

EVERYDAY MEDITATION

Physical Sensations in the Body

This is what is wrong; we, only we, the humans, can retreat from ourselves and
not be
altogether here.

We can be part full, only part, and not die. We can be in and out of here, now,
at once, and not die. The little song, the little river, has banks. We can pull up
and sit on the banks. We can pull back
from the being of our bodies, we can live in a
portion of them, we can be absent, no one can tell.

Excerpt from “Other” by Jorie Graham,
from *Overlord* © Harper Collins, 2005.

IMPORTANT TERMS

The goal of mindfulness practice is to precisely track what you’re experiencing and to let things come and go with detachment. To create a structure for that to occur, we’ll use noting and labeling.

Noting

To note something means to notice it and then focus on it intently (but gently) for a few seconds.

Noting consists of two parts:

- (1) an initial noticing which takes place in a fraction of a second
- (2) a period of intently yet gently focusing on what you noticed

Labeling

You have the option of accompanying the noting with labeling. To label means to think or say a word or phrase that describes what you are noting. For breath awareness, the labels could be “in” for the inhale and “out” for the exhale.

Pacing

Note and label at a leisurely pace, allowing about five to ten seconds between each label. This pace allows you to soak in and savor each experience as you note it. It also establishes a rhythm and feedback loop to help you become aware when your mind has wandered off.

Tone

When you speak the labels out loud, use a low, gentle, matter-of-fact tone of voice. When you think the labels, create the same tone in your mental voice. The tone of voice helps put you into a deeper state of focus and concentration.

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THE MATHEMATICS OF MINDFULNESS

Suffering = Pain x Resistance

A person's subjective sense of suffering is directly proportional to the intensity of discomfort present and the degree to which the natural flow of that discomfort is impeded. Conversely, a person's subjective sense of suffering is inversely proportional to the degree to which one is able to monitor that discomfort with specificity.

In other words:

- When resistance goes up, suffering tends to increase.
- When mindfulness goes up, suffering tends to decrease.

Satisfaction = Pleasure ÷ Grasping

A person's subjective sense of satisfaction is inversely proportional to the degree to which the pleasure is subject to grasping. Conversely, A person's subjective sense of satisfaction is directly proportional to the intensity of pleasure present and the degree to which one can monitor that pleasure with specificity.

In other words:

- When grasping goes up, satisfaction tends to decrease.
- When mindfulness goes up, satisfaction tends to increase.

Mindfulness x Equanimity = Insight + Catharsis

When mindfulness and equanimity are applied to any aspect of sensory experience, the result is insight and catharsis.

Insight refers to various aspects related to understanding how your sense of a self is being generated moment by moment. Your ability to clearly notice the components of sensory experience grows as you develop concentration. This leads to a more direct awareness that the nature of everything in and around us is to constantly change.

Catharsis refers to an internal cleaning out that occurs when we pay attention without interfering. It does not necessarily include the external experience of catharsis we often take as evidence of personal change (intense surface displays of emotion). When we practice refraining from the constant pushing and grasping on our sensory experiences, they begin to take on a quality analogous to digestion or getting a massage.

EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Free Floating Awareness in the Body (Shinzen Young)

1. **Settle in.** The first thing to observe when you begin a formal meditation practice is the sense of your body physically settling into your posture. Lengthen the spine as you inhale, and observe any sensations associated with relaxation as you exhale. Take a couple of minutes to enjoy this settling. Establish a balance between a state of alertness and repose.
2. **Chose a domain.** The sensory domains include physical-type sensations in the body, emotional-type sensations in the body, mental images, and internal conversations.

In this technique we will be focusing on physical sensations in the body.

3. **Position your attention.** Position your attention over your whole body: two arms, two legs, the head, and torso all connected. Take a minute to feel satisfied that you are well positioned in this domain.
4. **Start noting.** Let your attention float to a location within your body. Use a simple label to describe the location. Soak you attention into the location for a few seconds and then allow your awareness to circulate to another area with you body.

The labels in this technique will be names parts (hand, finger, foot, face, etc.) and regions (legs, torso, upper body, etc.) of the body.

