



Mindfulness Course For Health & Well Being

Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

PRACTICE RECORD & WORKBOOK

SESSION FIVE: Allowing and Letting Be

The Guest-house

*This being human is a guest-house,
every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture;*

*still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

Coleman Barks with John Moyne: *The Essential Rumi*. Harper. San Francisco. 1997

These hand-outs have been developed by Mindfulness Practitioners and Mindfulness Service User Volunteers, using a range of resources that include Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1991), Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale (2013), The Mindful Way through Depression by Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn (2007) and The Mindful Way Workbook: An 8-Week Program to Free Yourself from Depression and Emotional Distress by John Teasdale, Mark Williams and Zindel Segal (2014).

SESSION 5 MAIN PRACTICES AND DISCUSSIONS

- The king's Story
- Working with Difficulty Practice
- Mindful walking
- Breathing Space - using the "body door"
- Film: Healing from within
- The flavour of acceptance and the Guesthouse poem.

SERENITY PRAYER

*Give me the grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
courage to change the things which should be changed,
and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other*

GUIDANCE ON HOME PRACTICE

Home practice is the way to help make yourself more aware of how you live your life. Practicing daily between sessions will help improve your confidence and skills in using mindfulness.

SESSION FIVE: Allowing and Letting Be

GUIDED PRACTICE

- Practice mindful walking for 10-20 minutes.
- Alternate Working with Difficulty Practice (20 minutes) with self-guided practice using Silence with Bells CD.
- Three Minute Breathing Space - practice three times a day at the times that you have decided in advance. Try the BODY DOOR.
- Responsive Three Minute Breathing Space, practice whenever you notice unpleasant feelings. Try the BODY DOOR when working with unpleasant sensations. Record each time you do it and note any comments, observations or difficulties that may arise.

EVERYDAY MINDFULNESS:

- Reflect upon the old Celtic tale about the woman beside the well (see page 8 of practice guidance hand out). This week try to notice how unwanted experiences arise, like waves, from the seas of our lives. Bring to these unwanted experiences into your awareness. See if you can live for a few moments or minutes with things exactly as they are..... unwanted but present. Notice your bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings. Allow all of this to be a source of information rather than another occasion for self-criticism. Note on the Practice Record Form how this was experienced.



Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it.

- Helen Keller

Session 5 Working with Difficulty Practice Diary

Allowing experience means simply allowing space for whatever is going on, rather than trying to create some other state.

Every day, after your sitting meditation, jot down a few notes on your **experience**:

Day 1 (Working with Difficulty):

Where in your body did you sense (1) any difficulty and (2) any aversion, not wanting, or resistance? What, if anything, happened to the difficulty and the aversion?

Anything else?

I felt bad because I couldn't bring a difficulty to mind.

No problem - this gives you a real difficulty in the moment to work with - the unpleasant feelings about not being able to do the practice as you'd like to.

PLEASE NOTE: The difficulty you use for this practice can be something quite small - a slight sense of unease will do fine.

Day 2 (practice without guidance or use the intermittent bells track):

Where in your body did you sense (1) any difficulty and (2) any aversion, not wanting, or resistance? What, if anything, happened to the difficulty and the aversion?

Anything else?

It didn't work - the unpleasant feelings just didn't go away.

That's perfectly okay. It's helpful to remember that, odd as it may seem, we're not trying to change the feelings themselves. The intention is to soften the way they are held in awareness - to ease our relationship of aversion to them - that's what makes us suffer and gets us stuck in emotional distress. Sometimes feelings themselves change; often they don't.

Day 3 (Working with Difficulty practice):

Where in your body did you sense (1) any difficulty and (2) any aversion, not wanting, or resistance? What, if anything, happened to the difficulty and the aversion?

Anything else?

Day 4 (practice without guidance or use the intermittent bells track):

Where in your body did you sense (1) any difficulty and (2) any aversion, not wanting, or resistance? What, if anything, happened to the difficulty and the aversion?

