience and gentle curiosity to your experience.
10. Continue with the practice for 10–15 minutes, or longer if you wish, perhaps reminding yourself from time to time that the intention is simply to be aware of your experience in each moment, as best you can, using the breath as an anchor to gently reconnect with the here and now each time you notice that your mind has wandered and is no longer down in the abdomen, following the breath.

POSTURES FOR SITTING MEDITATION



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B



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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 bit of body, 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 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 for which you need to strive. The only discipline involved is regular and frequent practice. Just do it with an attitude of openness and curiosity, 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, accept things as they are.

PLEASANT EXPERIENCES CALENDAR

Each day, aim to be aware of one pleasant experience as it is happening. The experience can be quite ordinary, something as simple as hearing a bird sing or noticing the smile on the face of a child; the important thing is that it has a pleasant feel to it. There are two parts to this practice:

1. Consciously choosing **what** you pay attention to—by looking out for pleasant experiences
2. Consciously choosing **how** you pay attention, by focusing on the separate aspects of each pleasant experience: mood, feelings, body sensations, thoughts.

Use the following questions to focus your awareness on the details of the experience as it is happening. Write it down later, using the table provided or in your own journal if you prefer.

- What was the experience?
Example: Heading home at the end of my shift—stopping, hearing a bird sing.
- How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?
Example: Lightness across the face, aware of shoulders dropping, uplift of corners of mouth.
- What moods and feelings accompanied this event?
Example: Relief, pleasure.
- What thoughts went through your mind?
Example: “That’s good,” “How lovely [the bird],” “It’s so nice to be outside.”
- What thoughts are in your mind now as you write this down?
Example “It was such a small thing, but I’m glad I noticed it.”

Why this exercise?

- **The doing mode of mind controls what we habitually look out for**—in a depressed mind-state we focus on the negative and what’s wrong, in an anxious mind-state we focus on what’s threatening or dangerous. **Deliberately looking out for pleasant experiences can retune our attention** and open us to the many small delights of life that were always there but that we never noticed— reflections of trees on water, the laughter of children, flowers by the side of the road. . .’
- **Many of us end up tuning out unpleasant feelings as a way of self-protection. But this also means we generally numb out from all feelings— unpleasant and pleasant.** We can cut ourselves off from much of the potential richness of life and from our mind and heart’s deep potential for healing. Paying attention directly to the simple sense of whether an experience is pleasant or not can reconnect us with the wider world of feeling and open us more fully to the wonder of being alive.
- **‘Knowing by thinking’ means we see experiences as solid ‘blobs’—things appear to be either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.** This prompts the ‘driven-doing’ mode of mind into action - trying to hang on to the pleasant or to get rid of the unpleasant. Focusing attention on the separate elements of experiences (sensations, feelings, thoughts, and impulses) we notice the details of what is here and can see how the elements of our experience change and unfold from

moment to moment. We ‘de-blob’ the experience and when we relate to it in this way, we step out of driven-doing mode and into being mode: mindfulness allows us simply to experience the moment as it is.

Adapted from the Mindful Way Workbook by Teasdale, Williams and Segal.

BARRIERS TO NOTICING PLEASANT MOMENTS

Especially when we are on automatic pilot, and when mood is low, it can be surprisingly difficult to tune into pleasant experiences – or even to allow them to be part of the picture. Noticing how old patterns of thought stand in the way of experiencing life’s richness is part of becoming familiar with the workings of our minds. We don’t need to do anything to change the patterns – our task is simply to become aware of their presence. Here are some examples of common patterns.

Being too busy

When we are under pressure, it is all too easy to forget to take time to replenish our resources and do things that give us pleasure. When life is busy, we may feel we simply don’t have the time. The busier our lives are, the more we need moments to refresh ourselves, moments when we come alive to the pleasure in small things. Pleasure does not have to be a major event – small things can make all the difference (e.g. noticing the scent of our shampoo or shower gel, savouring a cup of coffee instead of hardly noticing we are drinking it, pausing to look around us as we walk from the car to the front door).

Not believing we deserve pleasure

High standards can get in the way of pleasure – for example, we have to complete all our tasks before we can take a moment to ourselves, or we have to look after everyone else before we can attend to our own needs. In fact, if taking care of ourselves is always bottom of the list, it may actually be harder to meet the demands of our busy lives and can make us miserable. We need to balance attention to others with kindness to ourselves.

Comparisons

Minds are quick to make comparisons between how things are and how they “should” be. We may find ourselves comparing how we feel now with times when we felt better or comparing ourselves with other people who seem to be feeling better than we are, or comparing how we are feeling with how we want to feel. All of these comparisons undermine our capacity to be fully present with pleasant moments. Seeing them more clearly, we can choose to give them less weight.

Lost in our thoughts

As we practice meditation, we notice how quickly our minds turn to the past (memories, action-replays of things that have happened) and the future (planning the next thing and the next, worrying, anticipating). This wandering from the present moment can mean that we rush past experiences that might have been pleasant without even noticing them. Instead, we need to cultivate a sense of now – fully present with our experiences as they happen.

HOME PRACTICE RECORD FORM

You can record each time you practice on this form or use your own diary/journal. Make a note of anything that comes up in the home practice so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day/date	Practice (Yes/No)	Comments: Discoveries, Delights, Difficulties?
1	Body scan: Breath: Everyday mindfulness:	
2	Body scan: Breath: Everyday mindfulness:	
3	Body scan: Breath: Everyday mindfulness:	
4	Body scan: Breath: Everyday mindfulness:	
5	Body scan: Breath: Everyday mindfulness:	
6	Body scan: Breath: Everyday mindfulness:	
7	Body scan: Breath: Everyday mindfulness:	

PLEASANT EXPERIENCES CALENDAR

Day	What was the experience?	How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?	What moods and feelings accompanied this event?	What thoughts went through your mind?	What thoughts are in your mind now as you write this down?
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					