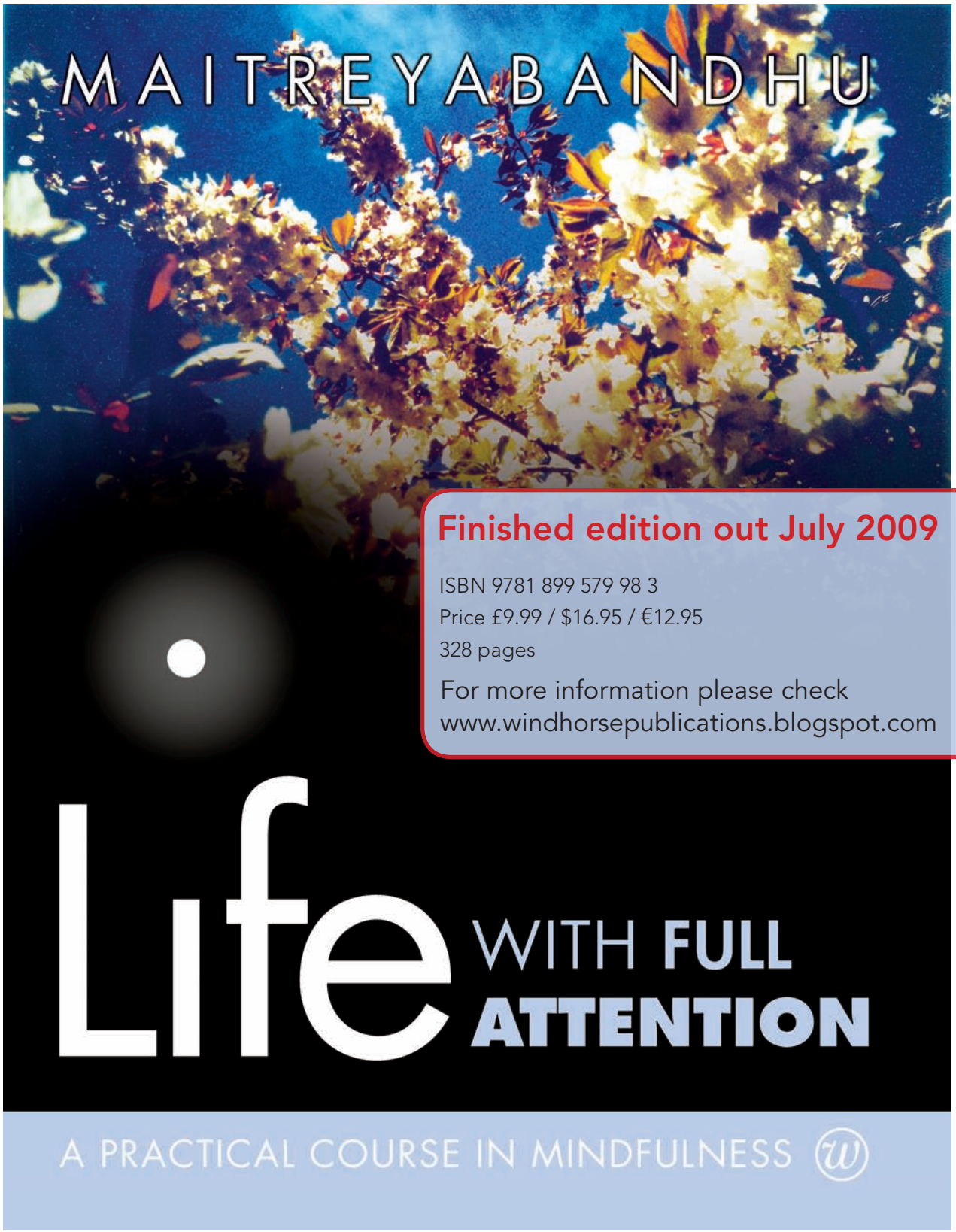

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Contents

Introduction

Seeing the blossom

I REMEMBER AN INTERVIEW with the television dramatist Dennis Potter. It was conducted when the writer was dying of cancer, when he knew he only had a few weeks to live. It is a remarkable interview: Potter sitting in his grey suit, sipping champagne, smoking ten to the dozen, taking swigs of liquid morphine now and then to ease the pain. He talked about plum blossom in his garden.

'Last week, looking at it through the window as I'm writing, I see it is the whitest, frothiest, blossomest blossom that there ever could be.' He continues, 'The nowness of everything is absolutely wondrous, and if only people could see that... there's no way of telling you, you have to experience it, but the glory of it...'

The interview is a testimony to what life could be like if only we were aware of death, if only we knew how brief and transient life is. As Dennis Potter puts it, 'The fact is, if you see the present tense, boy, do you see it! And boy, can you celebrate it!' When we set out on the path of full attention we are trying to see the 'blossomest blossom', we are trying to live with the kind of present-tense vividness that Dennis Potter celebrates in his last TV interview. But it's difficult to do that with so many things competing for our attention. Modern life is extremely complicated, especially if you live in the city. Most people have to juggle full-time work, family, and social life all at the same time. There are always emails to catch up on, parking spaces to find, food shopping to buy, mobile calls to make, heating bills to pay, vacuuming to do. There's your daughter to take to the swings, the car to go to the garage, your suit to be dropped off at the drycleaner's. All this complexity forces us to the surface of ourselves. We don't have the time to experience things deeply. Our mind is set on rush, on multi-task.

If we want to experience life more deeply – if we want to see the 'blossomest blossom' – we need to look at how we live. We want 'life satisfaction' but what we get, in the West at least, is choice. We have a strong tendency to believe that more choice leads to more happiness. When you travel business class, for instance, one of the main things the airline offers, apart from more leg room, is more choice. So we tend to want more money, so we can have more choice, so we can be happier. But this can have negative consequences. We easily become paralysed by too

much choice, and we often choose badly. We choose things that don't in the long term (or even in the short term) make us happy – cigarettes, fizzy drinks, junk TV. And of course choosing which school to send our children to, what filling to have in our bagel, which airline offers the cheapest deal, takes time. The more choices we have the longer we have to spend making those choices. We don't get that time back. Worse still: the fact that there is so much choice undermines the satisfaction we feel with the choices we make. A crowd of choices presses in on our life; one consequence of this is that it is more and more difficult to give any of those choices full attention.

Of course, one of the main reasons we find it hard to live in present-tense awareness is because we're in no fit state to do so. We can't enjoy things if we are hyped up, stressed out, exhausted, or in a bad temper. To enjoy something we need an enjoyable object – the sight of plum blossom, a walk in the country – and we need a subject capable of experiencing enjoyment. In other words, we need to be in a state of mind that is receptive enough, clear enough, calm enough, to enjoy things. Simply surrounding ourselves with pleasurable objects won't do it. We need to be in a good state of mind.

It's strange, when we come to think about it, that of all the things we learn – from algebra to circle dancing – so little is said about the mind and how we experience things. We miss the one thing that absolutely determines whether the holiday in Majorca is enjoyable, the new IT job rewarding. Our state of mind filters everything. We cannot make the most of life if we are distracted by trivialities, rehearsing arguments in our head, or getting irate about how long it takes to make an online booking. If we want to live well, we need to attend to the mind. Of course, we don't have to. We could just party, shop, watch daytime TV, or cruise the internet. It's up to us. No one is going to make us live with full attention. But I believe that if we want to be happy, if we want to feel that life is going somewhere – rather than just going round and round in circles – we need to attend to the mind. If you agree, then it will be worth your while reading on.

I imagine that most people picking up this book will want to learn how to live more deeply and richly; they will want to develop present-tense awareness. But some will read this book because they want to solve the mysteries of life. The reader I have in mind might well be happy enough – at work, at home – and perhaps they don't have any particular childhood traumas to unearth; they just have this nagging 'Is this it?' feeling, the sense that life should add up to something more than career, family, and pension. And what I imagine this person wants, as they read, is not just advice about how to be happier and more relaxed (fundamental

though that is); they will want to find out about reality, and about how to gain insight into reality. So I want to talk to that person as well. I want to talk about how Buddhism concerns itself with gaining insight into reality.

This book follows a journey of awareness, from remembering where you put your keys to transcendental insight into the nature of reality. It is a journey that I am currently undertaking. I encourage you to join me. Much of what I write arises from my years of practice, from my struggles and my successes. The guiding influence is my own teacher, Sangharakshita, without whose wisdom I would have nothing much to share. I hope that this book helps you to live with full attention. I hope it helps you to see the blossom.

Introducing the course

I have designed this book as an eight-week course in cultivating full attention. Mindfulness has many different facets. So we'll start relatively simply with 'day-to-day mindfulness': remembering to recharge your mobile or switch off the oven. After that we'll explore mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of sensations, inner narratives, spiritual teachings, the environment, other people, and, finally, reality itself. It is more effective to learn systematically, so we'll take it a step at a time, learning one aspect of full attention then adding another as we go along. By the end of the book, I'll be guiding you in a daily 'mindful walk', suggesting regular 'mindful moments' – an island of awareness in your busy day – and recommending particular approaches to daily meditation.

You don't have to be a Buddhist to read this. We're not going to rush into metaphysics; we're going to take it a step at a time. I've been practising mindfulness and meditation for over 20 years. I'm a member of the Western Buddhist Order – an international Buddhist movement devoted to communicating the practices, attitudes, and insights of Buddhism. So I'll be sharing my experience of all that with you. But you don't have to be a Buddhist to gain from this book; you don't have to be particularly spiritual. All you need is curiosity, a desire to learn, and a willingness to put what you learn into practice.