Anything else?

A very old and familiar difficulty came up - I felt so angry with it for all the suffering it had caused - and with myself for not sorting it before.

At such times, you might find it helpful to remind yourself that kindness is the foundation of MBCT. Kindness to yourself means being gentle, perhaps saying to yourself "it's okay not to like these feelings - it's okay not to want them around." Kindness to what's arising, moment by moment, is saying, "OK, you're here. Let me allow you to be here, even though I don't like you." We move in close. We open the guest house to what we fear; we roll out the red carpet.

We disempower aversion by intentionally bringing to all experience a basic sense of kindness - allowing the experience to be, just as it is, without judging it or try to make it different. From this clear seeing we can choose what, if anything needs to change.

Day 5 (Working with Difficulty):

Where in your body did you sense (1) any difficulty and (2) any aversion, not wanting, or resistance? What, if anything, happened to the difficulty and the aversion?

Anything else?

I was thinking about my friend who has cancer. How can I say "it's okay" to that - because it isn't okay.

Saying "it's okay" isn't about the fact that your friend has cancer. The words are simply meant to help you, in that particular moment, to be with your feelings about that situation as they already are - the feelings of fear, anger, or guilt - with less struggle and aversion. You are gently encouraging yourself to feel what is already present, instead of fighting it - that's what "okay" means here

Allowing/letting be frees us from the contraction of aversion. It creates a space where the difficult can be held more kindly, with less struggle. Very often, letting be will not immediately remove the original unpleasant feeling.

Day 6 (practice without guidance or use the intermittent bells track):

Where in your body did you sense (1) any difficulty and (2) any aversion, not wanting, or resistance? What, if anything, happened to the difficulty and the aversion?

Anything else?

ALLOWING THINGS TO BE

THEME: *Relating differently to unpleasant feelings and sensations - 'allowing' things to be they already are. We can disempower aversion by intentionally bringing to all experience, a sense of "allowing" it to be, just as it is, without judging it or trying to make it different. Such an attitude of allowing embodies a basic attitude of kindness to experience. From this clear seeing we can choose what, if anything, needs to change.*

The basic guideline for this week's practice is to be mindful of whatever predominates in our moment-by-moment experience. So, if the mind is repeatedly drawn to particular thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations, we deliberately take gentle, friendly awareness to that place. That is the first step.

The second step is to observe how we are relating to whatever is arising. Often we can be with an arising thought, feeling, or bodily sensation but in a non-accepting, reactive way. If we like it we try hold onto it; we become attached. If it is painful, unpleasant, or uncomfortable, we try to push it away out of fear, irritation or annoyance. Both these responses are the opposite of acceptance.

The easiest way to relax is to stop trying to make things different. Allowing experience means simply allowing space for whatever is going on, rather than trying to create some other state. Through letting it be, we settle into awareness of what is real. We simply observe whatever is already present. This is the way to relate to experiences that have a strong pull on our attention.

For example, if your awareness keeps being pulled away from the breath (or any focus of attention) to body sensations of physical discomfort, or emotions or thoughts, the first step is to be fully aware of those physical sensations or emotions; focus your awareness in the area of the body where those sensations are strongest. Breath can help you do this: just as in the Body Scan you can take gentle, friendly awareness to that part of the body by "breathing into" it and "breathing out" from it.

Once your attention is on bodily sensations and the item is in your awareness, say to yourself "It's okay. Whatever it is, it's okay. Let me feel it". Then just stay with awareness of these bodily sensations or emotions or thoughts and your relationship to them, breathing with them, allowing then, letting it be. It may help to repeat "Whatever it is it's okay. Let me feel it." using each out-breath to soften and open to the sensations.

Allowing does not mean resignation. Bringing a sense of allowing to our experience helps us become fully aware of difficulties as a vital first step and then, if appropriate, to respond skilfully rather than react in a knee jerk fashion by automatically running some of our old (often unhelpful) strategies for dealing with difficulties.

