

Summary of Session 4: **Recognising Aversion**

Difficult things are part and parcel of life itself. It is how we handle those things, that makes the difference between whether they rule (control) our lives or whether we can relate more lightly to them. Becoming more aware of the thoughts, feelings and body sensations evoked by events, gives us the possibility of freeing ourselves from habitual, automatic ways of reacting, so that we can, instead, mindfully respond in more skilful ways.

In general, we react to experience in one of three ways:

- with spacing out, or boredom, so that we switch out from the present moment and go off somewhere else "in our heads"
- with wanting to hold on to things - not allowing ourselves to let go of experiences that we are having right now, or wishing we were having experiences that we are not having right now.
- with wanting it to go away, being angry with it - wanting to get rid of experiences that we are having right now, or avoid experiences that may be coming along that we do not want.

As we will discuss further in class, each of these ways of reacting can cause problems, particularly the tendency to react to unpleasant feelings with aversion. For now, the main issue is to become more aware of our experience so that we can respond mindfully rather than react automatically.

Regularly practising Sitting Meditation gives us many opportunities to notice when we have drifted away from awareness of the moment, to note with a friendly interest whatever it was that took our attention away, and to gently and firmly bring our attention back to our focus of attention, reconnecting with moment-by-moment awareness. At other times of the day, deliberately using the Breathing Space whenever we notice unpleasant feelings, or a sense of "tightening" or "holding" in the body, provides an opportunity to begin to respond rather than react. We create a space in which we can begin to see things from a wider perspective, thus giving ourselves more choices about what to do next.

Staying Present

Remember to use your body as a way to awareness. It can be as simple as staying mindful of your posture. You are probably sitting as you read this. What are the sensations in your body at this moment? When you finish reading and stand, feel the movements of standing, of walking to the next activity, of how you lie down at the end of the day. Be in your body as you move, as you reach for something, as you turn. It is as simple as that.

Just patiently practise feeling what is there - and the body is always there - until it becomes second nature to know even the small movements you make. If you are reaching for something, you are doing it anyway; there is nothing extra you have to do. Simply notice the reaching. You are moving. Can you train yourself to be there, to feel it?

It is very simple. Practise again and again bringing your attention back to your body. This basic effort, which paradoxically is a relaxing back into the moment, gives us the key to expanding our awareness from times of formal meditation to living mindfully in the world. Do not underestimate the power that comes to you from feeling the simple movements of your body throughout the day.

Adapted from:
Joseph Goldstein
Insight Meditation

Mindful Walking

1. Find a place where you can walk up and down, without feeling concerned about whether people can see you. It can be inside or outside.
2. Stand at one end of your walk, with your feet parallel to each other, about 4 to 6 inches apart, and your knees “unlocked”, so that they can gently flex. Allow your arms to hang loosely by your sides, or hold your hands loosely together in front of your body. Direct your gaze, softly, straight ahead.
3. Bring the focus of your awareness to the bottoms of your feet, getting a direct sense of the physical sensations of the contact of the feet with the ground and the weight of your body transmitted through your legs and feet to the ground. You may find it helpful to flex your knees slightly a few times to get a clearer sense of the sensations in the feet and legs.
4. When you’re ready, transfer the weight of the body into the right leg, noticing the changing pattern of physical sensations in the legs and feet as the left leg “empties” and the right leg takes over the support of the rest of the body.
5. With the left leg “empty”, allow the left heel to rise slowly from the floor, noticing the sensations in the calf muscles as you do so, and continue, allowing the whole of the left foot to lift gently until only the toes are in contact with the floor. Aware of the physical sensations in the feet and legs, slowly lift the left foot, carefully move it forward, feeling the foot and leg as they move through the air, and place the heel on the floor. Allow the rest of the bottom of the left foot to make contact with the floor as you transfer the weight of the body into the left leg and foot, and of the “emptying” of the right leg and the right heel leaving the floor.
6. With the weight fully transferred to the left leg, allow the rest of the right foot to lift, and move it slowly forward, aware of the changing patterns of physical sensations in the foot and leg as you do so. Focusing your attention on the right heel as it makes contact with the ground, transfer the weight of the body into the right foot as it is placed gently on the ground, aware of the shifting pattern of physical sensations in the two legs and feet.
7. In this way, slowly move from one end of your walk to the other, aware particularly of the sensations in the bottoms of the feet and heels as they make contact with the floor, and of the sensations in the muscles of the legs as they swing forward.