Planning

Developing present-tense awareness means doing whatever it is we are doing wholeheartedly, fully. It's not saying we shouldn't think about the future. One of

the challenges of mindfulness is making sure that we plan carefully and prepare sufficiently – whether we're going ice-skating or on retreat, whether we're planning a meeting or a journey. Things go better if they are well organized. The difference between a poorly prepared business meeting and one with a properly thought-through agenda can be very marked. The first often results in tetchiness and impatience, whereas the second can be quite satisfying and lead to good decisions being made on the basis of fruitful discussion. If we want things to run smoothly and time to be used effectively, we need to plan and prepare.Of course much of our planning is to do with maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. That's fine. We just need to get better at it. We need to notice what really brings satisfaction and happiness and what actually causes pain. Planning is only problematic if we forget to notice the future when we get there, if we're so hooked on preparing for pleasure that we forget to notice the pleasure we actually experience! Planning can be the expression of fear and anxiety – the attempt to organize things so that nothing ever goes wrong, which of course is impossible. But this doesn't mean that planning itself is wrong. We need to plan sensibly, and then attend fully to what we have planned for. So our eight-week course in full attention will include planning: preparation, thinking about the future, organizing our time, even making dates in our diary or setting our computer to remind us of our next meeting. That's part of mindfulness as well.

What is mindfulness?

'What is?' questions have limited value. They're fine for practical purposes – what is a Victoria sponge cake, a motorbike, a gas bill? We can get useful answers to these kinds of questions, especially if we fancy something sweet, or want to get somewhere fast, or find ourselves short of cash. But if we ask 'What is?' questions about qualities we are trying to develop, the answers are far less illuminating.

When you buy your first set of paints, you don't start by asking yourself 'What is art?'. You usually don't read about the history of art or about what various critics have said about its social, historical, or political value. You just splash some paint around and see what happens. You find out about art by doing it. Similarly, when you start to practise mindfulness you don't need to be completely clear about what mindfulness is and where it leads. You can just get on with it and find out as you go.

So let's do that now, just as we might with a new set of paints. As you sit and read these words, see if you can notice the weight of your body. Are you tighten-

ing your thigh muscles, or curling up your toes, or furrowing your brow? And can you feel the warmth of your clothes, the texture against your skin? Are there any sounds you can hear – your partner cooking something in the kitchen, the distant wail of a siren? What do you see around you? Stop reading for a moment and take things in: the colours, the shapes, and the direction of light. Can you smell anything? What about any taste in your mouth? Then pause for a moment, and notice your breath. You don't have to close your eyes; just feel the breath in your body. Where do you feel it most? Do you feel it in your belly or in your chest? Is your breath quick, or is it slow and heavy? Now notice the weight of your body again...

That's mindfulness, or at least that's one aspect of it. Of course, there's more, a lot more. This whole book is trying to answer the question 'What is mindfulness?'. If you have just tried the above, then you have already set out on life with full attention. It's as simple as that. The real answer to 'What is mindfulness?' is found in your experience.

Mindfulness is something you do, like volleyball or cooking; it's not an abstract theory. And it's not something that can be pinned down to a final definition – just as you can't pin down 'art' or 'beauty'. One description of mindfulness is 'paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally'.[2] That's fine as far as it goes. It's enough to get us going. But it's only the beginning. You'll have to read this book, and put it into practice, to really discover what mindfulness is.

Approaching this book

Mindfulness is something you can practise on a plane, waiting at the post office, or eating a takeaway. It's not religious. It's about paying attention. This whole book is about paying attention.

In this book, I want to explore the different levels and dimensions of mindfulness. I want to address the issues a reader might face when they try to put mindfulness into practice. And I want to clear up some of the common misunderstandings that I encounter when I teach meditation and mindfulness at the London Buddhist Centre. I begin each chapter by exploring some broad themes for cultivating awareness. For instance, in the chapter on mindfulness of the body, I suggest that you eat a healthy diet and take regular exercise – obvious things perhaps, but no less important for that. Then I go on to recommend

specific daily practices, such as particular ways of cultivating mindfulness of your body on your daily 'mindful walk'.

I recommend that you take up the book in the way that I intended: that you read it and try to put it into practice over the next eight weeks. Obviously, it may take you longer than eight weeks, which is fine. Have a look at your diary and see if you can find an eight-week slot that is fairly standard, fairly typical, and, if possible, fairly routine. It's best not to choose a period that includes a business trip to Berlin, or a move to a new home. Try to choose a time when you are not massively busy, or at least not much busier than usual. But don't put it off. If you think now is as good a time as any, then start. Don't wait for the ultimate peaceful, hassle-free eight weeks – for most of us, that's not going to happen.
And don't worry: I'm not assuming you have plenty of free time.

I do assume, however, you have work to do, people to see, things to accomplish, children to get to school. The art of mindfulness will be learning to bring more attention to the sort of things you already do. I'm not trying to add another task to your jobs list. For instance, I'm going to be introducing a daily 'mindful walk'. But this walk should be one you are already in the habit of taking – to the bus stop, the gym, or the train station. I am not expecting you to put lots of extra time aside.Having said that, as the book progresses, I will be asking you to notice more and more aspects of your experience. I have designed the eight-week course so that it develops gradually. With each successive week, I'll introduce new exercises to cultivate full attention. The course is cumulative – teaching one aspect of mindfulness and then adding another as you go. I'll also be asking you, as we go along, to reflect on the issues that arise when you practise mindfulness, and to jot down these reflections in a notebook. And, at the end of each week, I'll be asking you to review how your week of practice has gone. Did you remember to cultivate mindfulness? How did it go? What issues were you presented with? How did it leave you feeling?

And remember: this book is not a wonder-cure – something that will change your life without you having to do anything. I will be expecting you to make an effort. I will be asking you to cultivate mindfulness and authentic happiness, and this will require energy, persistence, and perseverance. I'll be encouraging you to practice mindfulness every day, to cultivate your strengths and virtues, and to put aside 20 minutes each day to meditate. In other words, I will be assuming that you want to live with full attention. So you need to be prepared to put some time aside to cultivate mindfulness. The more committed you are to the course, the more you will get out of it.

Thought bubbles



As you read, you will notice that I have written some short pieces indented into the page and marked with a small icon, a bodhi leaf for instance. I think of these as 'thought bubbles'. They are reflections, specific applications, and further explorations of the path. You could read them as you read the book, or you could skip them, or dip into them at any time you like. They are like those short 'thought for the day' slots you sometimes hear on the radio. I mostly limit myself to three in each chapter and I've tried to keep them pithy. The thought bubbles have three broad themes: 1) Reflection on this week's theme — such as on the 'mind and body problem' 2) Specific applications of the teaching — such as how to work with physical pain, and 3) The path of full attention — exploring how one stage of the path relates to another, or arises out of another. You can identify them by a lotus flower for reflection, a dharma wheel for specific applications, and a bodhi leaf for stages of the path.

Cultivating the right spirit

It's important to approach all this in the right spirit. We need an attitude of exploration. When we explore something, we don't have a particular aim in mind. We're just exploring. We're bound to get lost from time to time, or find ourselves in dead-ends. That's all part of it. We'll need to keep our sense of humour and cultivate a lightness of touch. Having an overly goal-orientated approach will be counterproductive, as will being too determinedly self-improving.Try to follow the course as I have written it. At the same time, if you find yourself getting tired of me suggesting yet another way to cultivate mindfulness, just ignore it, or try it out later. You don't have to do everything I suggest. You can pick and choose. I'll remind you about this as we go along. But remember: you're in charge. If it all feels a bit much, you can simply drop one aspect of practice – you might decide not to write in your journal, or you might decide to lie in bed with the Sunday papers instead of getting up to meditate. What I suggest is that if you skip something – an approach to mindful walking, a particular exercise – you put a note next to it in the margin, so you can come back to it later. Of course, you might find yourself drawn to some of my suggestions but not to others. That's ok too. Not everything I write will be useful for you.

At the same time, be wary of letting yourself off too easily, or giving up at the first setback. The main thing is to stick with it. Don't worry about what you don't (or won't) do. Just keep on paying attention. It will have its effect. What we are trying to do is cultivate a thread of awareness – a golden thread that, as we practise, becomes stronger and stronger. Each time we notice the weight of our body on a chair, or our chattering thoughts, or what it is we feel – we are cultivating this thread of attention. Gradually we become the thread: we live our life with full awareness. But at first the thread easily breaks. So 'a little and often' is the key. Be gentle and patient, don't be too earnest, and at the same time cultivate self-discipline. It's like going to the gym: you just have to go – it's no use thinking about it!

And be conscious of the diet effect. It's well known that the best day of a diet is the first day. It's the day you feel most motivated. But it usually wears off. Soon enough you're sneaking out for a jam doughnut. You have to build that into your expectations. You might feel inspired at first – but like as not, at some point you'll want to forget all about it or resist. Part of the path of full attention is wandering away from the path. It's important not to get disheartened about that: it really is part of the process. The issue is how far from the path you wander, and how quickly you can get back. I've tried to counteract the diet effect by gradually building up the level of mindfulness as we go along. It's best to start with realistic aims rather than grand ambitions.

Find your own way

As you flick through the ensuing chapters, you might think, 'I couldn't possibly read this and put it into practice in the next eight weeks, it's just too much!'. So find your own approach. You might, for instance, just read it without doing any of the exercises I recommend. That would be fine – after all, that's what you normally do with a book! Recently I started reading something on poetic form, on how to write in iambic pentameter and how to compose a sonnet, but I stopped because I didn't have time to do the writing exercises. It would be a shame if that happened to you. Just reading this book will have a beneficial effect. One of the Buddhist teachings I'll be highlighting is 'what you dwell on, that you become'. So just reading about awareness, about full attention, will help you become more mindful. As I say, don't let yourself off too lightly; don't fall into the diet effect and give up after a fortnight – but at the same time, try not to be overly fastidious about how you go about putting this book into practice. Find your own way.

What is meditation?

For the moment, and without getting stuck in the 'What is?' question, let's just say that meditation is a period of intensified mindfulness. When we are mindful, we notice what is around us and inside us – the shadow of a poplar tree, the song of a sparrow, the thought we have just had about a problem at work. We notice these things consciously. We try to experience them fully. Meditation is an intensification of that kind of awareness. But, in meditation, the emphasis is on noticing your mind, understanding your mind, and changing your mind. In meditation, we are noticing our mind with our mind. It is possible to meditate while walking or sitting in a chair and looking at the garden, but usually we sit still and even close our eyes – we withdraw from the world of activity to explore an inner world of quality. And often we use an 'object' to meditate on: we observe our breathing or we try to cultivate calm, wellbeing, and loving-kindness.