THE WOMAN BESIDE THE WELL

THERE IS AN OLD CELTIC TALE about the five sons of the Irish king Eochaid. As the story goes, the sons were out hunting and got lost. Unable to find a way out of the wood, they became increasingly thirsty. Then, one by one, each of them went off seeking water. Fergus was the first of the sons to go. After some time he spotted a well and made his way to it, only to find an old woman guarding the source of refreshment. Joseph Campbell, in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, describes this woman:

Blacker than coal every joint and segment of her was, from crown to ground; comparable to a wild horse's tail the grey wiry mass of hair that pierced her scalp's upper surface; with her sickle of greenish looking tusk that was in her head, and curled till it touched her ear, she could lop the verdant branch of an oak in full bearing; blackened and smoke-bleared eyes she had; nose awry, wide-nostrilled; a wrinkled and freckled belly, variously unwholesome; warped crooked shins, garnished with massive ankles and a pair of capacious shovels; knotty knees she had and livid nails.

Standing before her, Fergus only commented, "That's the way it is, is it?" The horrific lady responded, "That's the very way!". He then asked her if she was indeed guarding the well. "I am" was all she said. He, in turn, asked if he might take away some water, and she obliged him. But first, there was an agreement to be made. To receive the water - the sustenance of the well - Fergus was required to kiss her. He refused outright, vowing in the strongest of terms that he would rather die of thirst than give the lady a kiss, and he turned away. One after another, three more brothers followed the same path as Fergus. Each found the well. Each refused to kiss the woman standing guard. Each vowed to die rather than to make contact with the hideous presence before him. Each turned away.

Finally, the fifth brother, the one called Niall, took up the quest. He found the well, met the lady, and upon hearing the terms of the bargain, agreed without hesitation not only to kiss her but also to embrace her. When he had willingly done so, right before his eyes the guardian of the well transformed from a distorted figure to a beautiful woman. As the story goes, Niall, dazzled beyond belief, described the woman before him as "a galaxy of charms." To which her only reply was, "That is true indeed." When asked who she was, she revealed herself: "King of Tara! I am Royal Rule."

Standing in her fullness and true nature, she bid Niall take his water and go back to his brothers. Before he departed, she bestowed on him a blessing for himself and his children, that they should be graced with the kingdom and the highest of power. The great lady went on to say that although Niall first saw her as ugly and distorted, he, unlike his brothers, was guided by his deep and gentle heart, offering her loving-kindness rather than revulsion. This alone, she proclaimed, is the "royal rule": To meet the unwanted with kindness and love rather than harsh rejection or abuse.

This story offers us much guidance on our journey toward mindful awareness. It asks us to see what is before us. To make deep contact with the unwanted, opening our hearts at our own pace

and proceeding with gentleness rather than with the intention to deny, reject, or destroy. As the story suggests, proceeding in any other manner will keep us thirsty, held fast by concepts and ideas, views and opinions, unable to step out into a larger domain of being. There is much grief and sadness connected with living our lives in such a manner. Take note. The other brothers were not cursed, demeaned, or punished for their unwillingness to "kiss" the unwanted. Instead, they simply remained thirsty. Parched. Hard and dry. Unwilling to embrace the guardian of the well, to face, join, and work with the unwanted within themselves, they received no sustenance.

There is more than enough water for all of us. The story suggests to us a way to proceed, a way to approach our lives, without self-loathing or paralysing fear. At first, entering the realm of our broken or unwanted places is terrifying. Later on, we may begin to discover, through our willingness to proceed with care, an inexhaustible source of life.

