**Week 2 Sitting meditation**

Sitting is not a special activity; we do it all the time, however, the importance of this exercise is the attention and awareness we bring to it. We first need to find time and a place within our home to sit.

Having found a spot we make a decision about how to sit; on a chair, or on a mat and a cushion, or on a bench. If you choose a chair, it ideally needs to be one with a straight back that allows your feet to be flat on the floor. It is recommended that you do not sit with your back flush against the chair, but if possible, a little away from it so that your back is self-supported. If you choose the floor, ensure that any cushions you use are firm and thick. Ideally the cushion should raise your buttocks off the floor three to six inches (a pillow folded over once or twice works quite well). It does not really matter if you choose a cross legged or a kneeling pose, so long as your knees are below your hips and there is not too much pressure on them. What is most important is that your sitting position works for you. Your chosen position will need to be comfortable enough to support the cultivation of an inner attitude of dignity, patience and self-acceptance. Once sitting we then choose where to put our hands; gently on our knees or in a resting position in the lap with the fingers of the left hand above the fingers of the right and the tips of the thumbs just touching each other.

When we sit we consciously adopt an alert and relaxed body posture. We need to feel comfortable without moving. An up-right and dignified posture is key with your head, neck and back in alignment. This should not be a ‘stiff’ posture; our shoulders need to be relaxed. It is sometimes helpful to think of a string coming up through your spine and neck and out of the top of your head to the ceiling. Our posture aims to reflect the inner attitude of self-reliance, self-acceptance, and alert attention that we cultivate as part of our meditative practice. This posture will also allow our breath to flow more easily.

When we have assumed the posture we have selected, we bring our attention to our breath. We feel our breath coming in, we feel it going out. We rest here in the present, moment by moment, breath by breath. We attend our awareness fully on the in-breath, and fully on the outbreath. Letting the breath happen, observing it, and feeling all the sensations.

You may find that at least part of you does not want to stay here with the breath. Your body and mind may begin to request something different, your body may complain or your mind may wish to focus on something else. This is perfectly normal.

It is at this point that the work of self-observation begins to become more fruitful. Normally we simply react to these impulses, if the body says, ‘I’m thirsty’, our mind reacts by making a decision about what to drink, if the mind says “This is boring,” the body is up and looking around for the next thing to do to keep the mind happy. If the body feels discomfort, it will shift to be more comfortable or it will call on the mind to find something else for it to do. Our mind and body seems to be in a constant state of seeking something else. In mindfulness, we are not asking why this is. Rather we just observe the impulse to get up or the thoughts that come into the mind. Instead of acting on them we gently but firmly bring our attention back to the tummy and to the breath, and just continue to watch the breath, moment by moment. We may ponder why the mind is like this for a moment and observe where our mind goes, but basically we are practicing accepting each moment as it is without reacting or judging.

Through the practice of meditation we become less reactive and more stable. When you meditate you are making each moment matter. You are taking each moment as it comes, not valuing any one above any other. You are cultivating your natural ability to concentrate your mind. By repeatedly bringing your attention back to the breath each time it wanders off, concentration builds and deepens. Through meditation the mind is being worked on in the same way an athlete works on building their physical strength and flexibility. Working regularly with and not struggling against the workings of your own mind builds inner strength. By not making judgements about yourself during this process, you will inevitably develop patience and become less judgmental. Do not beat yourself up each time your mind wanders away from the breath, simply congratulate yourself on having noticed this and matter-of-factly return it to the breath, gently but firmly.

We are not trying to stop our thoughts as they cascade through our mind, this is impossible. We are simply making room for them, observing them as thoughts, and letting them be, using the breath as our anchor for observing, for reminding us to stay focused and calm.