As my intention is to introduce mindfulness gradually and systematically, I won't be expecting you to meditate in weeks 1 or 2. In week 3, I introduce various relaxation exercises and breath-work. It's only when we get to week 4 that I suggest you establish a daily meditation practice. After that, and as the weeks go by, I'll provide more and more detailed instruction. Of course, you might be meditating every day already, in which case you can take my suggestions as a part of your ongoing practice. Otherwise, simply follow the day-to-day instructions. I've written them so they can be stand-alone practices or serve as particular emphases in your daily meditation.

I'll be suggesting that you meditate for around 20 minutes each day and I'll be asking you, if you have time, to jot down a few notes about your meditation each day – it will help you be more objective about how the meditation has gone. If you don't meditate on a particular day, mark that missed day in the margin of the book. This will tell you how often you actually meditate. Crossing out the missed days will provide something of a reality check. It will also mean that you can go back to those particular meditations later on, should you wish to.

Finding a mindfulness buddy

If at all possible, team up with a 'mindfulness buddy'. One of the things I notice again and again when I teach mindfulness is how easily people assume they are the only one who's forgotten to do the mindful walk, or who hasn't managed to

meditate. If you share your experience with others, you usually find that they are working with exactly the same issues. Talking about it helps. It helps you keep things in perspective. It helps refresh your enthusiasm. It supports your motivation. It will also, very likely, deepen your friendship. Obviously, don't browbeat someone into doing the course with you. Just see if there is anyone around who would like to join you. Then try and get in touch with them at least once a week. You could make a phone date – say on a Sunday night after you've written your review about how the week has gone. Or you could set up a chat room with others doing the course. Or you could be in email correspondence. You could even meet up and talk!

Buying a journal

I suggest that you go and buy yourself a new journal. Find one that you can carry with you all the time, one that can be slipped into your jacket pocket or put into your handbag. Make sure you have it at hand for the duration of the course. As the weeks go by I'll be asking you to note things down, so it will be handy to have a notebook on you at all times. If it helps, choose a notebook that feels special, one that makes you want to write in it.

Check your diary and start

So, having had a look in your diary, start the course. But first of all take some time to think about what you would like to get out of it. See if you can come up with three aims. Make sure they are realistic, achievable, and specific, nothing nebulous and grand such as 'I want to be a source of love in the world'. Worthy though that might be, it will be difficult to know if you have achieved it, and it sets you up to fail. Keep your aims as down to earth and practical as possible. An aim might be 'I want do the whole course and not drop out' or 'I want to find creative ways of cultivating mindfulness at work'. Take your notebook and take some time to fill in the table on the next page.

1: Aims

Spend a bit of time being as clear about your three aims as possible. Then fill in the left-hand boxes. Leave the right-hand boxes clear so that you can evaluate your aims at the end of the course.

My aims for Full Attention	Evaluation - Have I achieved what I'd hoped for?		
	Yes	Improving	No
1			
2			
3			

2: Obstacles

Then try to think of obstacles that might prevent you meeting your aims, such as 'I often stay up late, so I would find it difficult to get up early to meditate', 'I fear my partner might think this is another one of my fads and not support me in doing the course', 'I am prone to thinking that I am not making progress and therefore give up easily'. Really try to imagine possible obstacles: 'My parents are visiting for a week!'. Jot them down in your journal.

3: Supports

Then try to think of supports and strategies that will help you overcome obstacles that might arise – just being aware of potential obstacles will help you prepare to meet them. You might decide to meditate during your lunch break (you know a local church you can go and sit in). You might ask your partner to do the course with you, or you might explain what you are trying to do and enlist their support. You might ask a mindfulness buddy to help encourage you not to give up. Whatever your supports are, write them in your journal

Mindfulness makes life vivid: you feel more deeply, think more clearly, act more fully. You appreciate the simple things – the sight of a moorhen, the sound of a football bouncing, the taste of blueberries. Full attention is a kind of relishing of things. But if we're late for work because we've forgotten our bus pass or left our power-lead at home, we'll be in no state to relish anything. So we need to start with the basics – remembering our PIN number, having a place where we keep our driving licence, sorting out the kitchen cupboard. It may not seem very exciting, it may not seem very spiritual, but it will make all the difference

Day-to-Day Mindfulness

Week 1

Mindfulness of small things

Have you ever walked into the kitchen to get something, only to forget what it was you were looking for? Have you stood at a ticket barrier searching your pockets for train tickets? Have you forgotten an appointment; lost your car keys; forgotten your passport; mislaid a vital piece of paper and had to go through the contents of your wastepaper basket? You are not alone. Something like 130,000 items of lost property are left in public transport and taxis in Greater London every year. This includes around 10,000 mobile phones, 7000 umbrellas, and 6000 pairs of eyeglasses. If we imagine multiplying that across all the cities of the UK and across Europe, it adds up to an awful lot of forgetfulness! Each lost item causes pain – a wince of realization, a pang of regret, a fit of accusation.

The predominant feeling of contemporary life is of lots of bits – bits to be finished, started, filed, read, applied for, cancelled, organized, emailed, tidied, sent, remembered, checked, documented, or binned. It's a recipe for stress. But it is not going to go away. So we need to pay attention to this bitty aspect of life. We need to explore day-to-day mindfulness.

When we practise mindfulness, we are trying to learn that small things can have a big effect. This is true of our emotional life, our communication with others, and our day-to-day mindfulness. How much time do we waste looking for the remote control or trying to find our house keys?

Set up positive routines

Cultivate a sense of mastery

Complete your cycles

Reduce input

Notice the consequences of unmindfulness

We have statistics for how much of our life we spend in the bathroom or surfing the internet, but how much time do we spend looking for our address book, our sunglasses, or our train tickets? And we can forget that, when we lose something, we often get in a bad mood, which in turn sets off a chain reaction: we get bad-tempered with a work colleague; they get tetchy with the receptionist; they take it out on the cleaner. We pass on our irritations like pass the parcel.

When we are unhappy, frustrated, or angry, we so often look to the big stories – childhood traumas, the state of the world. We would be better off looking to make small, practical changes to how we lead our life. For most of us, life is not full of momentous events and overwhelming emotions but of small things: the car to be serviced, toys to put away, an online booking to be made. Life goes better, runs smoother, is happier, if we attend to the small things. So mindfulness needs to start here: remembering the baby-wipes, double-checking our flight-departure time, prioritizing our to-do list. This is day-to-day mindfulness.

Take day-to-day mindfulness seriously

For some reason it's difficult to take this aspect of mindfulness seriously. The things we forget are usually fairly trivial – a mislaid document, a forgotten appointment. We can usually make do. And after the panic, the rush, the searching, and the blaming, we usually forget about it. Being a 'scatterbrain' can even become part of our personal charm; it can even be another way of getting people to do things for us! Then there is the question of temperament – some people do seem to be more naturally organized than others.

One of the reasons we find it hard to take day-to-day mindfulness seriously is because we fail to understand that actions have consequences. This simple fact of life is central to our path of full attention. Again and again, as we explore each new dimension of awareness, we'll find ourselves trying to learn that actions have consequences – for ourselves, for others, and for the planet. As with so many other so-called 'small things' – from how we joke about other people to how we eat our supper – we can easily think, 'Oh well, it doesn't matter, it's not worth making a fuss about. We forget to add up all those acts of unmindfulness. We don't notice their cumulative effect. We fail to realize how much happier we could be if our life ran a bit more smoothly. And we often find it hard to see that our lack of day-to-day mindfulness affects other people – that we make their life harder when we forget to call them, mislay a book they've lent us, or turn up 20 minutes late. Remembering things, finishing what you started, planning – they are all part of

growing up. As a child, our parents check we have our packed lunch, our mittens, and our schoolbooks. They remind us to go to the toilet before long journeys. They get us to put things away. Parents are a child's mindfulness. So growing up means taking responsibility for all this – not waiting around for someone to tidy up after us or remind us to do our income tax returns. Mindfulness, spiritual life itself, is about growing up.

Fail better

Day-to-day mindfulness is surprisingly difficult to practise. There are so many things competing for our attention. We write to-do lists, scribble little reminders, but inevitably things get forgotten, mislaid, or overlooked. So right from day one we need to remember what Samuel Beckett, the Irish playwright, wrote: 'Try again, fail again, fail better.'[3] If we're afraid of failing, we'll fail to learn. This is as true for table tennis as it is for day-to-day mindfulness. We need the courage to fail, to persist with failure. This means not losing heart, not giving ourselves a hard time, not expecting perfection, and not condemning ourselves. It also means admitting failure, coming clean with it. Mistakes are part of life. There's nothing wrong with them. They are only negative if we try to wriggle out of responsibility for them. All we need to do is 'Try again, fail again, fail better'.

It has already happened

Day-to-day mindfulness needs to be practised with patience and a sense of humour. Getting into a terrible mood because we have lost something will only make matters worse. We need to remind ourselves, that whatever it is that has just gone wrong, just been mislaid or broken, it has already happened. Mindfulness is what happens next. If we reverse our car into a post because we're not concentrating on what we're doing, that's our fault. But going over and over it in our mind and berating ourselves won't improve matters. We need to accept responsibility, say sorry, and do the next thing: phone the garage. We need to accept the situation we're in. It has already happened. We cannot make it un-happen. We take full responsibility for what we've done (or not done) and admit it; we're even willing to say 'It's my fault, I'm to blame'; we need to make reparation if needs be – pay for the bumper to be mended – but none of that is helped by self-condemnation. We need to accept the situation with kindness and patience, and say to ourselves, 'it has already happened'.

First practice week

Day-to-day mindfulness means attending to the small things so that we can concentrate on the big ones. We need to find strategies that help us get on with what's important in life and stop us having to think about what isn't. Take kitchen scissors, for example. You probably had a pair in your cutlery drawer. They are useful for opening vacuum-packed coffee bags or packets of pasta. If you try to open this kind of packaging with a kitchen knife or your bare hands, they tend to split or tear badly – spilling coffee grounds or pasta shells over your worktop. So it's handy to have a pair of scissors. But they often go walk-about – your daughter goes off with them to cut pictures out of a glossy magazine, your roommate takes them to her room. You end up searching the cutlery drawer and going through the drainer. You become irate. You start blaming someone. You tear the coffee bag open and spill the contents. You have to get the dustpan. It's a small thing, I know. But if the scissors were in the drawer where they're meant to be, then you wouldn't have to think about them at all: you would use them, have your breakfast, and then go off to work feeling happier and calmer.