EVERYDAY PRACTICE GUIDANCE IN LEARNING TO EMBRACE THE UNWANTED

Every day there are hundreds of unwanted moments arising like waves from the undifferentiated sea of our lives. Over the course of the next week, attempt to begin working deliberately with this frothy wetness guised in the arrival of the unwished-for. What might happen if, even for a few seconds, we ceased the frantic activity, the denial, self-recrimination, or rejection usually accompanying such moments? See if you can live for a few moments or minutes with things exactly as they are. Notice sensations roiling within your body while allowing yourself to attend to conditioned gesture patterns as they manifest, or the torrent of thoughts and emotions cascading forth when you are confronted face to face with the undesired. Allowing all of this to be a source of information rather than another occasion for self-criticism is, much like the attitude and actions of Niall in the story, receiving and embracing the unwanted. When you commit yourself to cultivating such an inner stance, there's no telling what might happen.



Adapted from *Heal Thy Self, Lessons in Mindfulness in Medicine* by Saki Santorelli.

BARRIERS TO ALLOWING THINGS TO BE AS THEY ALREADY ARE...

When beginning to practice mindfulness, it can be helpful to understand common barriers or blocks that may interfere with developing our moment-to-moment awareness. These barriers or blocks are *grasping*, *aversion*, *weariness*, *agitation*, and *doubt*.

These barriers may crop up at any time, and if we can become more skilful in bringing mindful awareness to these barriers to allowing/letting be, then we can identify when they occur, name them ("Ah, There I go clinging"; "Oh yes, there is my doubt"), and in the recognising and bringing our mindful awareness to these things, the impact of the barrier begins to subside. It can often be quite unhelpful to push away or avoid our barriers to allowing/letting be; rather, we want to accept their existence and work with them in skilful ways.

Try this experiment.... Start with the assumption that you can be free from suffering, in this very moment, right here, right now. Allow a sense of well being to develop in the background of your mindfulness practice. Then, when there's "disturbance in the field of your awareness," asking yourself which of the following barriers might be occurring. Bring to that moment a sense of mindful curiosity and interest to the presence of these barriers, rather than trying to fight it off, drive it out or avoid it, learning to skilfully acknowledge, accept and let go of these barriers to allowing and letting be as they arise in the mind.

GRASPING

We instinctively *grasp* for pleasure and for things that we hope will give us pleasure. If we don't get what we want, we may feel disappointed. For example, imagine how you would feel if your favourite musician were playing in a nearby town, only to find out that the tickets were already sold out. A desire that didn't even exist before leaves you feeling disappointed.

We also *cling* to what we enjoy and feel sad when it ends. If you had a nice bowl of ice cream, you might have wanted to enjoy the taste forever and felt disappointed when you finished it.

We may also be wary of becoming too attached to the good feelings that may arise during our mindfulness practice. If you find yourself clinging to positive experiences like feeling calm, relaxed or contentment, your practice may become more frustrating than uplifting. Good feelings will arise and disappear as night follows day.

AVERSION

Learning mindfulness skills enables us to turn toward, acknowledge and accept the presence of the feelings of aversion. Other words for aversion are "avoidance," "resistance," "entanglement," "disgust and "resentment." Aversion is what we instinctively feel toward disturbing events, thoughts or feelings. We can experience aversion toward an *internal state* like panic, or toward an *external object*, like an open wound or spoiled food: toward *other people* in the form of anger or fear; or toward *ourselves*.

When aversion is directed towards ourselves, we may lose the ability to comfort and forgive ourselves for our mistakes. Sharon Salzberg suggests that we might perhaps look at our aversion from the perspective of a Martian who's seen it for the first time. "What is this?!" Curiosity is the first stage toward overcoming aversion.

WEARINESS

Weariness or “boredom” is perhaps noticeable as a lack of interest in the practice of mindful awareness. The opposite of weariness is the sense of delight that a child feels when encountering a fascinating object for the first time.

It helps to remember *why* you started to practice. The reason probably is to feel better!

When you sit, just SIT.

When discomfort arises, meet it with awareness, allowing it into the moment, then letting it go.

Consider yourself like a captain on rough seas, always needing to make a course correction. Stay alert to the conditions that arise in each successive moment and make the most of them. You'll more likely get bored and have a rougher ride if you switch to autopilot.