Cont’d

8. At the end of your walk, turn slowly around, aware of and appreciating the complex pattern of movements through which the body changes direction, and continue walking.
9. Walk up and down in this way, being aware, as best you can, of physical sensations in the feet and legs, and of the contact of the feet with the floor. Keep our gaze directed softly ahead.
10. When you notice that the mind has wandered away from awareness of the sensations of walking, gently escort the focus of attention back to the sensations in the feet and legs, using the sensations as the feet contact the floor, in particular, as an “anchor” to reconnect with the present moment, just as you used the breath in the sitting meditation.
11. Continue to walk for 10 to 15 minutes, or longer if you wish.
12. To begin with, walk at a pace that is slower than usual to give yourself a chance to be fully aware of the sensations of walking. Once you feel comfortable walking slowly with awareness, you can experiment as well with walking at faster speeds, up to and beyond normal walking speed. If you are feeling particularly agitated, it may be helpful to begin walking fast, with awareness, and to slow down naturally as you settle.
13. As often as you can, bring the same kind of awareness that you cultivate in walking meditation to your normal, everyday experiences of walking.

Sitting Meditation: Mindfulness of Sounds and Thoughts

1. Practise mindfulness of breath and body, as described earlier, until you feel reasonably settled.
2. Allow the focus of your attention to shift from sensations in the body to hearing - bring your attention to the ears and then allow the awareness to open and expand so that there is a receptiveness to sounds as they arise, wherever they arise.
3. There is no need to go searching for sounds, or listening out for particular sounds. Instead, as best you can, simply open your mind so that it is receptive to awareness of sounds from all directions as they arise - sounds that are close, sounds that are far, sounds that are in front, behind, to the side, above or below - opening to a whole space of sound around you. Aware of obvious sounds, and of more subtle sounds. Aware of the space between sounds, aware of silence.
4. As best you can, be aware of sounds simply as sensations. When you find that you are thinking *about* the sounds, reconnect, as best you can, with direct awareness of their sensory qualities (patterns of pitch, timbre, loudness and duration), rather than their meanings or implications.
5. Whenever you notice that your awareness is no longer focused on sounds in the moment, gently acknowledge where the mind had moved to, and then retune the awareness back to sounds as they arise and pass away from one moment to the next.
6. Mindfulness of sound can be a very valuable practice on its own, as a way of expanding awareness and giving it a more open, spacious, quality, whether or not the practice is preceded by awareness of sensations or followed, as here, by awareness of thoughts.
7. When you are ready, let go of awareness of sounds, and refocus your attention so that your objects of awareness are now thoughts as events in the mind. Just as, with sounds, you focused awareness on whatever sounds arose, noticing their arising, development, and passing away, so now, as best you can, bring awareness to thoughts that arise in the mind in just the same way - noticing when thoughts arise, focusing awareness on them as they pass through the space of the mind and, eventually, disappear. There is no need to try to make thoughts come or go - just let them arise naturally, in the same way that you related to the arising and passing away of sounds.
8. Some people find it helpful to bring awareness to thoughts in the mind in the same way that they might if the thoughts were projected on the screen at the cinema. You sit, watching the screen, waiting for a thought or image to arise - when it does, you pay attention to it so long as it is there "on the screen" and then you let it go as it passes away.

Wild Geese

By Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Home practice following session 4

Audio: 'Sitting Meditation'

- **Three-minute breathing space:** Practice this 3 times a day, at set times that you have decided in advance.
- In addition, you might like to begin to experiment with *intentionally* responding to the unpleasant or stressful events in your day-to-day life. Do this by **taking a 3-minute breathing space whenever you** become aware that you are having difficulty remaining present, **feel unhappy, stressed or thrown off balance** ('responsive' breathing space').
- **Mindful Walking:** Walk mindfully on your way to work, going shopping, taking the dog for a walk. This means walking with awareness that you are walking, and where you are walking (in this case not walking so slowly that you make life uncomfortable for yourself or others!)

Complete the 'Practice Record Form' each time you do any of the practices. Make a note of anything that you notice.

Practice Record Form

Name:.....

Record on this form each time you practice. Also, make a note of anything that comes up in the practice, so that we can talk about it at the next meeting.

Day / date	Practice (Yes / No)	Comments
Date:	Sitting meditation: BS: 1 2 3 Responsive BS:	
Date:	Sitting meditation: BS: 1 2 3 Responsive BS:	
Date:	Sitting meditation: BS: 1 2 3 Responsive BS:	
Date:	Sitting meditation: BS: 1 2 3 Responsive BS:	
Date:	Sitting meditation: BS: 1 2 3 Responsive BS:	
Date:	Sitting meditation: BS: 1 2 3 Responsive BS:	