Mindfulness is sometimes talked about in terms of doing everything very slowly and deliberately – noticing every movement of the body, every flicker of feeling. Whilst this can be useful, especially on retreat, what is really needed is the kind of mindfulness that allows us not to have to think about the whereabouts of the kitchen scissors, or where we have jotted down our online password.

So this first week of full attention is about sorting out the small things so we can attend to what's important. It's a week of setting up the conditions for mindfulness to arise, a week of looking at how we structure our life – how we pattern it, organize it, order it.

Set up positive routines

We could start by establishing positive habits. Routine is a way of building shape in our life. It helps us to persevere when we feel under-motivated. It is a way of making time for activities – Spanish lessons or trumpet practice – that our hectic timetable could easily overwhelm. Routines are sustaining and have a morale-boosting effect. People who don't have them don't usually have much energy,

are not very effective with their time, and tend to miss out on things. Of course, routines have dangers as well – it is tempting to pack too much into them, and they can become rigid and inflexible – but without them we usually don't develop the kind of spiritual stamina we need in order to make progress. There is a value in doing something out of 'force of habit'. If our circuit-training class takes place every Sunday, the habit of going protects us from the whim of the moment – from whether we feel like going or not. In the same way, meditation needs to become a positive habit (as we will see). This is often a sticking point for people who come to the London Buddhist Centre: they value meditation, they see the benefit of it, but they struggle to make space for it. Regularly getting to the meditation cushions is the biggest challenge. Habit is the biggest helpmate. Once a positive habit is established, it helps us to meditate or go training without having to exert our willpower.

Check your diary

So, this week, think about the place of sustaining routine in your life. Are there things you want to do that you somehow never find the time for – attending yoga classes, learning to swim, cooking a meal at home? Why don't you get around to them? Think about the shape of your week. Are you burning the candle at both ends? Would it be worth planning a quiet night in once a week so you can read, relax, or do nothing? Does your week have some kind of shape to it that sustains you, or is it all very ad hoc? Is it too full of self-improving activities? Are you out every night?

Try to set up some sustaining routines for the next week – or two, or eight! You could decide to get up every morning half an hour earlier, pencil in going to the gym twice a week, or take the longer walk home through the park every Friday. You might think about your work routines – are they productive? Do you have work routines?

Make two resolutions

Try and come up with two resolutions. It might be that you (1) go on a creative-writing course, and (2) go swimming twice a week. Then, see if you can think of something you could actually do – something that commits you to your intention, confirms that you mean it. For instance, you could book for that creative-writing

course, or you could buy a pair of swimming goggles. Using the help of others – your mindfulness buddy for instance – could be invaluable in this. For instance, you might agree to meet a friend at the pool. Or you might talk to them about your habit of leaving 10 minutes late for work. You might promise that for the next week at least, you'll leave on time. Then make a date at the end of the week to talk to them about it. Write down your two resolutions and accompanying actions in the 'week review' below. But remember: positive habits can take a long time to establish, so you may well need to be patient. What will help you most is some action that confirms and strengthens your intention.

Motivation

There is a common misconception that we should want to do something before we actually do it. If we don't feel like it, we take that to mean that we don't want to do it. This is fine for chocolate or beach holidays, but it is not useful when it comes to many of the things we find sustaining and satisfying. Very often we only feel the motivation to do something when we are actually doing it. Take swimming. The idea of going for a swim, particularly if it's raining, is not very appealing: the changing rooms are drafty, the showers feeble, the tiles cold and slippery. Then there is the question of how to get into the water – the macho dive into the deep end, or the gradual, painful descent from the shallow? But once you've got your head under the water and are moving, you start to enjoy it. You start to feel you want to go swimming. By the time you leave – your skin tingling, your body glowing – you're convinced of the value of swimming. You know that you'll need to remember this feeling the next time you resist the idea of a cold changing room on a November morning. Waiting for motivation to arise before you do something is de-motivating. Just do it. You'll soon want to.

Cultivate a sense of mastery

We need a sense of 'mastery'. Mastery is that pleasant sense of achievement when a task is completed – when that chaotic pile of documents has been filed away, when you have made the phone call you had been putting off for days, when that annoying bit of DIY is finished. Mastery is a sense of being in charge of what you do – instead of being at the beck and call of whatever happens to happen to you. It is the satisfaction of accomplishment.

Starting and finishing

Routines for starting and finishing can help foster mastery. They help you become more in control (in the positive sense) and more organized, as well as less rushed. When you get to work, for instance, do you plunge straight into your inbox? Emails are easy work. You don't have to think about what you want to do in that day, or what you need to prioritize. So it might be better to start by writing a list of the things you want to achieve before you log on. It's often suggested, for instance, that you don't start your working day doing emails. Instead, get on with something you can complete, or make substantial progress with. Otherwise it's easy to end up feeling that even though you've done lots of work – made lots of phone calls, sent lots of emails – you haven't really achieved anything. And it's that sense of achievement we're after. And just as starting well is important, so is finishing well. I write two or three mornings a week. I usually have lunch with someone. If I am not mindful, I write all the way up to the time I'm supposed to meet them. I keep forgetting that there are always a few things to do before I leave the house – back up my work, gather up my keys, turn off the computer. All this takes time. And I feel much better if I give myself that time, if I finish things off properly. When I do that, I experience mastery: I have done what needs to be done, backed up what needs to be backed up. I have not left the room with papers scattered everywhere, I have not forgotten my keys. Feeling self-possessed and calm, I can give someone my full attention.

Do three things now

A sense of mastery is important for wellbeing. If you're feeling depressed or overwhelmed with work, you may well feel better if you make a quick to-do list, and then do three of the most straightforward tasks – tasks that you can accomplish immediately. For example, (1) put laundry in the machine, (2) take bottles to recycling, and (3) top up your pay-as-you-go account. Any three things will do. It will help you to feel in charge, and this in turn will give you the energy to start looking at the more complicated jobs. Just doing three things will help you feel in touch with a confidence-building sense of mastery. Either that or you could think of two things you could do this week that will help create an atmosphere of mindfulness. You might decide to (1) clear out your in-tray and file stuff away, or (2) tidy your bedroom and throw out clutter. The positive effect of doing simple things like this can be very surprising – they help foster mastery.

Complete your cycles

Our awareness tends to last only as long as something is useful to us. We forget things – and often enough we forget people – once they no longer serve a purpose. Like a teenager who litters the pavements after unwrapping a chocolate bar, we have a strong tendency to forget things once we don't need them. As I have said, training in mindfulness is about maturing as a human being. We might not leave our bedroom in quite the mess we once did, but for most of us, there is still quite a lot of growing up to do. So mindfulness means finishing our cycles – washing up after we've had our breakfast, putting the milk away in the fridge, wiping the table. It means finishing the whole sequence, not just the part of it that concerns us. It's about remembering that other people exist, that our actions (and non-actions) have consequences for them. It's remembering to put back the kitchen scissors.

And if we think we already do that, it might be worth thinking about rubbish. Usually it's at that point that we forget all about it. It is no longer part of our life; it has no value for us... it's rubbish. But it still has consequences: massive landfill sites full of stinking refuse, plastic supermarket bags, soft drink cans, takeaway cartons, and rotting vegetables. Part of mindfulness is extending our imagination beyond what is immediately useful to us – beyond the wastepaper basket – to what happens next.

Finish what you started

Perhaps you habitually leave the washing-up until the next morning, or assume your partner will do it. Perhaps you leave your work desk littered with documents. Perhaps you are not very good at clearing up after yourself. Again, this might be something you could talk to your buddy about, or your friends. We are often hypersensitive about what other people don't do – not cleaning the shower after them, not putting the bread back in the breadbin, leaving their documents in the photocopier – but we find it much harder to notice the things we don't do. So ask your friend, your flat mate, your mindfulness buddy, to gently point it out to you if you have left things half completed. Again and again, we'll find over the next eight weeks that to really develop mindfulness, to see ourselves objectively, we'll need to enlist the help of others.

Think of the consequences

See if you can extend your awareness beyond the immediately useful. You might start composting, or recycling. You might get an old-fashioned cloth shopping bag so you don't have to use the plastic ones. You might decide to make a particular effort to turn off lights when you don't need them, or make sure that you don't leave your computer on sleep mode.

Reduce input

The Buddha lived in a pre-industrial society, unimaginably different from our own. His followers led simple lives conducive to mindfulness, meditation, and insight. Our lives are different; we are bombarded by advertising, packed into public transport, or stuck in traffic. We seem to be always on the phone, or on the computer, or rushing somewhere, or being late for something. We often don't realize how stressful all this has become.

Our attention is so divided. We often find ourselves split between what we are doing and what we are thinking. We talk to a friend whilst keeping an eye on the time and trying to remember what we need from the supermarket. We read a book whilst waiting for a text message. We work on a complicated spreadsheet whilst checking our emails and looking at news sites. There's always the radio on in the background. Our attention is constantly being pulled in different directions at the same time – advertising demands our attention and exploits it; we flip from song to song on our mp3 player; we multitask. We live in a time of information-glut.[4] This divided state has become our basic mindset – so much so that we don't really notice how chopped up and unstable our mind has become.

Many of us are suffering from a chronic inability to attend. Deep experiences, satisfying experiences, are characterized by absorption – reading a novel, listening to music, enjoying a conversation. We need to set up the conditions that allow us to get absorbed in things. Often, all we need to do in order to get ourselves into a better frame of mind is get absorbed in something positive – weeding a flowerbed, playing badminton, listening to Bach. We need to wean ourselves off over-stimulation and over-consumption if we are to make progress with mindfulness. We need

to make an effort against the colossal force of consumerism – even if it only means restricting our television viewing hours, or the time we spend on the internet.

So try and think of some specific things you could do (or not do) to help you become more concentrated and less divided. You might write some resolutions down or take a resolution with your flat mate or your partner. For instance, you could decide to have an evening a week where the house is silent – no radio, music, or television – so you can read a book in peace.

