**Week 2 - Handout**

“The present is the only time that any of you have to be alive…to know anything…to perceive…to learn…to act…to change…to heal”

Jon Kabbat Zinn, Full catastrophe Living”, Piatkus,London, 1996

Our aim on this course is to learn to be more aware more often. A powerful influence taking us away from being fully present in each moment, is our automatic tendency to judge our experience. We can find it not quite right in some way - not what should be happening, not good enough, not what we expected or wanted. These judgements can lead on to sequences of thought about blame, or what needs to be changed, or how things could or should be different. Often these thoughts will take us, quite automatically, down some fairly well worn paths in our minds. In this way we may loose awareness of the moment, and also lose the freedom to choose what, if any, action needs to be taken.

We regain our freedom if, as a first step, we simply acknowledge the actuality of the situation we find ourselves in, without being immediately hooked into automatic tendencies to judge, fix, or want things to be other than they are. The body scan exercise provides an opportunity to simply practise of being aware of what our experience in the moment is, whatever it is. We can also be mindful, and apply the same skills of awareness, during any moment or activity.

**Coming to Our Senses**

Mindfulness is about paying attention - deliberately - and without judgement, as best you can, to what is going on in your body and your mind and the world around you. What can I sense?

* What do I see?
* What can I hear?
* What do I feel physically?
* What do I taste?
* What do I smell?
* What are my emotions in this moment?
* What is my thinking like? - eg - fast, slow, random, logical, swirling, scattered - step back to take perspective…

**Mindful Movement**

This is simply a practice where we apply awareness (as above), moment by moment, to activities where we are moving the body. On this course I will teach you some simple Qi Gong movements.

Many of us are reluctant to exercise because it involves discomfort or strain, or requires special equipment or going to a special place to do it. The simple movements from Shibashi Qi Gong which are used on this course, should be possible for everybody to enjoy, and can easily be done in the home: they are meant to be done in as relaxed way as possible, without straining the body. You can access further Qi Gong teaching from the DHI facebook page, where there are a number of Qi Gong workshops with myself.

In practicing Qi Gong, you are advised to practice in the same way that you do with other mindful practices - maintaining moment to moment awareness, just allowing yourself to be as you are, and letting go of any judging of yourself. Move slowly and consciously - honouring your body and the messages it gives you about when to stop and when to avoid doing a particular movement.

The easiest way to relax is to stop trying to make things different. Struggle comes from not accepting what is present.

**Focusing on Breathing**

Bringing awareness to your breath can be used to anchor your awareness to the present moment, it’s rhythm is always there to be experienced, and is core to the sense of being alive.

Bringing awareness to breath, can often have the effect of slowing and deepening it, and this will also slow the heart beat, the whole body system slows, including the thinking. However, the best approach is to just notice what the breath is like, let it unfold naturally. Everybody’s experience is different, for some who have experienced breathing difficulties, focusing on the breath may give rising to uncomfortable thoughts and emotions - if this is what happens for you, you can instead use awareness of the sensations In your feet as a present moment anchor.

The Breath

Breath is life. You could think of the breath as being like a thread or a chain that links and connect alls the events of you life from birth, the beginning, to death, the end. The breath is always there every moment, moving itself like a river.

Have you ever noticed how the breath changes with our moods - short and shallow when we’re tense or angry, faster when we’re excited , slow and full when we’re happy, and almost disappearing when we’re afraid. It’s there with us all the time. It can be used as a tool, like an anchor, to bring stability to the body and mind when we deliberately choose to become aware of it. We can tune into it at any moment during everyday life.

Mostly we’re not in touch with our breathing - it’s just there, forgotten. So one of the first things we do in mindfulness is to get in touch with it. We notice how the breath changes with our moods, our thoughts, our body movements. We don’t have to control it the breath. Just notice it and get to know it, like a friend. All that is necessary is to observe, watch, and feel the breath with a sense of interest in a relaxed manner.

With practice we become more aware of our breathing. We can use it to direct our awareness to different aspects of our lives. For example, to relax tense muscles, or focus on a situation that requires attention. Breath can also be used to deal with pain, anger, relationships or the stress of daily life.

Karen Ryder, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Instructor, University of Massachusetts Medical Centre

**Mindfulness of Breathing Guidelines**

* You can sit or lay for this practice: though sitting is usually recommended as it creates a sense of alertness, and prevents you from drifting to sleep - but where is is hard to be comfortable sitting, laying down is recommended. Please see guidelines for sitting below.
* Sit in a comfortable posture, with your spine erect, and let the shoulders drop. It helps to adopt an erect dignified posture, with your head, neck and back aligned vertically - this is the physical counterpart of the inner attitudes of self-reliance, self-acceptance, patience, and alert attention we are cultivating. It can also help to drop the chin (just a touch), so that the nape of the neck is open without cramping the throat area. You can be sitting in a chair or on the floor, When using a chair, choose one that has a straight back and where your feet are flat on the floor - sit away from the back of the chair so that your back is self-supporting. If -you choose the floor, use a firm thick cushion which raise your sitting bones up 3-6”, legs folded in front of you, but not resting on each other. It is quite commen for people to start to slump during the practice, when you notice this just ease yourself kindly back into an erect posture, bringing awareness to how the body feels.
* Close you eyes if it feels comfortable to do so
* Every time that you notice that your mind has wandered off the breath, softly note what it was that took you away and then gently escort your attention back to your belly, and the feeling of the breath coming in and out. If your mind wanders from the breath a thousand times, then your “job” is simply to bring it back to the breath every time, no matter what is becomes preoccupied with. It is just as valuable to become aware that your mind has wandered and to bring it back to the breath, as it is to remain aware of the breath.

***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

* Listen to the Awareness of Breath mindful practice, everyday
* Complete the pleasant/unpleasant events diary everyday (I would advise bringing awareness to things which are slightly unpleasant eg getting bitten by an insect or spilling food, not traumatic or upsetting events)
* Do the 9 dots exercise below

The Nine Dots Exercise

Draw four straight lines without lifting your pen or retracing any lines to connect all nine dots.

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