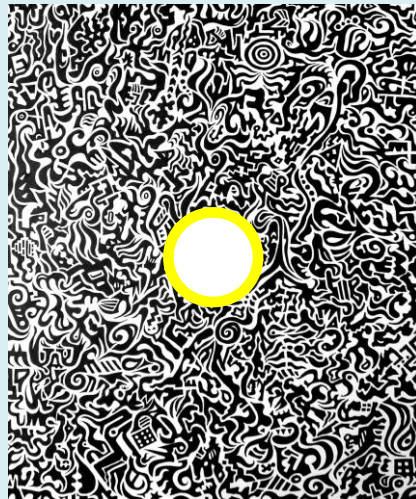


Introduction to Mindfulness



Actuality Counselling

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Introduction

Mindfulness is a form of meditation which has gained considerable popularity in the West. It has been used in therapy to alleviate numerous mental and physical conditions including anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, stress and addiction, and has been acknowledged as an effective way of helping people to be more accepting of difficult emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, shame and self-doubt. Mindfulness has enabled many people to be more compassionate towards themselves.



In writing this booklet, my aim is to provide a basic introduction to the concept of Mindfulness and to offer some simple exercises to enable you to begin practising. The booklet also contains details of other sources of information where you can explore Mindfulness further.

Actuality Counselling is based in Liverpool, in the UK. My services (which include counselling, coaching, EFT and supervision) are also available online. You can find out more about my work at www.actualitycounselling.co.uk.

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June 2017

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness practice has been defined as the act of deliberately paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally. Through Mindfulness exercises, we become aware of the full range of experience including sensory impressions, thoughts, imagery, emotions, urges and impulses (even becoming aware of the quality of Mindfulness itself), making sure to guide our attention back to the present moment when our mind is distracted.

Professor Mark Williams of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre has defined it as:

“Knowing directly what is going on inside and outside ourselves, moment by moment.”

By not judging either the content or the processes of our mind, we become free to observe them without identifying with the contents of our thoughts. We are able to watch the stream of consciousness rather than getting caught up in it.

In our everyday lives, we often function on auto-pilot. We drive our cars over long distances, arrive at our destination and then wonder how we got there. We walk somewhere and are totally focused on where we are going and what we plan to do when we get there, rather than on the myriad experiences that take place in the present moment.

We often find ourselves dwelling on the past (sadness, regret or anger at things that have happened to us) or drawn into the future (feeling anxious, scared or depressed about things that are going to happen or that we think might happen). When we do this, what we lose is the ‘here and now’: the ephemeral, fleeting moment in which we find ourselves and which, some would say, is all that we have - all that is real.

All thoughts and images, are considered equal when meditating, regardless of how “noble” or “base”, “profound” or “banal” we believe them to be. This is how we cultivate the non-judgemental awareness that lies at the heart of Mindfulness. For the purpose of Mindfulness, they are all "*just thoughts*". Mindfulness draws a distinction between the statements “I am sad” and “I feel sad”: the first is a more limited definition of self, whereas the second distinguishes us from our thoughts and opens up the possibility of acknowledging and influencing our feelings, without being overwhelmed by them. Mindfulness does not mean that we ignore or hide our emotions; we still experience them and still ‘own’ them but can respond to them in a more thoughtful and measured way.

Mindfulness is a form of meditation that enables us to truly experience the present moment - to focus all our attention on it and to achieve the tranquillity which that still centre can bring. It is a simple practice, can be learned by anyone and is secular, with no links to religion.

The benefits of Mindfulness

Much research has been conducted into Mindfulness and this is continuing. On a physical level, meditation has been shown to:

- lower blood pressure;
- reduce depression;
- lower the levels of blood lactate (helping to reduce anxiety attacks);
- relieve symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD);
- improve self-esteem and subjective wellbeing;
- decrease tension-related ailments (e.g. tension headaches, migraine headaches, ulcers, insomnia, muscle and joint problems);
- decrease the amount of stress-related cortisol produced by the body;
- improve overall heart health;
- increase serotonin production (improving mood and behaviour);
- create positive structural changes in the brain;
- reduce insomnia and improve the quality of sleep;
- help with PMS;
- strengthen the immune system;
- help manage the symptoms of ADHD;
- reduce the risk of dementia;
- help treat addictions (and reduce relapse rates);
- decrease emotional reactivity and increase resiliency;
- reduce chronic pain;
- decrease binge eating and emotional eating;
- reduce inflammation at cellular level; and
- increase energy levels by giving us access to an inner source of energy.