Here are some suggestions:

- You could: choose not to eat and watch television at the same time.
- You could: resist channel-flipping.
- You could: limit the amount of time spent surfing the internet, or playing video games.
- You could: set some time aside in your working week when you concentrate on one task – without checking your incoming emails or answering the phone at the same time.
- You could: prepare a meal without having music on, or go for a walk without being plugged into your mp3 player.
- You could: decide to turn everything off – your phone, your computer – after 10pm.
- You could: decide not to go clothes shopping for the next month.
- You could: lock your TV in the cellar for a fortnight.
- You could: have one evening a week when you go technology-free – when you don't stare into a computer screen, send text messages, or watch TV.

Commit yourself to reducing input for a period of time. But remember to be realistic. If you decide not to have music on whilst you work, or not to watch reality TV shows, decide how long you intend to do that for – a week, two weeks, the whole eight-week course? Be specific and realistic. Enlist the help of friends if possible. Our friends can help us be more objective about what we can manage. They might say 'If I were you I'd just try it out for a week and see how you get on with that.' So test yourself out a bit, go cold-turkey on shopping, on going to the pub, or on watching late-night DVDs. At the same time, be realistic – otherwise you're likely to react against it. And remember, reducing input is to do with increasing quality – so that you can give your full attention to other things, so you can become happily absorbed.Try and come up with three ways of reducing input this week and write them in the week review below.

Reminders

One of the first lessons to learn about mindfulness is that it is easy to be mindful but difficult to remember to be mindful. See if you can come up with things that remind you to be mindful, that reinforce your intentions for day-to-day mindfulness. You could put a note on your bathroom mirror reminding you to leave for work on time. You could set the alarm on your computer to go off every half-hour to remind yourself to take a short break. You could cross out an evening in your diary to remind yourself to have a quiet night in. Find creative ways of remind-ing yourself to be mindful.

Notice the consequences of unmindfulness

See if you can do some of the things I have suggested, and try to notice the effect. It might be that you just tidy your files on your computer, or do the first three things on your to-do list. If you do nothing else, use this week to take day-to-day mindfulness seriously. It's easy to want to get on to the more esoteric aspects of spiritual life – insight, mystery, and meditation. But first we need to apply ourselves to the small things of everyday life. We need to take them much more seriously. The way we do that is by noticing the consequences of not being mindful. Notice every time you feel stressed, rushed, or bad-tempered, and try to see if day-to-day mindfulness (or rather the lack of it) has played a part in that. You might realize, for instance, that you habitually don't leave enough time to cycle to work. You jump red lights and arrive late, out of breath, stressed, and defensive. So note that down; try to see much more clearly how leaving 10 minutes late has all kinds of knock-on effects: try to be aware of the consequences – emotional and practical – including the consequences on other people.

Jot down which aspects of unmindfulness have what effects (remember you are doing this to understand yourself and learn how to change, not to reprimand yourself). You could do this at intervals during your day, or you could take time to reflect before you go to bed. You might notice that your unmindfulness runs along habitual lines – such as always leaving 10 minutes late for work. So you could ask yourself 'What do I get from that?'. And where does 'being late for work' start? Is it because I find it hard to get out of bed? Try to get a sense of the cause and the consequences. For instance, being late for work results in a bad relationship with your boss, but it begins with your tendency to stay up late sending emails and logging onto YouTube.

Week 1 Practice Review

1. This week's resolutions

In the left-hand boxes below, write down your two commitments for the week. For instance: (1) you have decided to go jogging three times this week; (2) you've decided not to leave late for work. Write any actions that you have taken that reinforce your intention: you have set your watch alarm to go off when it's time to go to work; you've made an agreement with your mindfulness buddy.Then, at the end of the week, in the right-hand column, review how the week went. Were you able to stick to your decision? How did it leave you feeling? If you didn't stick to your intention, why not, what were the obstacles? Were you being unrealistic about the intention in the first place?

Your two commitments	Review how it went
1 Any reinforcing action?	
2 Any reinforcing action?	

2. Reducing input

In the left-hand boxes below, write down the three ways in which you have decided to reduce input this week. Review how that went in the right-hand boxes – did you feel better or worse? Was it a worthwhile thing to do? Did you manage to keep to your decision for the whole week? Are there other ways you could reduce input?

	I will reduce input this week by....	How did it go? What effect did it have?
1		
2		
3		

3. Mastery and completing cycles

Did you manage to cultivate a sense of mastery this week – at work and at home? Were you able to be aware of the degree to which you finish your cycles? What aspects of day-to-day mindfulness struck you as important and as something that you need to learn?

Write your thoughts here

We've been trying to learn the value of small things – organizing our life so we're not always looking for our car keys, reading glasses, or umbrella. We've been trying to see how the conditions around us affect us. Part of a Buddhist life is going on retreat. When we go on a retreat, we give up all kinds of things – sex, shopping, cinema, newspapers, the internet. We give up those things so that we can concentrate on other things: mindfulness and meditation. Most people find that when they do this, even if only for a weekend, they feel happier, more alive, and more relaxed. Reducing input means making our life a little more like being on retreat. It means concentrating on what really helps us become happy and live well. When we have a quiet evening in, when we turn off the TV and the radio, shut down the computer – we start to notice things. We notice our body and how our body feels, we notice how noisy our mind is, how speedy we have become. In other words, we start to notice the four spheres of mindfulness that the Buddha taught 2500 years ago.

Body

Body awareness

I SOMETIMES WONDER what the Buddha would make of us. I imagine him noticing the information-glut I mentioned earlier, how our attention is dragged out of ourselves and manipulated by the mass media. He would notice how complicated and technological modern life is, how intellectually sophisticated we have become. He would think of us as having a dragon's head and a snake's body.

We have a dragon's head. It is full of thoughts and ideas, arguments and opinions, knowledge and shopping lists. It is a wonderful head in many ways, but it is overdeveloped. We have a snake's body. It is long and thin and without limbs: it is underdeveloped. The Buddha would experience us as being one-sidedly cerebral – with a marked tendency to rationalize, ruminate, abstract, and complicate. He would realize that more than ever before, we need to cultivate the first of his four spheres of mindfulness: mindfulness of the body and its movements.

Alienation

Many of us are alienated from direct physical experience of our body. There are many reasons for this. We no longer have jobs that require us to use our body – apart from our fingertips and eyes. Our work requires brainpower and admin-power but not physical exertion. If we don't use the body, we don't feel the body. Then there is our alienation from the natural world. We are nature. We have all the physical needs and instinctive drives of an animal. And yet many of us live in massive urban condominiums dominated by concrete pavements, steel-and-glass office

blocks, neon lighting, electronic ring tones, and roaring traffic. Alienation from the natural world is alienation from nature in us, especially from our physical nature. Add to this our increasing reliance on computer technology. When it comes to alienation, there is nothing quite like staring into a computer screen. After a few hours of double-clicking, we emerge cyber-spaced out, dehydrated, physically stiff, alienated from our emotions, and disconnected from our direct sense experience.

Another reason for our alienation from the body may be to do with literacy. As the ethnologist Ellen Dissanayake puts it, 'Literacy (even more than advanced technology) is the major possession that separates modernized from the unmodernized persons.'[5] Without denying the enormous benefits of reading and writing, and without undermining the value of reason and critical thinking, it is worth remembering that literacy has its cost. The literate mind tends to favour abstractions, classifications into categories, analysis, and generalization. All this will be liable to distance us from direct experience – we will want to stand back from it all and examine it cognitively. Literacy favours thought and words over body and sensation. Just look at a toddler: sight, sound, touch, and sensation are a continual diet of fascination!

Negative views about the body, including religious strictures on sex and sexuality, coupled with the alienation from physical experience caused by urban life, the new demands of the workplace, and computer technology, mean that awareness of the body is especially important if we are to live healthy and productive lives.

The Buddha's four spheres of mindfulness are found in an ancient Buddhist text called the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. This '*sutta*' – or 'thread' of teachings – is a systematic guide to developing full attention. It teaches us how to cultivate mindfulness, what to be mindful of, and how mindfulness can lead to insight into the nature of reality. The first of the Buddha's four spheres is mindfulness of the body and its movements.

Awareness of the body has many benefits. It makes us calmer and more effective; our physical movements become more dignified and graceful; and it is an effective antidote to stress and anxiety. Body awareness makes us feel more truly alive. It is also a vital element in cultivating insight, as we shall see.

Mindfulness of the body means escaping from dragon's head and snake's body. It means noticing bodily sensations, staying with them, living from them. It means being embodied. It starts with noticing the stretch of our arm as we reach up to

hold the grab-rail in a bus, and it deepens, as we practise, into a rich sense of physical aliveness and vitality. Eventually it becomes an exploration into the nature of experience itself. However, before we look at how to practise this first sphere of mindfulness, we need to look at our attitudes to our body – because how we think about our body determines how we experience it.

Seeing life whole

We tend to think of the body as being separate from the mind and from the 'self'. We often only pay attention to it when it aches or knocks into something. Our default position is to make the body into a 'thing', an attractive, well-groomed thing, perhaps, but a thing nevertheless. I remember a comic strip I saw as a boy, in which the brain was drawn as a control station busy with little men sending orders to the toes, giving instructions to the belly, screening pictures received from the eyes. I assumed that the relationship of mind to body was something like that – a 'ghost in the machine'. And even though we don't perhaps think about it very deeply, most of us have a similar kind of view: as if there's a little man in our head who says, 'Ok, now lift the arm, now reach for the doughnut'. But it cannot be like that.

From one point of view, the body is like a complex machine. Like any machine, it needs fuel, cleaning, and maintenance. Like any machine, it breaks down, wears out; bits have to be mended. It is an object in space like any other object in space. We can hang a jacket on it or a pair of eyeglasses, we can put it into a car along with golf clubs and the dog; it takes so much space, weighs so much, smells a bit. Looked at like this, the body is a material object just like any other material object – like chairs, wardrobes, houses, or planets. And yet we experience the body in a wholly different way: we experience it from the inside. We take this for granted, it is how we know ourselves, and yet it's worth considering just how remarkable this inner knowledge is. Of all the material objects in the universe – including other people's bodies – there is only one that we know from the inside. Everything else we only know indirectly, from the outside. If we want to understand the nature of experience, if we want to discover what life means, we need to pay attention to the part of the universe we know from the inside.