AGITATION

Agitation may also be recognised as “restlessness”, “remorse,” or “anxiety.” It refers to dissatisfaction with the way things are and the need to move on ... somewhere, anywhere. Some have referred to agitation as a tyrannical boss who's never satisfied. Regret over the past or worry about the future keeps the mindfulness student perpetually agitated.

A strategy for reducing restlessness is to appreciate the present moment. Ajahn Brahmavamso, a meditation teacher, said “The fastest progress...is achieved by those who are content with the stage they are on now. It is the deepening of that contentment that ripens into the next stage”.

How do we experience contentment in the present moment when the present moment doesn't look good? Rather than daydreaming about the future, we can rearrange ourselves in the present moment by labelling exactly what we are feeling - “urgency,” “restlessness,” “anxiety,”- and softening into the physical experience of agitation.

DOUBT

Doubt, refers to scepticism about the benefits of mindfulness practice or of one's ability to succeed at it. Much time and energies are wasted in doubt.

The questions that arise for most students of mindfulness practice may be tinged with doubt. For example, “Will I *really* make progress if I just accept what I'm feeling in the present moment.”

When beginning to practice mindfulness, feeling doubt might be compared to being lost in the desert. Every student will get lost from time to time in particulars of his or her experience and will benefit from persevering until something reveals the bigger picture.

Practice records may help participants to document progress. To notice or recall moments of unexpected happiness or experience practice when doubt is less of a hindrance.

Adapted from Christopher K. Germer (2009).
The Mindful Path to Self Compassion: Freeing
yourself for destructive thoughts and emotions.
New York: Guilford Press.



MINDFUL WALKING

In mindful walking practice, the primary object of attention is the process of walking itself. In other words, to sharpen awareness and train the mind to concentrate, you pay close attention to the physical act of walking. Thus the object is more obvious and tangible than in more formal mindfulness practices, such as focusing on the breath, often used in sitting practices. Focusing the mind on this more obvious object helps us to better manage two extremes that are sometimes experienced during mindfulness practice.

First, you are less likely to fall into a state of dullness or sleepiness because you are physically moving with your eyes open. Sometimes, mindful walking can be a useful practice for those who experience difficulties with falling asleep during body scan practice.

The other extreme is having too much energy, which typically results in feelings of tension or restlessness. Because walking meditation is usually not practiced with the same intensity and concentration as a sitting practice, there is less chance of creating tension by using excessive force in an effort to focus the mind. Walking is generally a pleasant and relaxing experience for both mind and body, and therefore an excellent way to release stress or restless energy.

Finally, practicing mindful walking greatly facilitates the development of mindfulness in ordinary daily life. If you can learn to establish awareness during mindful walking - when you are physically moving with your eyes open - then it may become easier to arouse that same wakeful quality during other activities, such as eating, washing dishes, or driving. It may also become easier for you to arouse mindfulness while walking to a bus stop, through the park, or during any other time. Your mindfulness practice will begin to permeate your entire life.

GUIDANCE FOR PRACTICING MINDFUL WALKING

Mindful Walking is best practiced on a designated path rather than casually walking about. The path should be straight, level, and have a reasonably smooth surface. It is also helpful if the path has a beginning and an end. You practice this walking meditation by walking between these two points, being attentive and mindful of each step. Although the length of the path is primarily determined by individual preference and space available, a path in the range of 8 to 15 metres is typical. Experiment with paths of different lengths and find one most suitable for your practice.

Choosing a path with a beginning and an end is important because these two points provide structure for the meditation and foster sharper awareness. Each time you come to the end of the path, you are automatically reminded to check to see whether the attention is indeed with each step or whether the mind has wandered. In this way, you can re-establish focus more quickly and thus sustain awareness.