Mindfulness (and meditation in general) also offers mental benefits, bringing the brainwave pattern into an alpha state that promotes healing. Regular practice of Mindfulness can result in:

- less anxiety or panic;
- better control of blood sugar in type 2 diabetes;
- emotional stability;
- increased creativity;
- improved memory;
- a sense of happiness and harmony;
- improve emotional intelligence skills;
- a more highly-developed sense of intuition;
- increased clarity, peace of mind;
- an evolved consciousness and an increased ability to experience higher and refined states of consciousness (as one's consciousness evolves and expands, life's disturbances and problems become negligible; anger and disappointments become fleeting emotions that soon vanish; and it becomes easier to live 'in the moment' and let go of the past); and

- personal transformation and a more fulfilling relationship with universal questions about the mystery, meaning and purpose of life, the nature of love and knowledge etc.

In the brain, regular meditation increases grey matter (neuronal cell bodies and synapses) in the:

- Insula which handles interoception (sense of your own body), general self-awareness, and empathy for the emotions of others;
- Hippocampus which plays a key role in personal recollections, visual-spatial memory, establishing the context of events, and calming down both the amygdala (the alarm bell of the brain) and production of stress hormones like cortisol; and
- Pre-frontal cortex (PFC) which supports executive functions, self-control, and guiding attention.

Regular meditation also:

- increases activation in the left PFC (lifting mood);
- increases the power and reach of very fast, gamma range brainwaves (promoting learning and a sense of integration in awareness);
- preserves the length of telomeres (the caps at the ends of DNA molecules) resulting in fewer age-related diseases; and
- reduces cortical thinning due to aging in the insula and PFC.

We can achieve a sharper mind by gaining focus and expansion through relaxation. A sharp mind without expansion can result in tension, anger and frustration, while an expanded consciousness without sharpness can lead to a lack of action/progress. The balance of a sharp mind and an expanded consciousness is a perfect combination.

History and development

Mindfulness practices have existed for several thousand years. In the Indus Valley, archaeologists have discovered evidence of meditation in wall art dating from approximately 5,000 to 3,500 BCE. It has been suggested that primitive hunting and gathering societies may have discovered meditation and its many different states of consciousness while gazing into the flames of their fires.



Developed initially in the East, Mindfulness has spread to widely-differing cultures and many geographical locations, and has now been adopted by Western culture. The modern 'Mindfulness Movement' has revolutionised emotional and spiritual development, and has led to Mindfulness being used not only in spiritual retreats and yoga centres but also in offices, schools, prisons and even by the military.

One of the leaders of this movement since the 1970s is Jon Kabat-Zinn, Professor of Medicine Emeritus and creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Centre for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Kabat-Zinn has integrated Buddhist teachings, yoga and Mindfulness to develop Mindfulness-based Stress Relief (MBSR) and Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) which are used to help people cope with stress, anxiety, pain, and illness.

Setting and Posture

Mindfulness can be practised in any place and in any posture; however, some conditions are more conducive to effective practice.

Find a relatively quiet place where you are unlikely to be disturbed and switch off all phones. Adopt a relaxed but alert posture; sit on a chair with your back straight, unsupported and relaxed.



When first learning to practise, it is better to close your eyes. When you are more experienced, try to practise with your eyes open as this allows you to practise in a wider range of settings.

When practising Mindfulness, it is inevitable that you will become distracted by your thoughts and away from your breath (or whatever you are focusing on). When this happens, remember to be compassionate towards yourself: *gently* bring your attention back to the breath without criticism, struggle or frustration. You have been momentarily caught up in your thought stream. Similarly, you will experience sensations such as sounds, aches, itches and tingles - just allow them to be. When these sensations lead to discursive thoughts, such as: "I wish that dog next door would stop barking", treat them like any other thoughts and gently return your attention to whatever you are focusing on. If you have to do this many times during a particular sitting, *that* is your meditation and your challenge on that occasion.