And our direct, inner experience of the body is mysterious. We experience life whole. When we walk in the park, we experience sights, sounds, thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, memories, associations, and so on, all at the same time.

To think about something, we have to make it into a something that we can think about: a body, a mind. We have to break the whole into parts. But it is never really like that. We break up experience in order to think about it. We then forget that this is what we are doing, and start worrying about how it all fits together. We ask questions like 'What is the relationship of mind to body?'. Of course, there is a value in examining distinct aspects of experience. We will be doing so throughout this book. We just need to keep reminding ourselves that that is what we are doing – creating distinctions for the purpose of exploration. They are not to be taken literally. There is a mystery at the heart of life. Part of that mystery is to do with the fact that experience is whole – that it cannot really be broken down into parts: into a 'body' and a 'mind'.

Consciousness and body always appear together. They are interlinked. Even in sleep, we dream with a dream body. And anyone who has meditated knows that the body has depth: our awareness starts with muscle and bone, weight and warmth, and then deepens into a kind of subtlety that is difficult to explain in words. As we go deeper in meditation, our body and mind seem to interfuse more and more fully. We experience an emotional body; a subtle, mind-made body; a body that appears to contain and reveal memories, symbols, even teachings. This is the body we are setting out to explore.

The mind/body problem

The question of the mind's relationship to the body has always interested philosophers. It is one of the unsolved questions – 'the hard problem' as it has come to be called. Just how does a non-material mind interact with a material body? Or, to put the question the other way round: 'It is widely supposed that the world is made entirely of mere matter, but how could mere matter be conscious? How, in particular, could a couple of pounds of grey tissue have experience?'[6]

Arthur Schopenhauer, the great German philosopher, argued that the body was the physical manifestation of the mind – self- made flesh. He thought that mind and body were different sides of the same coin. He used the example of blushing. When we blush we do so at the exact moment that we feel embarrassed. We do not feel shy and then blush – both happen simultaneously: mind and body are twin aspects of a single reality. What that 'single reality' might be is very mysterious indeed.

One of the first things we need to learn is to become more aware of our inner physical sense. When I was a student, I was plagued by neck pains. They persisted so long and were so uncomfortable I was sent to see a specialist. He asked me if I tended to be an anxious person. 'Not at all', I said. I thought of myself as a fun-loving, arty type. Looking back, my shoulders must have been half-way up to my ears! I simply wasn't aware of it. It was only later through learning to meditate that I started to become meaningfully aware of my body.

One of my first discoveries was that I held tension automatically, and this made it more difficult for me to be aware of it. In our day-to-day lives, we often fail to notice habitual tension. Do we notice, for instance, that we instinctively clench our jaw or curl up our toes? How many of us rushing to work notice that we are frowning and leaning forward? Are we aware as we sit at our computer that our legs are twisted around each other?

Our sense of what is happening in the body is often extremely vague. Nowadays, when I lead meditation, I often remind my students to make subtle adjustments to their posture as they go along. What tends to happen is that they simply jolt themselves into the straight-backed, upright position that they think I want to see. This 'correct posture' lasts for a few seconds and then gradually collapses. What is needed, first of all, is to notice what is happening in the body and then to make subtle corrections. Being aware of our body in this way is more difficult than it sounds because what is happening in the body is mostly unconscious and automatic.

Many of us, for example, will tense our shoulders, neck, and belly as soon as our fingertips touch the keyboard of our computer. It happens involuntarily, without our noticing. Even when we do notice, and try to relax, we often find that our shoulders and belly become tense again as soon as we stop thinking about them. Our tendency to grip the body becomes automatic – a default position that the body goes back to once we have stopped being aware of it. But it was not always like this. When we were toddlers, our shoulder blades naturally dropped down the back, our head balanced beautifully on top of the spine, our belly was soft and round. We are probably not like that now. Our neck will tend to be habitually tense, our shoulders will often be pulled in and up towards our ears; we're likely to automatically suck our belly in. As we grow up, we unlearn the natural, healthy posture of an infant and learn to habitually hold the body in a dysfunctional and unhealthy way. This 'habitual holding' inhibits our breathing, reduces blood flow, increases toxic build-up in the cells, and interferes with our digestion.

So, first of all, we need to develop a much greater sensitivity to what our body is actually doing. With mindfulness, we learn to notice that we are subtly hunching our shoulders or constricting our throat – and then, by taking awareness into those areas, we begin to let them go. What we are doing here is relearning our natural posture, helping the body to find its way back to health. Over time, this new healthy attitude starts to become automatic. It is one of the reasons why the neck pain I experienced as a student gradually improved.

Cultivating sensitivity to the body

The key to cultivating awareness of our body is sensitivity. It is as though the body is tied up with knotted bits of string. Our task is to unpick the knots. At first it may feel as though we don't have the dexterity: we're too clumsy and ham-fisted. But as we go deeper with mindfulness, we'll find that gradually – without pulling too tight or getting impatient – we will begin to be able to allow the body to release and expand. We'll find ourselves working through layer upon layer of habitual tension, and letting go at ever-deeper levels.
But this is not merely a matter of 'relaxation', a simple loosening of tight muscles. The body is not a system of ropes and pulleys, wires and armatures needing adjusting and releasing. There is much more to it than that. Physical mindfulness is an exploration into the mysteries of embodiment. Letting go of habitual tension is as much to do with working with the mind as it is to do with releasing the body.

Stress first-aid kit

Notice when something is causing you stress. The fact you recognize that something is causing stress is the beginning of changing it. Look for symptoms, such as tensing in the belly and shoulders, frustration, irritability, compulsive thinking.

Catch it early. Stress reactions can speed up and fire off very quickly. The longer they go on, the more difficult they are to work with.

Do something! This may mean you need to stop doing something else – stop shouting, or working on your computer, or rushing. Bring your mind into your body; notice especially the lower part of the body (feet, legs, belly) and

the weight of the body on the floor. This is an immediate antidote for anxiety and tension. Notice the weight of the body, soften the belly and shoulders, feel your feet.

Extend your out-breath. When we experience stress, we breathe shallowly and quickly and in the upper part of our body only. This makes stress worse. So a good antidote is to extend the out-breath. Here's how: Blow the breath out slowly through the lips as if you were blowing through a straw. Try to blow the breath out as long as possible – a long, steady stream of out-breath. Do this without taking a particular in-breath beforehand. Then, when you can't breathe out anymore, relax and let the in-breath flood in of its own accord. Try to extend the out-breath as long as you can (without collapsing or squeezing in the chest as you do so, and without forcing). Do this a few times, no more than five or six full breaths.

Extending the out-breath empties the lungs of the stale air lying at the bottom of the lungs. It is also the way of taking a full in-breath. The way to breathe more deeply is to extend the out-breath.

Whatever we feel, say, or do affects our body. Emotions are at one and the same time movements of the heart, narratives in the head, chemical and muscular changes in the body. And it works the other way round – changes in the body affect feelings in the heart and thoughts in the head. A sleepless night will leave us more vulnerable to irritability; a head-cold will make it more difficult to concentrate; monthly hormonal cycles causes mood changes. We can work on our mind by bringing attention to our body. Mind and body are interconnected.

A central idea in this book is that mind has depth, experience has depth. The body also has depth. Mind and body are not two separate 'things', as we tend to think in the West. Physical mindfulness is a journey into depth. As our mind deepens, so our experience of our body deepens: both become progressively subtler, richer, and more integrated with one another. Any experience of depth has the taste of integration. The immediate symptom of integration is the sense of mind and body becoming one. This sense of oneness brings about a release of energy. It's as though we are not a self but a collection of selves, pulling in opposite directions, wanting different things, competing for supremacy. This inner conflict, which we may hardly be aware of, robs us of our energy. And this conflict is played out in our body, in the tensions and holdings of our body.

What we are looking for is to gather up these conflicting selves into one harmonious whole. Awareness of the body – returning the mind into the body again and yet again – is an effective way of doing this. Body awareness earths us, makes us more stable. All we need to do is notice the mind going off into one of its little fantasies or diatribes, and then come back to the feeling of the body – our feet on the pavement, our backside on the car seat.

As we develop physical mindfulness, we start to enter a subtler and richer relationship with our body. We might start to notice, for instance, how our body is the map and history of our mind. We seem to store memories in different parts of our body. I have had many experiences of this – or rather of unlocking this – especially in meditation. I remember, in one practice, noticing pain in my shoulders. I tried to feel it without wanting to push it away, without telling myself how painful it was, and then a memory seemed to come out of it – a memory of hiding under a low bridge and feeling scared. All the fear came flooding back, and in that moment my shoulders completely let go. My experiences of memories 'coming out' of the body fascinate me. They remind me of the mysterious nature of experience: that 'matter' – the stuff the body is made up of – is not mere matter.

Our body has wisdom of its own

If we engage wholeheartedly with mindfulness, our body will begin to speak to us in an intimate, symbolic language. The best way to think about it is, once again, in terms of integration; the arbitrary and illusory distinction we make between body and mind – or, more poetically, 'body and soul' – softens and dissolves. We start to experience the body in a new way. Thoughts and emotions have a much more direct and immediate effect on our body. It is as though we become more connected up – thought with emotion with body. And because of this, the body starts to give us clues about what is blocking our awareness, what it is we need, how we feel, what our deeper motivations might be. We start to understand our life through our direct physical sense. Body and mind are experienced as two sides of the same mysterious coin.

As absorption deepens in meditation, we can experience strange physical symptoms. I remember my hands suddenly feeling like massive baseball gloves. A friend of mine felt he was meditating upside down, and was tempted to open his eyes just in case! These kinds of experiences have a Buddhist name. They are called *samāpattis*, which roughly translates as 'attainments'. They are signs that our mind is loosening

up, that we are going in the right direction. Whilst they can feel unfamiliar and even a bit frightening at first, if we let go into them, they are often very pleasurable.