Choose an appropriate time and decide how long to meditate; for beginners 10 to 30 minutes may be suitable. The walking path can be either inside or outside, depending upon your preference and the area available. However, quiet surroundings are best, as you won't be distracted by external activity or feel self-conscious while pacing up and down along the same path. Also, whenever possible, it is better to practice in bare feet, although this is not essential.

Having established these conditions, stand at one end of the path and hold your hands gently together in front of your body. The eyes remain open, gazing down along the path about two yards ahead. The intention is not to be looking at anything in particular but simply to see that you remain on the path and know when to turn around.

You should now try to centre yourself by putting aside all concern for the past and future. In order to calm the mind and establish awareness in the present, let go of preoccupations with work, home, and relationships, and bring the attention to the body.

The idea of mindful walking practice is simply to walk at a slow, relaxed pace, being fully aware of each step until you reach the end of the path you are walking on. Begin with the right foot. While taking that step, pay careful attention to the movement of the foot as it is initially raised off the ground, moved through the air, and placed on the ground again. Then take a step with your left foot, being equally attentive. Continue walking in this mindful and methodical way until you have reached the end of the chosen path.

If while walking you become aware that your mind has wandered away from the step, clearly note the distraction and gently, but firmly, bring your attention back to the step. It is often helpful to make a mental note of "right" and "left" with each corresponding step, as this keeps the mind more involved with the act of walking.

When you arrive at the end of the path, stop for a moment and check to see what the mind is doing. Is it being attentive? If necessary, re-establish awareness. Then turn and walk back to the other end in a similar fashion, remaining mindful and alert. Continue to pace up and down for the duration of the meditation period, gently making an effort to sustain awareness and focus attention on the process of walking.

Mindful Walking may be practiced in a number of ways that require different degrees of concentration. While walking at a normal pace is suitable for developing awareness, very slow walking is more effective for refined concentration. You may want to experiment with walking at slightly different speeds until you find a pace most suitable for you.

As with any mindfulness practice, skill in mindful walking only comes from regular practice and patient effort, but the benefits are well worth it.

Adapted from John Cianciosi (Step at a time.)
John Cianciosi was a Buddhist monk for more than 20 years and a disciple of the late Ajahn Chah. He is now a lay teacher in the United States and the author of *The Meditative Path: A Gentle Way to Awareness, Concentration and Serenity* (Quest Books, 2001).



USING THE BREATHING SPACE

Responsive to Unpleasant Experiences

For use when troubled by thoughts & feelings

STEP 1. BECOMING AWARE

Observe - bring the focus of awareness to your inner experience and notice what is happening in your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations.

DESCRIBE, ACKNOWLEDGE, IDENTIFY - put experiences into words, for example saying in your mind "A feeling of anger is arising" or "Self-critical thoughts are here". Turning toward any sense of emotional discomfort or unpleasant feelings, acknowledging their presence. Perhaps quickly scanning the body to pick up any sensations of tightness or bracing.

STEP 2. GATHERING

Gently redirect your full attention to focus on the breath. Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out. Try noting 'at the back of your mind': "Breathing in ... Breathing out" or counting: "Inhaling, one ... exhaling one; ... inhaling two ..." etc..

Using the breathing to anchor yourself in the present.

STEP 3. EXPANDING

Allow your attention to expand to the whole body - especially to any sense of discomfort, tension, or resistance. If these sensations are there, then, take your awareness there by "breathing into them" on the in-breath. Then, breathe out from those sensations, softening and opening with the out-breath. Say to yourself on the out-breath, "It's okay, whatever it is, it's okay; let me feel it".

Become aware of and adjust posture and facial expression. As best you can, bring this expanded awareness to the next moments of your day.

BODY DOOR: Dwell in the body and notice the tightening and bracing in the body when upsetting events occur, tune in to the body sensations, breathe with and through the sensations, particularly if they are unpleasant and aversive, maintaining moment to moment awareness.

The breathing space provides a way to step out of Automatic Pilot mode and reconnect with the present moment.

The key skill in using Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is to maintain awareness in the moment.