

Session 6: Keeping your practice alive

The advantages of awareness, acceptance, and mindfully responding to situations rather than immediately running off pre programmed, "automatic" reactions has been a recurring theme throughout this course.

What we actually do with our time from moment to moment, from hour to hour, from one year to next, can be a very powerful influence on our general well-being.

You might like to ask yourself these questions:

Of the things that I do, what nourishes me, what increases my sense of being alive and present?

Of the things that I do, what drains me, what decreases my sense of being alive and present, what makes me feel I am merely existing, or worse?

Accepting that there are some aspects of my life that I cannot change, am I choosing to increase the effort I give to nourishing activities and to decrease the time and effort I give to depleting ones?

By being present in more of our moments and making mindful decisions about what we really need in each of our moments, we can make choices to influence our wellbeing.

For example one of the simplest ways to take care of your physical and mental well-being is to take daily exercise such as mindful stretching, yoga, swimming, walking, and so on.

The breathing space – with an action step

The breathing space provides a way of reminding us to use awareness to respond to feelings as they arise. To this, we can add an action step. After reconnecting with an expanded awareness in the breathing space it may feel appropriate to take some considered action. Ask yourself: what do I need for myself right now? How can I best take care of myself right now? You may want to try some of the following:

1. Do something pleasurable, be kind to your body, 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.
2. Do something that gives you a sense of mastery, satisfaction, achievement, or control. For example, 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 (N.B. It's especially important to congratulate

yourself whenever you complete a task or part of a task and to break tasks down into smaller steps and only tackle one step at a time.)

3. Act mindfully. Focus your entire attention on just 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 feet with the floor as you walk.

So we can see that acceptance may often be the springboard to some form of skilful action directed at achieving change in our inner or outer worlds. However, there are also situations and feelings 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 insolvable problem, or by refusing to accept the reality of the situation one is in, one may end up "banging one's head on a brick wall," exhausting oneself, and actually increasing one's sense of helplessness and suffering. 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 suffering than being forced to give up attempts at control after repeated failures.

In the so-called "Serenity Prayer;" we ask for:

The grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, the courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other.

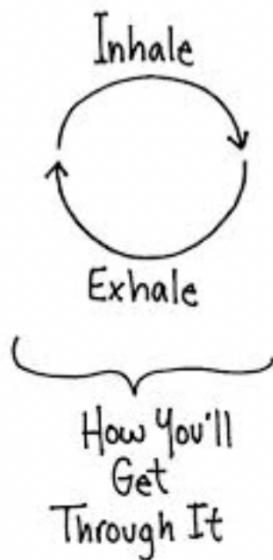
Where do we find this grace, this courage, this wisdom? At some level, we already have all of these qualities—our task is to realize them (make them real), and our way is none other than moment-by-moment mindful awareness.

The Future

Remember Jon Kabat-Zinn's advice to weave your parachute every day, rather than leave it to the time you have to jump from the plane!

You may want to organise a pattern of peer group mindfulness practices. Often this is set up as a space for you to meet together and follow a mindfulness practice, usually via zoom. Having a scheduled time can help you to keep practicing.

Also, remember that the regular breathing space 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—KEEP BREATHING.



Daily Mindfulness

- When you first wake up in the morning, before you get out of bed, bring your attention to your breathing. Observe five 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 as the bell of mindfulness. Really listen and be present and awake.
- Throughout the day, take a few moments to bring your attention to your breathing. Observe five mindful breaths.
- Whenever you eat or drink something, take a minute and breathe. Look at your food and realize that the food was connected to something that 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 you walk or stand. Take a moment to notice your posture. Pay attention to the contact 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. 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

just say what you need to say without overstating or understating? Can you notice how your mind and body feel?

- Whenever you wait in a line, 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 rise and fall of your abdomen. Are you feeling impatient?
- Be aware of any points of tightness in your body throughout the day. See if you can breathe into them 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, washing up, brushing your hair; 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 five mindful breaths.

Forget about enlightenment
Sit down wherever you are
And listen to the wind singing in your veins.
Feel the love, the longing, the fear in your bones.
Open your heart to who you are, right now,
Not who you would like to be,
Not the saint you are striving to become,
But the being right here before you, inside you, around you. All of you is holy.
You are already more and less
Than whatever you can know.
Breathe out,
Touch in,
Let go.

By: John Welwood

Further Resources

Books:

Kabat-Zinn J, 1990, Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness, Delta.

Kabat-Zinn J. Mindfulness meditation for everyday life. Piatkus.

Kabat-Zinn J. 2005, Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness. Piatkus.

Santorelli S.1999, Heal Thyself: Lessons on Mindfulness in Medicine, Bell. Tower.

Segal Z.V., Williams J.M.G. & Teasdale J.D, 2002, Mindfulness–based Cognitive Therapy for Depression. A New Approach to Preventing Relapse. Guilford Press.

Silverton, S. The mindfulness breakthrough

Wellings, N. Why can't I meditate? How to get your mindfulness practice on track

Williams J.M.G., Segal Z.V., Teasdale J.D. & Kabat-Zinn J., 2007, The Mindful Way through Depression. Guilford Press

Williams, M and Penman. Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World

Websites:

<https://bemindful.co.uk>

Has a listing of UK mindfulness network registered mindfulness teachers and courses.

<https://www.umassmemorialhealthcare.org/umass-memorial-center-mindfulness>

These free weekly online sessions have been established to support worldwide graduates of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) programs and those with an interest in mindfulness meditation.

Monday Night: Worldwide Sit, 7:00pm EDT (1 hr)

Tuesday Morning: Worldwide Sit for Clinicians and Caregivers, 7:30am EDT (30 min)

**12.30pm UK time

Thursday Afternoon: Worldwide Sit, 12:10pm EDT (40 min) - ** 5.10pm UK time

Gaia house run an online sitting group every Monday at 8-9 pm. There is a full explanation of the sessions here:

<https://gaiahouse.co.uk/local-meditation-groups/online-sitting-group/>

Local Groups:

Cambridge, Bury St. Edmunds, Newmarket and Thetford all have Buddhist orientated meditation courses or groups. Our mindfulness course has been based on Vipassana or Insight meditation, so it may be helpful to look for groups that follow these practices. There is a list of local meditation groups here <https://gaiahouse.co.uk/local-meditation-groups/>

Oh, the Places You'll Go!

I'm afraid that sometimes you'll play lonely games too. Games you can't win, cause you'll play against you.

All Alone! Whether you like it or not,

Alone you will be something quite a lot.

And when you're alone. There's a very good chance

You'll meet some things that scare you right out of your pants. There are some, down the road between hither and yon,

That can scare you so much you won't want to go on.

But on you will go, though the weather be foul,

On you will go, though the Hakken-Kraks howl.

Onward up many a frightening creek,

Though your arms may get sore

And your sneakers may leak.

On and on you will hike.

And I know you'll hike far

And face up to your problems

Whatever they are.

You'll get mixed up, of course,

As you already know.

You'll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go.

So be sure where you step.

Step with care and great tact

And remember that life's a Great Balancing Act.

Just never forget to be dexterous and deft.

And never mix up your right foot with your left.

By: Dr. Seuss