Strong emotions can sometimes be problematic and can lead to you being overwhelmed by a vortex of intense thoughts and feelings. In this case, it is often helpful to be mindful of the changing physical sensations in the body associated with each emotion. As you become aware of the fluctuations and changing nature of these sensations, the sense of being overwhelmed can often be replaced with interest or even curiosity about the experience. This is all part of the practice of Mindfulness.

Mindfulness exercises

The following Mindfulness scripts are offered as an introduction to the practice; you can find many more resources in the references at the end of this booklet. You might also want to consider joining a meditation group where you live.

These scripts will give you an idea of what to focus on when you are meditating. Ideally, you should listen to a recording of these (or other) scripts. Very soon, you will be able to meditate by yourself without needing to use any scripts or recordings.

Guided Sitting Meditation

This guided sitting meditation will help you learn to simply be and to look within yourself with mindfulness and equanimity.

Allow yourself to switch from the usual mode of doing to a mode of non-doing - of simply being. As you allow your body to become still, bring your attention to the fact that you are breathing and become aware of the movement of your breath as it comes into your body and as it leaves your body. Not manipulating the breath in any way or trying to change it. Simply being aware of it and of the feelings associated with breathing. And observing the breath deep down in your belly. Feeling the abdomen as it expands gently on the in-breath and as it falls back towards your spine on the out-breath. Being totally here in each moment with each breath. Not trying to do anything, not trying to get any place, simply being with your breath.

You will find that, from time to time, your mind will wander off into thoughts, fantasies, anticipations of the future or the past, worrying, memories, whatever. When you notice that your attention is no longer here and no longer with your breathing, and without judging yourself, bring your attention back to your breathing and ride the waves of your breathing, fully conscious of the duration of each breath from moment to moment. Every time you find your mind wandering off the breath, gently bringing it back to the present, back to the moment-to-moment observing of the flow of your breathing. Using your breath to help you tune into a state of relaxed awareness and stillness.

Now as you observe your breathing, you may find from time to time that you are becoming aware of sensations in your body. As you maintain awareness of your breathing, see if it is possible to expand the field of your awareness so that it includes a sense of your body as a whole as you sit here. Feeling your body, from head to toe, and becoming aware of all the sensations in your body.

Being here with whatever feelings and sensations come up in any moment without judging them, without reacting to them, just being fully here, fully aware of whatever you're experiencing. And again whenever you notice that your mind wandered off, just bringing it back to your breathing and your body as you sit here not going anywhere, not doing anything just simply being, simply sitting. Moment to moment, being fully present, fully with yourself.

Now as you sit here once again allowing the field of your awareness to expand. This time, expanding your awareness to include thoughts as they move through your mind. So letting your breathing and sense of your body be in the background and allowing the thinking process itself to be the focus of your awareness. And rather than following individual thoughts and getting involved in the content and going from one thought to the next, simply seeing each thought as it comes up in your mind as a thought and letting the thoughts just come and go as you sit and dwell in stillness, witnessing them and observing them. Whatever they are ... just observing them as events in the field of your consciousness ... as they come into your awareness and they linger and as they dissolve.

If you find yourself at any point drawn into this stream of thinking and you notice that you are no longer observing them, just coming back to observing them as events and using your breathing and the sense of your body to anchor you and stabilize you in the present.

The thoughts can take any form, they can have any content and they can be either neutral or very highly charged. If thoughts come up that have fear in them, then just be aware of fear being here and letting these thoughts come and go. The same for worries, preoccupations, and so on. Regardless of the feeling that a thought might create for you, just observing it as simply a thought and letting it be here without pursuing it or without rejecting it. Noticing that from moment to moment, new thoughts will come and go.

As the meditation ends, you might give yourself credit for having spent this time nourishing yourself in a deep way by dwelling in this state of non-doing, in this state of being. For having intentionally made time for yourself to simply be who you are. And as you move back into the world, allow the benefits of this practice to expand into every aspect of your life.

Reference: Mindfulness Meditation, CD Series 1, Jon Kabat-Zinn

Meditation on Lovingkindness

In this meditation on lovingkindness, allow yourself to switch from the usual mode of doing to a mode of non-doing. Of simply being. As your body becomes still, bring your attention to the fact that you are breathing. And become aware of the movement of your breath as it comes into your body and as it leaves your body. Not manipulating the breath in any way or trying to change it. Simply being aware of it and of the feelings associated with breathing. And observing the breath deep down in your belly. Feeling the abdomen as it expands gently on the in-breath and as it falls back towards your spine on the out-breath. Being totally here in each moment with each breath. Not trying to do anything, not trying to get any place, simply being with your breath. Giving full care and attention to each in-breath and to each out-breath. As they follow one after

the other in a never ending cycle and flow. If distracting thoughts arise, acknowledge them, then return to the practice.