Remember that labels are used as a tool to focus the attention. They don't need to be precise for this exercise. There are no incorrect labels. The idea is to select an area of the body and soak your attention there for a few seconds. The effect of the exercise is to broaden and refine your awareness of physical sensations within the body.

5. **Establish a rhythm.** Focus on each location for a few seconds, letting your attention soak into it to the best of your ability. After a few seconds, note again, either the same location or a different one.
6. **What doesn't matter?** It doesn't matter whether you are always noting the same places or continually circulating around to different locations within the body. If you feel like you're getting stuck in one place (such as the knee), you can divide that location into smaller sections within it (the left, right, top, bottom of the knee) or a broader area (the whole leg).
7. **What does matter?** When you notice a location, bring equanimity to it and let your awareness soak into it.

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Exercise 2: Noting Physical Sensations in the Body (Shinzen Young)

1. **Settle in.** The first thing to observe when you begin a formal meditation practice is the sense of your body physically settling into your posture. Lengthen the spine as you inhale, and observe any sensations associated with relaxation as you exhale. Take a couple of minutes to enjoy this. Establish a balance between a state of alertness and repose.
2. **Chose a domain.** The sensory domains include physical-type sensations in the body, emotional-type sensations in the body, mental images, and internal conversations.

In this technique we will be focusing on physical-type sensations in the body. We will refer to this area as Touch Space. Touch Space is the three-dimensional volume of the body when experienced from the perspective of detecting the presence or absence of touch activity.

3. **Position your attention.** Position your attention in Touch Space. Place your attention over your whole body: two arms, two legs, the head, and torso all connected. Take a minute to feel satisfied that you are well positioned in this domain.
4. **Start noting.** The basic states to note in Touch Space are touch activity (*Touch*) and restful aspects of touch (*Relax*).

Touch

Touch activity is most of what goes on most of the time in your body. Some examples are:

- The touch of clothes, chair, cushion, air, etc.
- Itches, pressures, aches, and pains
- Muscles working
- Ordinary breath and pulse sensation
- Hot and cold
- Sensations associated with sleepiness and fatigue
- Full bladder, gas, empty stomach

The label for activity in Touch Space is *Touch*.

Relax

Any perception of body repose or muscle relaxation. Relaxation is the restful aspect of Touch Space. Relaxation may occur in just one location, or shift around from place to place, or affect your whole body at once.

The label for restful aspects of Touch Space is *Relax*.

5. **Establish a rhythm.** Focus on that state for a few seconds, letting your attention soak into it to the best of your ability. After a few seconds, note again, either the same state or a different one.
6. **What doesn't matter?** It doesn't matter whether you are always noting the same states or continually circulating around to different locations within the body. It doesn't matter whether you mostly note activity or mostly note restful aspects or cover them both relatively equally.
7. **What does matter?** Stay in Touch Space. If you get pulled into Feel, Image, Talk, Sight, or Sound Space, gently return to Touch Space.

When you note a restful state, let it pull you into equanimity and consistently concentrate on that flavor of rest.

When you notice an active state, bring equanimity to it and let your awareness soak into it.

Exercise 3: Friendship Meditation (from Sharon Salzberg)

Feeling gratitude towards the teacher and mentors who have enriched our lives help create a momentum to foster a greater ability to extend positive feelings more broadly.

May my teachers/mentors be safe.
May my teachers/mentors be happy.
May my teachers/mentors be healthy.
May my teachers/mentors find some ease in my life as it is.

HOMEWORK

1. Ten to fifteen minutes of formal practice each day (breath or body awareness).
2. Give one activity each day your full attention. Make it something simple and non-verbal such brushing your teeth, taking a shower, eating a snack, walking around the block, or starting the car.
3. STOP* when walking through doors.
 - Stop whatever you're doing. Pause.
 - Take a slow, aware scan of your body.
 - Observe the physical sensations of opening the door (the temperature and texture of the handle or knob, the weight of the door) as well of the sensations of walking through it
 - Proceed. Continue with whatever you were doing.

*From *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction*

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