Of course, the danger of reading about this kind of thing is that it can make us feel inadequate. Questions such as 'Am I making progress?' or 'Am I having deep experiences?' can be really unhelpful. I have known people who have psychic experiences – visions and the like – without seeming to become kinder or wiser as a result. Any good meditation teacher knows that 'strong' experiences can be unhelpful, that people can 'get off' on them, start to feel special as a result of them. Becoming kinder, wiser, and more aware is the goal of life with full attention. That's what matters – not whether we have visions, unlock traumatic memories, or feel that our body is suddenly very large indeed. People seem to have these kinds of dramatic experiences earlier on in their practice of meditation. Gradually, as they become more integrated, everything starts to calm down.

The habitual body is the habitual mind

Body awareness is a journey from alienation towards integration and embodied consciousness. It is a path in itself, one that eventually leads to insight. Let's finally turn our attention to that, before we start to look at how to practise the first sphere of mindfulness in our day-to-day lives.

I tend to hold a lot of habitual tension in my guts. Relaxation and body awareness can help with this. I can notice the physical tension in my belly and keep letting it go – I can do this as I talk to a friend, attend a lecture, teach at the centre, or write these words. In meditation especially, I can release the tension very deeply. But – and there is a 'but' – the tendency to hold on in my belly has become instinctual. It goes into the very core of my being, far beyond conscious awareness. It has become how I hold on to 'me'.

The particular way we hold ourselves becomes hardwired. You can see this in how people walk. Some men walk like cowboys, others like nervous clerks; some women walk like timid librarians, others wiggle like film stars. Each walk expresses the person: they are quite unique and distinct. We hold our body, move our body, in a particular shape, a particular manner, and this becomes who we are. We identify with this shape. Even if it's uncomfortable, it feels like 'me'. We hold our body in a habitual shape that expresses our habitual self. Self is a habit – a habit of being a particular way, a tendency to react along particular lines. Who we are now

is a consequence of what we have habitually done – whether we have habitually gotten angry, depressed, bored, intoxicated, argumentative, or ebullient. All this is inscribed in our body. My tendency to habitually react with anxiety and worry is my tendency to hold in the belly. We become who we are now by what we have repeatedly and habitually done in the past. Who we become in the future will be the consequence of what we do now. This 'me-making' is held in the body, somatized in the body.

Exploring how we hold the body – finding ways of letting that go – is loosening our attachment to self. At root, relaxation is a spiritual practice. If we really want to relax, if we want to stay relaxed, then we need to let go of self. Just notice how your body feels when you strongly want something – a pretty face, a sexy poster, a chocolate fudge sundae – notice what happens in your guts, in your shoulders. And feel what happens when you don't want something – when you wish that so-and-so would shut up! – notice how the body tenses up. Every time egotism arises, physical tension arises. The more self, the more tension. Egoism is painful. Don't take my word for it: cultivate body awareness and see for yourself.

From a Buddhist point of view, our most fundamental belief about ourselves is misconceived. We instinctively believe that we exist as a fixed and separate entity. We can't help thinking that behind our changing body – cells wearing out and being replaced, hair gradually thinning – behind our changing emotions, thoughts, and attitudes, there is an enduring 'self', a 'me' that all these changes happen to. But the Buddha said that no such self exists. It is an illusion, something we have brought into being by habitual mind-stories, predictable reactions, repetitive thought patterns. Self is the habit of being a particular way – which is also a habit of holding our body in a particular way. Let go of one and you let go of the other. As the great Zen patriarch Dogen said, when he recorded his experience of awakening, 'self and body quite dropped off'.[7] We have nothing to lose.

Before I suggest practical, day-to-day ways of developing and deepening body awareness, I want to make sure we don't forget the basics: going for a run, getting an early night, eating a salad, avoiding junk food. This kind of thing may not seem very spiritual, but it is vital to our wellbeing. At the risk of stating the obvious, let's briefly review some of the broader health issues of mindfulness of the body.

The health audit

Body mindfulness needs to include awareness of what we put into our body – what we eat and drink. It means, for instance, being mindful of not overeating. We need to make sure that most of what we eat has nutritional value. Dietary theories differ to the point of outright contradiction, but they all agree that fruit and vegetables should play a large part in our diet. When we consider that only 14% of men and 27% of women eat the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables every day (not including potatoes), it's clear just how important this simple aspect of body awareness is. On top of that, many people only drink a fraction of the 2.5 litres of water that doctors recommend that we drink each day. Tea, coffee, and alcohol are diuretics, and this increases the likelihood of chronic dehydration.

Buddhism holds non-violence as a central belief. One relatively simple way of becoming more non-violent in everyday life is by becoming a vegetarian. The first ethical precept of Buddhism (as we shall see) is 'not to kill'– and as eating meat is killing, many Buddhists choose to become vegetarian. Whether or not we are moved by the moral considerations, it is fairly well documented that vegetarians live longer than meat eaters, and that vegans live longer than vegetarians. Vegetarianism and veganism are also more ecologically desirable and sustainable. By becoming a vegetarian or vegan, you are decreasing the harm you cause yourself, the planet, and all the beings on it.

We need to take regular exercise. This means doing at least 30 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise five times a week. 'Moderate exercise' means exercising to the point of getting warm, mildly out of breath, and mildly sweaty. Some studies show that the more vigorous the exercise the better, especially in preventing heart disease. In a way, it doesn't matter what exercise we do – though yoga or t'ai chi ch'uan have the added benefit of enhancing body awareness and aiding deep relaxation. At the very least, we should be regularly engaging in some enthusiastic gardening, or brisk walking. Once again, environmentalism and health coincide: what is unhealthy for the individual is unhealthy for the planet. The amount of sleep we need varies with age, life circumstance, and health, but many of us do not get enough. Our tendency to burn the candle at both ends has created 'so much sleep deprivation that what is really abnormal sleepiness is now the norm'.[8] Experts tell us that if we feel drowsy during the day – even when we are bored – then we haven't had sufficient sleep. If we routinely fall asleep within 5 minutes of lying down, we probably have severe sleep deficit.

I can only brush the surface of the health issues we need to face up to if we are to take mindfulness of the body seriously. It has now been shown, for example, that many food additives (such as E numbers) are linked with hyperactivity and disruptive behaviour in children.[9] A total of 67% of men and 58% of women are overweight and there is an epidemic of teenage obesity caused by the combination of junk food, lying on sofas, and playing computer games. It is estimated that one in five people drink alcohol to dangerous levels. If we include recreational drug use, monosodium addictions linked to fast food and over-reliance on stimulants such as caffeine, it's obvious that the physical health benefits of body awareness should not be overlooked.

This might be a good time to do a health audit on yourself, and, if they are willing, on your family. Use your journal. Create your own scoring system from 1 to 10 (1 being very poor and 10 being exemplary). Create categories such as: five portions of fruit and veg per day, regular aerobic exercise, 2.5 litres of water per day, 8 hours of sleep. See what your score is. You might also check the amount of alcohol you drink, and the number of cigarettes you smoke, if any. Do you use recreational drugs?

We often find that our good intentions are not borne out in actual experience. It's curiously easy to not notice this, as if we mistake intentions for actions. Because we mean to get to the gym or eat less junk food – even tell ourselves that that's what we're doing – we can fail to notice that we keep finding reasons for not doing it.

The mindful walk

The body is the anchor of our awareness. Every time we come back to our body, we are establishing ourselves in immediate sense experience instead of being 'somewhere else'. Tuning in to our physicality – the touch of our clothes, a cool breeze on our face, our feet striking the pavement as we walk – is a simple way of escaping toxic mind. Toxic mind is mind speeded up, stressed out, and compulsively active. In toxic mind, thoughts breed more thoughts; they proliferate into a noisy cacophony of recycled pop songs, negative self-talk, and repetitive views. Returning to the body is the first antidote to that.

But it would be unrealistic of me to ask you to be aware of your body all the time. Instead, it would be better to think of cultivating islands of mindfulness. These 'islands of mindfulness' will gradually affect your whole experience. So from now

on I am going to ask you to take on specific mindfulness practices – practices that I will guide you through week-by-week. We are going to start by cultivating body awareness in a daily 'mindful walk'. I'm going to ask you to do this every day this week and then continue doing it until the end of the eight-week course. Of course you might forget, or you may choose not to do the mindful walk – we'll come to that later. As the weeks progress, I'll be suggesting new approaches to the walk, approaches that explore the particular mindfulness theme we are exploring during that week.You will be more likely to remember to practise your mindful walk if you set up for it well – if you think ahead to the issues you are likely to face. As I've already said, if you plan carefully, you are more likely to succeed – and by 'succeed' I mean actually do it! Here's how to prepare:

Think of a walk you do every day. It's important, wherever possible, to choose a walk that you already do. If you add a special mindful walk to your daily routine, chances are you won't be able to keep it up. The walk should be no longer than 20 minutes and no less than 5 minutes. Over 20 would be too demanding, less than 5 would hardly be a walk at all! You might like to choose the first 10 minutes of your walk to the train station, or your walk to the bus stop, or nursery.

Describe your route. Using your journal, describe the walk you have chosen in as much detail as possible. Visualize it in your mind: 'I walk past the post office, the dry cleaners, and the supermarket, then I turn right down such-and-such a road with the park on my left...' Writing about it, visualizing it, you will remember to do it. It will serve as a prompt. I can't stress enough how remembering to be mindful is going to be the key to this whole course. So write it all down. If you can, draw a picture of your walk – it doesn't matter if you use stick men and lollipop trees – it will all help you to remember. The more detail, the better.

Jot down any issues you might face. Try to think of any possible obstacles you might face in trying to be mindful of your body during your mindful walk. For instance, you might meet people you know in the street, or you might have no set routine. Perhaps your routine is very different at the weekend? Perhaps you're a cyclist?

Try to think of creative ways of resolving those issues. What solutions can you come up with? You could plan a weekday walk to the train station and a weekend walk to the local park. You could dedicate the first 10 minutes of your bike ride to mindfulness – noticing your backside on the seat, and your feet on the pedals. You could park your car a little further away from work, or get off the bus a stop before your usual one. Write down what you decide. Be as specific as you can:

one walk per day, for so long, with such-and-such creative solutions to such-and-such possible obstacles.