And now bringing to mind someone for whom you have deep feelings of love. Seeing or sensing this person and noticing your feelings for them arise in your body. It may be simply a smile that spreads across your face, or your chest becomes warm. Whatever the effects, allow them to be felt.

Now letting go of this person in your imagination, and keeping in awareness the feelings that have arisen.

Bring yourself to mind now. And seeing if you can offer lovingkindness to yourself, by letting these words become your words...

May I be happy

May I be healthy

May I ride the waves of my life

May I live in peace

No matter what I am given

And noticing the feelings that arise and letting them be, as you look within yourself with mindfulness and equanimity.

When you are comfortable, try offering lovingkindness to someone who supports you, who has always “been on your side.” Bringing this person to mind, imagining them perhaps across from you, and letting these words become your words...

May you be happy

May you be healthy

May you ride the waves of your life

May you live in peace

No matter what you are given

Once your feelings flow easily to a loved one, turn your attention now to someone with whom you have difficulty – it’s best not to start with the most difficult person, but perhaps someone who brings up feelings or irritation or annoyance. And seeing if you can let these words become your words as you keep this person in awareness...

May you be happy

May you be healthy

May you ride the waves of your life

May you live in peace

No matter what you are given

Notice the sensations and feelings that arise within you. And seeing if you can just allow them and let them be.

And now bringing to mind the broader community of which you are a part. You might imagine your family, your workmates, your neighbours, or fan out your attention until you include all persons and creatures on the planet. And including yourself in this offering of lovingkindness, as you let these words become your words...

May we be happy

May we be healthy

May we ride the waves of our lives

May we live in peace

No matter what we are given

Notice the sensations and feelings that arise within you. Sitting with them for a few moments until you are ready to end the practice.

Reference: Mindfulness Meditation, CD Series 3, Jon Kabat-Zinn

Guided Body Scan

This guided body scan meditation is intended to help you enter a very deep state of relaxation. It is best if you can manage to stay awake throughout the entire exercise. It's important to remember to not try to relax. This will just create tension. What you'll be doing instead is becoming aware of each passing moment and just accepting what is happening within you, seeing it as it is. Let go of the tendency of wanting things to be different from how they are now and allow things to be exactly as you find them. Just watch the activity of your mind, letting go of judgmental and critical thoughts when they arise, and just doing what the exercise guides you to do as best you can.

Lie down in a warm and private place, dressed in loose and comfortable clothing at a time when you will not be interrupted. Closing your eyes, and letting your arms lie alongside your body, your feet falling away from each other and slowly bringing your

attention to the fact that you are breathing. Not trying to control your breath in any way but simply experiencing it as the air moves in and out of your body and noticing your abdomen and feeling the sensations there as your breath comes into your body and your abdomen gently expands. Then noticing your belly deflate as the breath comes out of your body. And following the rhythmic movement of each breath ... the rising of your belly on the in-breath and on each out-breath just letting go, letting your body become heavy as it sinks a little bit deeper into relaxation. Just bringing full attention to each breath in each moment.

Now bringing your attention to your feet, becoming aware of whatever sensations are there. If you are registering a blank as you tune in, then just experiencing nothing. And as you breathe in, imagine your breath moving all the way down to your feet and then when you reach your feet, begin your out-breath and let it move all the way up your body and out your nose. So that you're breathing in from your nose and breathing out from your feet. And when you are ready, letting your feet dissolve in your mind's eye. Become aware of the shins and calf muscles and the sensations in the lower legs, not just on the surface but right down into the bones, experiencing and accepting what you feel here and breathing into it, then breathing out from it. Then letting go of your lower legs as you relax into the bed or mat. And moving now into the thighs and if there's any tension just noticing that. Breathing into and out from the thighs. Then letting your thighs dissolve and relax.

