**Session 2**

**Perception and creative responding**

*‘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. Jon Kabat Zinn, (1996).*

How we see things (or don’t see them) will determine in large measure how we react or respond to them. During our daily lives we can experience many pressures and stresses. Stress reactivity is the capacity or tendency to respond to a stressor and depending upon how we react or respond is assumed to be connected to our physical and mental health and general well-being. However, it is not the stressors per se, but how we relate to them that influences the short and long term health effects.

Our aim 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. We can find it not quite right in some way; not what should be happening, not good enough, not what we expected or wanted. These judgements can lead on to sequences of thoughts about blame, or 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 lose awareness of the moment, and also lose 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 the situation we find ourselves in, without being immediately hooked into automatic tendencies to judge, fix or want things to be other than they are. The body scan exercise provides an opportunity to practise 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 something specific or some special state of relaxation is not the goal.

**The Breath**

Breath is life. You could think of it as a thread or a chain that links and connects all the events of your life. The breath is constantly with us each and every moment. It moves though our bodies like waves gently lapping on a beach. Each and every breath is an individual and is not necessarily the same as the last. The breath is also a reflection of our mood, short and shallow implies we are angry, faster when we experience excitement, slow and full when we feel contentment and almost non-existent when we experience fear.

We spend very little time during our everyday life paying any attention to it, it is just there. In mindfulness it is helpful for the breath to be viewed as an anchor, to bring stability to the body and the mind simply by choosing to become aware and tune into it. As we do so we notice more about how it changes with mood, thought and body movement.

With practise, 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 our attention. The breath can also be used to help deal with pain, anger, relationships or the stress of everyday life. We will be exploring this in detail over the next few weeks. The invitation is not to control the breath, or make it deeper, but to get to know it like an old, forgotten friend. Observe, watch, and feel the breath with a sense of gentle interest and in a friendly, relaxed manner.

**The formal practice for this week will include:**

Opening meditation

Sitting meditation with postural guidance

Standing Yoga

Body Scan