



SESSION 3: GATHERING THE SCATTERED MIND

This week we practiced resting awareness on the breath, and the body in stillness and movement.

The mind is often scattered and lost in thought because it is working away in the background trying to complete unfinished tasks from the past and strive for goals in the future. In mindfulness training, we are learning intentionally to step out of such states of ‘automatic pilot’ and to ‘come back’ to the anchor of the breathing body in the here and now.

The breath and body offer an ever-present focus that we can use to reconnect us with the present, to gather and settle the mind, and to ease ourselves from states of ‘driven-doing’ into those of ‘mindful-being’, both in formal meditation and as we go about the activities of our day.

FOCUSING ON THE BODY BREATHING

- 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 change your experience by connecting you with a wider space and broader perspective from which to view things.

MINDFUL MOVEMENT ALLOWS US TO

- Build on the foundation of the body scan in learning how we can bring awareness to and ‘inhabit’ body experiences and sensations in movement as well as in stillness.
- See old habitual patterns of the mind - especially those that emphasize unhelpful striving.
- Work with physical boundaries and intensity and learn acceptance of our limits.
Learn new ways of taking care of ourselves.

EMOTIONS, FEELINGS AND THE BODY

In our evolutionary history, emotions have been around for much longer than our ability to think. The range and variety of human emotions evolved in order to maximise our chances of survival in different sorts of situations. Fear, for example, prepares the brain and the body to flee from what is threatening and dangerous. Contentment, on the other hand, lets us know that things seem safe and that we can relax into whatever we are doing.

When talking about the subjective experience of an emotion, we often use the words feel and feelings. So we might say “I feel afraid” or “I have a feeling of contentment”. Of course, we also use the words feel and feelings to refer to physical sensations, “I feel warm” or “I have a painful feeling in my knee”.

We are emotional beings. Our emotions are a fundamental part of who we are and influence pretty much everything that we experience and do. They put the dread in dreadful and the joy in joyful. They can motivate us to act with cruelty or with kindness.

Despite their importance to us, we are quite often unaware of our emotions, sometimes even when they are having a major impact on how we think and behave. Being aware of emotions comes more naturally to some than to others and is also often harder for people who've had difficult and traumatic experiences. All of us sometimes try to avoid difficult feelings by pushing them down or diverting our attention elsewhere. At other times we choose to have an indirect experience of emotions, by being in our heads and thinking about them rather than actually feeling them. Sometimes we are just too busy or distracted to notice our emotional state.

The body offers us a way to become more aware of our emotions more often. Tuning into physical sensations and 'inhabiting the body' brings us closer to the direct experience of how we are feeling. Noticing sensations of muscular tension in the shoulders may help us to become aware of feelings of tiredness and irritability that are making us snappy with a colleague. Tuning into the sensations of warmth in the chest may help us realise the depth of our fondness for the person that we're with.

Being more aware of emotions can be uncomfortable. We may become unsettled and uncertain, especially when we experience difficult feelings more fully than we are used to. When this happens, it is often helpful to continue tuning in to the details of physical sensations... as we have been learning on the course so far, this can help to ground us in the present moment, steady the mind and prevent us from getting lost in thinking.

The movement practices give us opportunities to bring awareness to a range of sensations and feelings. We may notice a tendency to want the pleasant ones to continue and the unpleasant ones to cease. We can investigate the possibility of 'staying with' sensations and feelings, without holding on or pushing away, experiencing them more fully and bringing a spirit of kindness and compassion to ourselves as we do this.

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 practise 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. Practise again and again bringing your attention back to your body. 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



During the week explore finding an anchor in the body and letting it anchor you while speaking and listening. See if it would be helpful for this practice to become part of your everyday life.

Helpful 'anchors' for attention include sensations of contact between feet and floor, sensations of sitting, the feel of the hands, and sensations of breathing. These anchors can be steadying and resourcing for us in the midst of life's difficulties and demands.

HOME PRACTICE INVITATION

This week we use some formal practices that involve movement. If you have any neck, back or other health difficulties that may be made worse by these stretches and postures, please make your own decisions as to which (if any) of the movements to do.

A Formal Practice:

Mindful Movement, followed by a Breath and Body Meditation.