Shift your attention to your pelvis now. From one hip to the other. Noticing your buttocks in contact with the bed or the mat. And the sensations of contact and of weight. Becoming aware of the region of the genitals. And whatever sensations or lack of sensations you are experiencing. And directing your breath down into your pelvis, breathing with the entirety of your pelvis. And as you breathe out, moving the breath back up through your body and out your nose, letting your pelvis soften and release all tension as you sink even deeper into a state of relaxed awareness and stillness. Totally present in each moment. Content to just be, and to just be right here as you are right now. Direct your attention now to your lower back. And just experiencing your back as it is. Letting your breath penetrate and move into every part of your lower back on the in-breath. And on the out-breath, just letting any tension, any tightness, any holding on just flow out as much as it will. And then letting go of your lower back. And moving up into your upper back now. Just feeling the sensations in your upper back. You may even feel your ribcage, in back as well as in front, expand on the in-breath. And any tightness, fatigue or discomfort in this part of your body, just letting them dissolve and move out with the out-breath as you let go and sink even deeper into stillness and relaxation.

And now shifting your attention to your belly again and experiencing the rising and falling of your belly as you breathe. Feeling the movements of your diaphragm, that umbrella-like muscle that separates your belly from your chest. And experiencing the chest as it expands on the in-breath and deflates on the out-breath. And if you can, tune into the rhythmic beating of your heart within your chest. Feeling it if you can. As well as the lungs expanding on either side of your heart. Just experiencing your chest, your belly, as you lie here ... the muscles on the chest wall, the breasts, and the

entirety of the front of your body. And now just letting this region dissolve into relaxation as well.

Moving your attention now to your fingertips and to both hands together, just becoming aware of the sensations now in the tips of your fingers and thumbs where you may feel some pulsations from the blood flow, a dampness or a warmth or whatever you feel. Just feeling your fingers. And expand your awareness to include the palms of your hands and the backs of your hands and your wrists. And here again perhaps picking up the pulsations of the arteries in your wrists as the blood flows to and from your hands. And becoming aware as well of the forearms. And the elbows. Any and all sensations regardless of what they are. Allowing the field of your awareness to include now the upper arms. Right up to your shoulders. Just experiencing your shoulders and if there are any tensions, breathing into your shoulders and arms. And letting that tension dissolve as you breathe out. Letting go of the tension and letting go of your arms. All the way from your fingertips, right through to your shoulders. As you sink even deeper into a state of relaxed awareness. Just being present in each moment. Letting go of whatever thoughts come up or whatever impulses to move and just experiencing yourself in this moment.

And now focus your attention on your neck and throat and feel this part of your body, experiencing what it feels like perhaps when you swallow and when you breathe. And then letting it go. Letting it relax and dissolve in your mind's eye. Becoming aware of your face now. Focusing on the jaw and the chin, just experiencing them as they are.

Becoming aware of your lips and your mouth. And becoming aware of your cheeks now ... and your nose, feeling the breath as it moves in and out at the nostrils. And be aware of your eyes. And the entire region around your eyes and eyelids. And if there's any tension, letting it leave as the breath leaves. And now the forehead, letting it soften to let go of stored emotions. And the temples. And if you sense any emotion associated with the tension or feelings in your face, just being aware of that. Breathing in and letting the face dissolve into relaxation and stillness. And now become aware of your ears, and back and top of your head. Now letting your whole face and head relax. For now, just letting it be as it is. Letting it be still and neutral. Relaxed and at peace.

Now letting your breath move through your entire body in whatever way feels natural for you. Through the entire length of your body. All of your muscles in a deep state of relaxation. And your mind simply aware of this energy, of this flow of breath. Experiencing your entire body breathing. Sinking deeper and deeper into a state of stillness and deep relaxation. Allow yourself to feel whole. In touch with your essential self in a realm of silence, of stillness, of peace. And seeing that this stillness is, in itself, healing. And allowing the world to be as it is beyond your personal fears and concerns. Beyond the tendencies of your mind to want everything to be a certain way. Seeing yourself as complete right now as you are. As totally awake right now.

As the exercise ends, bring your awareness back to your body again, feeling the whole of it. You may want to wiggle your toes and fingers. Allow this calmness and this centeredness to remain with you when you move. Congratulate yourself on having taken the time to nourish yourself in this way. And remember that this state of

relaxation and clarity is accessible to you by simply paying attention to your breath in any moment, no matter what's happening in your day. Let your breath be a source of constant strength and energy for you.

