

***Session 3 Becoming Present***

*"If it were just a matter of playing football with the firmament, stirring up the ocean, turning back rivers, carrying away mountains, seizing the moon, moving the Pole-Star or shifting a planet, I could manage it easily enough.*

*Even if it were a question of my head being cut off and my brain removed or my belly being ripped open and my heart cut out ... I would take on the job at once," said Monkey. "But if it comes to sitting still and meditating, I am bound to come off badly. It's quite against my nature to sit still."*

Wu Ch’eng-En

# Tips for the Body Scan

* If you fall asleep, try doing it at a different time of day, or do the body scan in a sitting position.
* When your mind wanders, simply observe the thoughts as passing events, and then bring the mind gently back to the body scan. It is just as valuable to become aware that the mind has wandered and to bring it back , as to remain fixed on the chosen object of attention.
* Let go of ideas of success, failure, doing it well, trying to still the mind or body. It is not a skill for which you need to strive. The only requirement is the discipline of regular and frequent practice. Just do the body scan with an attitude of openness and curiosity.
* Let go of any expectations about what the body scan will do for you. Imagine it as a seed you are planting. The more you poke around and interfere with it, the less it will be able to develop. So it is with the body scan, just give it the right conditions – a bit of space and regular practice. That is all that’s needed. The more you try to influence what it will do for you, the less it will do.
* Try to approach your experience in each moment with the attitude: *OK, that’s the way things are right now.* Trying to get rid of unpleasant thoughts, feelings or body sensations, will only distract you from what you are intending to do. Be aware, be non-striving, be in the moment, accept things as they are and just do it!

# Mindfulness of the Breath

Our breath is always with us. It is like a chain that connects and links all the events in our lives, from beginning to end, from birth all the way to death. The breath is always there, moving of its own accord, like a river flowing.

You may have 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. The breath is with us all the time and we can use it as a tool, as an anchor, to bring stability to the body and mind simply by becoming aware of it. We can tune in to the breath at any moment we choose.

Mostly we are not in touch with our breathing, we don’t need to be. The breath breathes itself. Becoming aware of our breath is an important and useful skill in becoming more mindful. We can start to notice how our breath changes in response to our moods, thoughts and movements. We don’t have to interfere with it, we can just let it get on with what it does, while noticing it and getting to know it, like a friend who is always there. We just watch our breath, observe it with a sense of interest and curiosity.

As with the body scan, we can learn to use the breath as a background to noticing when our mind has gone away and noticing what we are feeling. The breath is there for us to come back to no matter what conditions are around us.

## Why the breath is useful

* It takes place in the here and now and so focusing on it enables us to let go of the ‘what if’ and ‘what might have been’ modes of thinking.
* The act of bringing our attention to the breath actively takes up the mental space which may be being used passively in ‘autopilot’ thinking.
* The breath is always with us, both as a focus for attention, and as a source of information about our emotional state.
* Being mindful of our breath is the opposite of how we normally live. We are often very goal focused - we are thinking about what steps we need to take to get from A to B – *the doing mode*. The breath does itself so we can just be with it – *the being mode*.
* It helps us to develop our mental awareness, to notice when the mind has wandered, and helps to accept thoughts as mental, passing events and to stay in the being mode.

## Some general guidelines on Practicing Mindfulness of the Breath

1. Find a posture in which you can feel calm and dignified, and remain alert. Sitting upright if possible, but not stiffly. The head and shoulders should be balanced and relaxed.
2. Focus your attention on your breath. If you wish, first focus on sounds or on your body and then when you are ready bring your attention to the breath.
3. Be curious about what happens, in the sense of having an alert interest, or wise attention to what you experience.
4. When your mind wanders, as minds do, congratulate yourself for noticing this, then briefly acknowledge what took your mind away, without getting involved with it, and then bring your attention back to your breathing.
5. Repeat Step 4 as often as necessary. If your mind wander 100 times then bring it back 100 times, and congratulate yourself 100 times for noticing.
6. When you are ready to end, expand your attention to your whole body and if you wish to the space around it or the sounds you can hear. Bring with you a sense of calm and spaciousness to whatever you are going to do next.

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# Being vs doing modes

Focusing on routine events, we may become aware that we are generally not very curious about our ability to do what we see as simple tasks, e.g. picking up our own cup, shoe, pencil from a selection of similar items. In contrast, we seem to place far more value on consciously using our thinking abilities e.g. I am at A, how does that compare with B, which is where I want to be, how do I get to A from B.

Mindfulness training helps us to approach our lives in a different way, a different mode. More being and less doing, or finding a way to do. We become more able to let go of striving and goal orientation and become more accepting of what is. Ironically, by doing this, by being willing to let go of trying to get somewhere else, we become more open and better able to see how to get somewhere else.

In these sessions we are learning to widen our experience and to become more skillful in how we can use tools such as the breath as an anchor, so that we can remain more open to our experience more often, whether in formal practice of everyday situations.

Just as with the raisin exercise, we can use simply seeing and simply hearing as a way to relate differently to the familiar. Letting go of the need to interpret and label (doing mode), we can learn to have a different relationship with our experiences and just be with them (being mode). In this way we can become aware that our experiences are made up of an event plus the add-ons of what we think or feel about the event.

Simply seeing and hearing gives us practice in just being, in a similar way as at the end of the spoken meditations, when we are invited to bring the being mode with us to whatever we are going to do next.

## Simply Seeing

We can practice seeing patterns of light and shade, colour and texture. And for the time being, letting go of the idea that what we are seeing may be called a tree, a car, a tunnel. Whenever we become aware that we are thinking about what we are seeing, or when our mind has wandered, we can simply notice and bring our awareness back to simply seeing.

## Simply Hearing

Just as in the Simply Seeing exercise, we can simply hear sounds as sounds. As patterns of tone, pitch and volume. There is no need to label the sound as a cough, a phone ringing, a car revving it’s engine. It is simply sound, it does not need description. Again, when you notice that you are thinking about the sounds, just notice, *‘Ah there’s thinking’*, and as best as you can, let go of the thoughts and return to just hearing sounds.

# Home Practice

* Use the 10 minute or 20 minute Body Scan CD track daily if possible, maybe alternating them, or do whichever you prefer.
* Sit with your breath for 5 – 10 minutes, with or without the CD, daily if you can.
* Simply See or Hear whenever you can, at least once every day.