You can access the meditation recordings via this webpage link

An Informal Practice:

Begin to notice unpleasant experiences. Pause and bring awareness to one unpleasant experience that arises each day. Use this as an opportunity to become really aware of the sensations, feelings, thoughts, and impulses that arise, at the time. You might choose to keep a record of your observations on the sheet provided or in a diary or notebook.

A New Habit In Everyday Life:

Explore 'Letting the Body Anchor You' when speaking and listening to other people.

POSTURES FOR SITTING PRACTICE

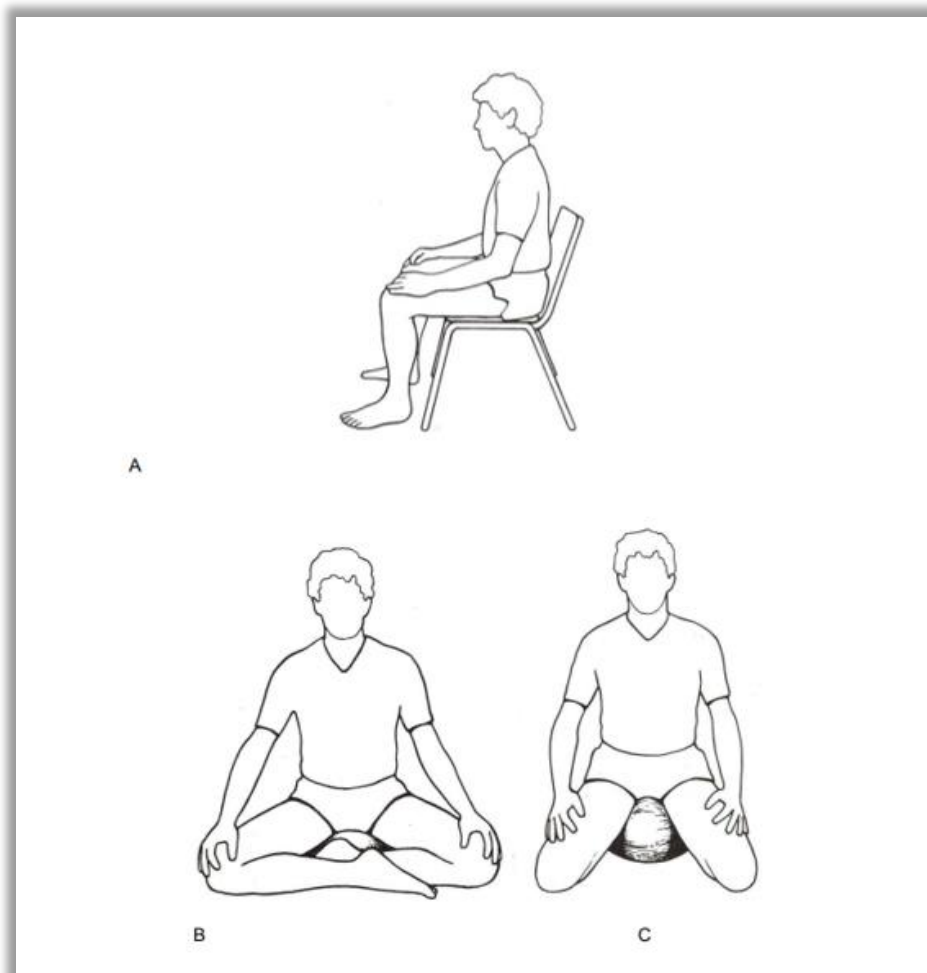
When we do sitting practice, our posture can be seen as the physical counterpart of the attitudes that we bring to the practice. It is helpful to adopt an erect and dignified posture, with the head, neck, and back aligned vertically.

If sitting on a chair, choose one that has a straight back and that 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 - see Figure A.

If sitting on a meditation stool, you may want to put a mat or rug underneath it so that your knees and lower legs are comfortable.

If sitting on the floor, use a firm, thick cushion (or pillow folded over once or twice) which raises your buttocks off the floor three to six inches – see Figures B and C, for examples. Figure B involves drawing one heel in close to the body and draping the other leg in front of it; Figure C involves kneeling with the cushion between the feet.

Whatever you sit on, try to arrange things so that your knees are lower than your hips. Experiment with the height of the cushions or stool until you feel comfortably and firmly supported.



STRETCH AND BREATH POSTURES