Reference: Mindfulness Meditation, CD Series 1, Jon Kabat-Zinn

Awareness of Breath

This guided meditation on the breath will help you learn to simply be and to look within yourself with mindfulness and equanimity. Allow yourself to switch from the usual mode of doing to a mode of non-doing. Of simply being. Sitting in an erect posture, either on a straight back chair or on a cushion. As you allow your body to become still, bring your attention to the fact that you are breathing. And become aware of the movement of your breath as it comes into your body and as it leaves your body. Not manipulating the breath in any way or trying to change it. Simply being aware of it and of the feelings associated with breathing. And observing the breath deep down in your belly. Feeling the abdomen as it expands gently on the in-breath, and as it falls back towards your spine on the out-breath. Being totally here in each moment with each breath. Not trying to do anything, not trying to get any place, simply being with your breath. Giving full care and attention to each in-breath and to each out-breath. As they follow one after the other in a never ending cycle and flow.

You will find that from time to time your mind will wander off into thoughts. When you notice that your attention is no longer here and no longer with your breathing, and without judging yourself, bring your attention back to your breathing and ride the waves of your breathing, fully conscious of the duration of each breath from moment to moment. Every time you find your mind wandering off the breath, gently bringing it back to the present, back to the moment-to-moment observing of the flow of your breathing. Using your breath as an anchor to focus your attention, to bring you back to the present whenever you notice that your mind is becoming absorbed or reactive. Using your breath to help you tune into a state of relaxed awareness and stillness.

Now as you observe your breathing, you may find from time to time that you are becoming aware of sensations in your body. As you maintain awareness of your breathing, see if it is possible to expand the field of your awareness so that it includes a sense of your body as a whole as you sit here. Feeling your body, from head to toe, and becoming aware of all the sensations in your body. So that now you are observing not only the flow of breathing, but the sense of your body as a whole.

Being here with whatever feelings and sensations come up in any moment without judging them, without reacting to them, just being fully here, fully aware. Totally present with whatever your feelings are and with your breath and a sense of your body as a whole. And again whenever you notice your mind wandering off, just bringing it back to your breathing and your body as you sit here, not going anywhere, not doing

anything, just simply being, simply sitting. Moment to moment, being fully present, fully with yourself.

Re-establishing your awareness on the body as a whole and on the breath as it moves in and out of your body. Coming back to a sense of fullness of each in-breath, and the fullness of each out-breath. If you find yourself at any point drawn into a stream of thinking and you notice that you are no longer observing the breath, just using your breathing and the sense of your body to anchor you and stabilize you in the present.

Just being with your breathing from moment to moment, just sitting in stillness, looking for nothing and being present to all. Just as it is, just as it unfolds. Just being right here, right now. Complete. Human. Whole.

As the practice comes to an end, you might give yourself credit for having spent this time nourishing yourself in a deep way by dwelling in this state of non-doing, in this state of being. For having intentionally made time for yourself to simply be who you are. And as you move back into the world, allow the benefits of this practice to expand into every aspect of your life.

Reference: Mindfulness Meditation, CD Series 1, Jon Kabat-Zinn

Guided Mountain Meditation

Sit with a straight back, your head held erect on your neck and shoulders, allow the shoulders to fully relax. And place your hands on your knees.

Close your eyes and bring your attention to the flow of your breathing. Feeling each in-breath and each out-breath. Just observing your breathing without trying to change it or regulate it in any way. Allowing the body to be still. And sitting with a sense of dignity, a sense of resolve, a sense of being complete, whole, in this very moment, with your posture reflecting this sense of wholeness.

And as you sit here, picturing in your mind's eye as best you can the most beautiful mountain that you know or have seen or can imagine. Just holding the image and feeling of this mountain in your mind's eye, letting it gradually come into greater focus. Observing its overall shape, its lofty peak high in the sky, the large base rooted in the rock of the earth's crust, its steep or gently sloping sides. Noticing how massive it is, how solid, how unmoving, how beautiful both from afar and up close.