Review how it went. The mindful walk will be our daily practice in full attention. At some time in the day (perhaps last thing at night or as soon as you get into work), write down whether you remembered to do it and, if you did, what you noticed and how it went. I have provided a day-to-day review at the end of this chapter.

Walking mindfully is not about walking in a deliberate or artificial way. You don't even have to walk slowly. Yes, in some walking meditation practices, you walk very slowly indeed, and this has value (especially for continuing the effects of meditation), but you will look rather silly if you try to get to work like that! We have been walking perfectly naturally up to now; the only difference in our mindful walk is that we decide to pay attention to it. Here are some specific suggestions for how to do that:

Bring your attention into your body and its movements as you walk. Each time you get distracted, simply bring your mind back to your body in a relaxed and natural way.

Bring your attention into the soles of your feet. This is especially useful if you are speedy or anxious. Notice the weight of your body dropping through the soles of your feet and be aware of the support of the ground. Keep bringing your mind back to that.

Use a counting technique. You can use this along with awareness of the soles of your feet. It will help you stay with your direct physical sensations. Using counting is a really good way of doing walking meditation, especially if you are very distracted or stressed. It is also a useful method of building up concentration when you first set out on your mindful walk.What I suggest is that you count after each step, starting at one. Take a step and say 'one' silently to yourself. Take another step and say 'two', and so on up to eight. When you get to eight, count backwards after each step. Take a step and say 'eight'. Take another step and say 'seven', then 'six', then 'five', and so on. You could drop the counting after 5 minutes or so, or you could carry on counting for the entire walk.

Use words or phrases. Be aware of your whole body while you walk and add phrases that help you stay with your experience. You could repeat the words 'walking mindfully', 'walking peacefully'. You might like to find your own words that connect you emotionally with the practice.

Walk and let go. Be aware of your whole body, paying special attention to any feelings of worry or anxiety, either physical or mental. See if you can just let go of those worries and relax your body and mind as you walk.

Bring an appreciative attention to your experience. This means tuning in to any pleasurable sensations coming in through the senses. Take pleasure in your body moving, the breeze on your skin, feelings of warmth or coolness. Notice pleasant sights and sounds – the colour of dahlias, the song of blackbirds.

Use your imagination. You might try using images, such as a lotus blossom opening under each foot as you walk, or the depths of the earth beneath your feet. This is a good way of getting interested in the walking practice.

The discrepancy monitor

All of us have what might be called a 'discrepancy monitor' – something that evaluates the discrepancy between how we are now (or how we think we are now) and some kind of model or ideal. The discrepancy monitor shows up the mismatch between the state of mind we actually are in, and the state of mind we wish, expect, or feel we should be in. This is inevitable and, often enough, helpful and healthy. It alerts us to the need for change, and stimulates the desire to reduce the gap between who we are now and who we want to be.

The problem is that many of the things that cause this sense of discrepancy relate to aspects of life where no immediate or obvious action can be taken – the desire to be happy or confident, for instance. All the mind can do is rehearse all the different possible ways of reducing the discrepancy. This can become a state of rumination – where we think we are trying to resolve the mismatch, but in fact we are making it worse. In this state of mind, we find ourselves constantly and painfully measuring what progress (or lack of progress) we have made towards closing the gap. This can cause an ongoing and undermining sense of always falling short of the mark, of not living up to our ideals, of not being who we should be. One of the challenges of spiritual life – of any life that involves the wish to move towards ideals, towards happier, calmer, wiser states of mind – is finding ways of activating change without becoming overconcerned with discrepancy. One of the antidotes to rumination (as we will see) is grounding our experience in the actual sensations of the present. The key to this is to bring the mind into the body.[10]

The daily body scan

You might find that taking up the mindful walk is enough for this week. Sometimes, it's best to decide to do one thing and to do it well. However, this would also be a good week to start a deliberate daily practice of body awareness. It will increase your felt-sense of the body and release pent-up tension. It will ground your energy in the body instead of allowing it to spin around in the whirligig of your mind. Practising the body scan will also help to set you up for next week, when I will be introducing meditation.

See if you can find 15 to 30 minutes each day to practise the body scan. Read how to do it carefully before you try it yourself. See if you can put time aside every day – you might find that you can do it as soon as you come back from work, or, if you work from home, you could do it in your lunch break. The body scan is about bringing your awareness into your body, filling the body with awareness. You are trying to notice what's there in the moment, bringing a non-judgemental awareness to whatever it is you can feel – comfortable or uncomfortable, relaxed or tense. You are not trying to change your experience of the body, or even relax; you are just noticing what's there.

Lying down

Lie on the floor with your knees up and your feet flat on the floor and hip-width apart. Your head should be resting on a firm cushion, yoga block, or a couple of paperback books. Only the bony part at the back of the skull should be resting on the support – so you should be able to reach up and touch the back of your neck. You can get a sense of how far your feet should be from your backside by bringing the knees up to the chest, grasping them, and then letting them fall down with your feet flat. Basically, you are trying to find a place where you can balance your legs easily and naturally without having to grip. Have your elbows out to the side and your hands resting on your belly.

This is an excellent posture for your spine. Having your knees up like this means that the whole of the back rests on the floor (if you have your legs out flat, then the small of your back will rise up off the ground slightly). Having your head supported and your neck free means that the neck can fall back into alignment with the spine. Make sure you are warm enough. If you wear glasses, take them off, and put them on the floor above your head. If you put them on your chest, you might forget and roll onto them when you get up! When you're ready, close your eyes.

Scanning your body with non-judgemental awareness

Bring your attention into the body. Feel the warmth and weight of the body on the floor. Then cultivate conscious awareness, detailed awareness, of each part of your body in succession – starting with your feet and ending up at the top of your head: toes, soles of the feet, backs of the feet, ankles, shins, calf muscles, and so on... Try and be as detailed as you can (though this will depend on how much time you have put aside). Remember, you are trying to notice what you actually feel in the moment, not what you think you feel. You will probably notice that you can feel some areas of the body quite clearly, others hardly at all. That's fine. Just notice that – it's nothing to be concerned about. We are trying to educate our awareness to notice subtlety, nuance, and detail in the body, and this will take time and patience. So do what you can – work up from the feet to the top of the head, bringing your attention into each area.

Getting up

It is important not to jerk yourself forward to get up from this posture. You want to keep the alignment of your neck and spine. So, when you're ready, open your eyes. See if you can let 'the seen' just fall into your eyes without you having to look at anything. See if you can keep your awareness routed in your body. Often, when we think about moving, our mind jumps forward to the end of the movement – and this brings tension back into the body. So see if you can inhibit that tendency. You don't need to think about getting up at all. Your body will do that for you; just stay resting in your body, at home in your body. Let your eyes travel to one side and allow your head to follow; then let your whole body roll onto your side. Try to do this without lifting your head. When you are on your side, notice your belly – have you tightened your belly? Then, when you feel ready, roll onto all fours and then get up from there.

Week 2 Practice Review

1. The mindful walk

Use the simple chart below to check if you remembered to do the walking practice. If you have time, jot down how it went. Were you able to work creatively (as you had planned) with the issues of doing your walking practice? How did the mindful walk leave you feeling – better or worse? Did you notice anything in particular about your body during the practice?

	Did you remember?	How did it go? What were the issues if you forgot?
Day 1	Yes/No	
Day 2	Yes/No	
Day 3	Yes/No	
Day 4	Yes/No	
Day 5	Yes/No	
Day 6	Yes/No	
Day 7	Yes/No	

2. The body scan

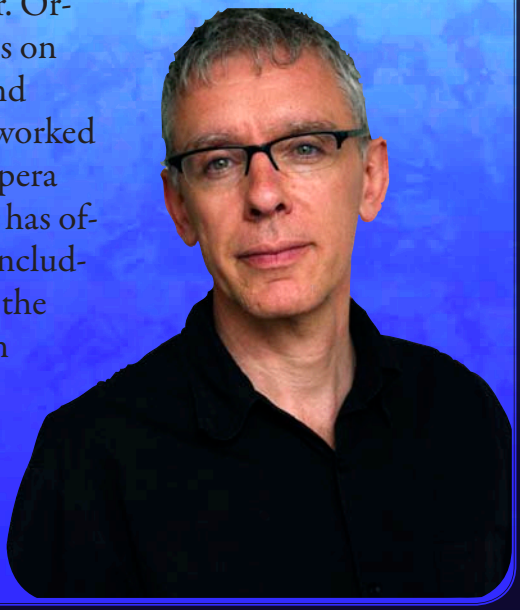
Were you able to do the body scan? If so, what did you notice? Which parts of the body were you able to feel and which parts were you less able to feel? How did doing the body scan leave you feeling? Jot down your thoughts below.

Write your thoughts here

Awareness of the body and its movements is the first of the Buddha's four spheres of mindfulness. It is the bedrock of full attention. The body is our home. We can think of ourselves as living in such-and-such a place in such-and-such a town, but really, if we live anywhere at all, we live in our body. The first sphere of mindfulness is about becoming more and more at home in our body. All we need to do to feel a little bit happier is to go for a run, do some yoga, or take the dog for a walk. The body is our first port of call. If we want to de-stress or avoid becoming depressed, our first questions to ourselves should be: Am I getting enough exercise? Am I getting enough sleep? Am I eating healthily? The body is something we can always come back to – as you read this, attend a tricky business meeting, or drive to work. Whenever we are not sure how to cultivate mindfulness, we can just come back to the body and its movements – that's all we need to do. And of course when we notice the body, we start to notice how the body feels – whether it feels comfortable or uncomfortable, heavy or light, numb or tingly. So, in the next chapter, I want to explore this inner world of bodily sensations more deeply and I also want explore the feel, even the taste, of experience.

About the Author

Maitreyabandhu is an experienced teacher and a member of the Western Buddhist Order. Ordained in 1990, he has published articles on Buddhism and meditation in the UK and abroad. He is a published poet and has worked in such diverse fields as the visual arts, opera and alternative health. Maitreyabandhu has often presented Buddhism in the media, including television and radio. He is currently the director of Breathing Space, the London Buddhist Centre's health and wellbeing programme. He lives and works at the London Buddhist Centre in the East End of London. This is his second book.



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