Perhaps your mountain has snow at the top and trees on the lower slopes. Perhaps it has one prominent peak, perhaps a series of peaks or a high plateau. Whatever its shape or appearance, just sitting and breathing with the image of this mountain. Observing it, noticing its qualities and, when you feel ready, seeing if you can bring the mountain into your own body so that the body sitting here and the mountain in your mind's eye become one. So that as you sit here you share in the massiveness and the

stillness and majesty of the mountain. You become the mountain rooted in the sitting posture, your head becomes the lofty peak, supported by the rest of the body. Your shoulders and arms the sides of the mountain. Your buttocks and legs the solid base rooted to your chair. Experiencing in your body a sense of uplift from deep within your pelvis and spine, with each breath as you continue sitting, becoming a little more a breathing mountain, unwavering in your stillness, completely what you are, beyond words and thought. A centred, rooted, unmoving presence.

Now as you sit here becoming aware of the fact that as the sun travels across the sky, the light and shadows and colours are changing virtually moment by moment. Night follows day and day follows night. A canopy of stars, the moon, then the sun. Through it all, the mountain just sits, experiencing change in each moment. Constantly changing, yet always just being itself. It remains still as the seasons flow into one another and as the weather changes, moment by moment, and day by day. Calmness abiding all change.

In summer, there's no snow on the mountain except perhaps for the very peaks. In autumn, the mountain may wear a coat of brilliant fire colours. In winter, a blanket of snow and ice. In any season, it may find itself at times enshrouded in clouds or fog or pelted by freezing rain. People may come to see the mountain and comment on how beautiful it is or on how it's not a good day to see the mountain. None of this matters to the mountain which remains at all times its essential self. Clouds may come, and clouds may go. The mountain's magnificence and beauty are not changed one bit by the way people see it or not or by the weather. Seen or unseen, in sun or clouds, broiling or frigid, day or night, it just sits, being itself. At times, visited by violent storms, buffeted by snow and rain and winds of unthinkable magnitude. Through it all, the mountain continues to sit unmoved by the weather, by what happens on the surface, by the world of appearances.

And in the same way, as we sit in meditation, we can learn to experience the mountain. We can embody the same unwavering stillness and rootedness in the face of everything that changes in our own lives over seconds, over hours, over years. In our lives and in our meditation practice, we constantly experience the changing nature of mind and body and of the outer world. We have our own periods of light and darkness, our moments of colour and our moments of drabness. Certainly, we experience storms of varying intensity and violence in the outer world and in our own minds and bodies. We endure periods of darkness and pain, as well as the moments of joy. Even our appearance changes constantly, experiencing a weather of its own.

By becoming the mountain in our meditation practice, we can link up with its strength and stability and adopt it for our own. We can use its energies to support our energy to encounter each moment with mindfulness and equanimity and clarity. It may help us to see that our thoughts and feelings, our preoccupations, our emotional storms and crises, even the things that happen to us, are very much like the weather on the mountain. We tend to take it all personally but its strongest characteristic is impersonal. The weather of our own lives is not to be ignored or denied. It is to be encountered, honoured, felt, known for what it is and held in awareness. And in holding

it in this way, we come to know a deeper silence, and stillness, and wisdom. Mountains have this to teach us and much more if we can come to listen.

Reference: Mindfulness Meditation, CD Series 2, Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindful walking

In practising walking meditation, you don't need to change the way you walk, you only need to become AWARE of it. Give yourself 10-20 minutes or longer to take a walk. Look for outdoor spaces that have less noise and fewer distractions, and where you can walk freely and with ease. If, for any reason, you can't go out, you can always use a treadmill.

Prepare by standing up, noticing your body weight being transferred to the soles of your feet. Shift your focus to the adjustments your body has to make to stay in balance.

Begin to walk at a fairly slow but normal walking pace (once your body has adjusted, you can walk at a moderate pace to increase your heart rate slightly). You don't have to walk slowly to make it a meditation: walk at a pace that's comfortable for you. The most important thing is that you are aware of the sensations you are experiencing: the beat of your heart, the pressure on your soles, the temperature of your skin etc.

As you walk, shift your attention to five different points of focus. The first is the feeling of walking in your body: the sensation of your feet touching the ground, your weight shifting, your legs moving and your arms swinging. Next, focus on your breathing. Notice how it feels to breathe in and breathe out. Notice any smells as you inhale. Keep your lungs open so you can breathe properly. Then, shift your attention to the feeling of your body in contact with the world. Notice the sensations in your face, skin, hands, and all parts of your body (are you experiencing warmth or cold, tension, pain, comfort?). Be aware of what you hear: the birds singing, the wind blowing, and the trees swaying - even less pleasant sounds such as traffic, people shouting etc. Finally, be aware of what you see around you: the buildings, houses and people. Spend between 30 seconds and one minute on each point of focus.

Next, shift your focus to an open awareness for about one to five minutes. In this state, you are no longer focusing on one state at a time, but on anything you see, feel, smell or experience in the *present* moment. If your mind wanders away from the direct moment to other thoughts like planning, fantasising or worrying, go back to your state of awareness. Enjoy the sensations you feel at the very moment.

The whole cycle takes five to ten minutes. You can repeat it several times, starting from the focus-shifting to open awareness. Then, in a few seconds, allow yourself to stop walking. Again, notice the weight on your feet as you stand up - experience yourself. Take one or two more deep breaths to end your meditation session.

Try doing this exercise as often as possible (in the morning as you head to work, or on your way home) and experience the benefits of walking meditation on your mind and body.

Resources

There are many books, websites and podcasts where you can find information about Mindfulness. There are also CDs, DVDs and online videos where you can listen to some of the world's most experienced practitioners guiding you through Mindfulness exercises.

Here is a small selection of the resources that are available.

Books

Coming To Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness (2005) by Jon Kabat-Zinn; Publisher: Piatkus. ISBN: 0 7499 2588 4.

Full Catastrophe Living (2004) by Jon Kabat-Zinn; Publisher: Piatkus. ISBN: 978-0-7499-1585-8.

Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness meditation for everyday life (1994) by Jon Kabat-Zinn; Publisher: Piatkus. ISBN 0 7499 2548 5.

Insight Meditation Kit (2001) by Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein; Publisher: Sounds True. ISBN: 1-56455-906-8 (includes a workbook, study cards and 2 CDs).

Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World (2011) by Mark Williams and Danny Penman; Publisher: Piatkus. ISBN: 978-0-7499-5308-9 (includes a CD of guided meditations).

The Miracle of Mindfulness (2008) by Thich Nhat Hanh; Publisher: Rider. ISBN 978-1-84-604106-8.

Heal Thyself (1999) by Saki Santorelli; Publisher: Three Rivers Press. ISBN: 978-0-609-80504-6

Diamond Mind (1999) by Rob Nairn; Publisher: Shambala Publications Inc. ISBN: 978-1-57062-763-7.

Recordings

Mindfulness for Beginners (2012) by Jon Kabat-Zinn (includes a CD of guided meditations, available at <http://www.soundstrue.com/store/mindfulness-for-beginners-2552.html>).

<http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/browse?th=Mindfulness> (free guided Mindfulness meditations).

Websites

<http://meditationinliverpool.org.uk/>

<http://www.be-intelligent.co.uk/>

<http://www.wellseeingconsultancy.co.uk/>

<http://bemindful.co.uk/>

<http://www.mindfulnet.org/>

<http://www.meditationresearch.co.uk/index.html>

<http://www.meditationfoundation.org/home>

<http://www.rickhanson.net/>

<http://www.drdansiegel.com/home/>

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/mindfulness.aspx>

<http://oxfordmindfulness.org/>

Online videos

Jon- Kabat-Zinn – A short Mindfulness taster (12 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5Fa50oj45s>

How Mindfulness can change your life (a short documentary):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJjyrzqkXrE>.

Jon Kabat-Zinn – Coming to Our Senses (a talk):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvXFxi2ZXT0>.

Jon Kabat-Zinn - Sitting Meditation (guided meditation):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGKe7b8NVWA>.

Jon Kabat Zinn – “Wherever You Go, There You Are” (full audiobook):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAzIsmjz5Ac>.

Jon Kabat-Zinn – Guided meditation delivered at Google’s offices:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nwwKbM_vJc.

Jon Kabat-Zinn – Cure depression and anxiety (guided meditation):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtZpy02SFk4>

Joseph Goldstein – “Big Mind” (guided meditation):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SroTzdcqEBg>.

Sharon Salzberg – Breathing (a guided meditation):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBfxnFV_myA.

Sharon Salzberg – The Power of Mindfulness (guided meditation):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d07rQsNiKog>.

Dr. Friedemann Schaub – Release anxiety (guided meditation):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75zfO5BEyzU>