

Health & Wellbeing course meditations

Week 1: Bodyscan Meditation (read slowly, takes about 20-25 mins)

Ok, so coming into a comfortable lying position. Take a little time to adjust yourself so that you can get as comfortable as possible. Make sure your spine and your neck is nice and long and straight. Let your hands rest palms face up by your sides. Allow your eyes to rest either closed or half open looking along the line of your nose, whichever is most comfortable. Have your mouth closed and your tongue resting against the roof of your mouth.

As your body starts to settle, start to feel your breathing in your belly. When you relax you can naturally feel the rising and sinking of your belly with each breath. As your body relaxes, allow your mind to stay aware and sensitive.

Notice the various sensations in the body, become aware of sounds around you; notice the thoughts coming into your mind. These are all part of what's going on in the present moment. Be aware of the various ways in which your body is in touch with the world around you. There may be sensations in your back or legs – you can feel the pressure of what they're resting on, maybe warmth. There're various sensations there which you probably haven't noticed. Just notice how it feels, what the sensations are like. Just open to that experience. We're now going to bring this presence or awareness through the body in a particular order.

First of all we're going to bring the attention to the crown of your head; just becoming aware of the crown of your head. Don't try to change anything, don't try to do anything; just being present with how things are in the crown of your head.

And now bring your awareness into your forehead. Just your presence, awareness. And now into the right side of your head, above your ear. And now to the back of your head, and to the left side of your head. Bringing your awareness now into your eyes, first your left eye, your right eye, your right ear, the back of your head in line

with your ears, your left ear; bringing your awareness into your nose, moving downwards through your body all the time; just being present, aware of how things are in your nose.

And now moving that awareness to your mouth, your right jaw, the back of your head at the base of your skull, your left jaw. Moving your awareness down again into your throat at the front. Not doing anything; not changing anything just being aware. All the transformation you need comes simply from your awareness. Moving your awareness to the right side of your neck, the back of your neck, the left side of your neck; moving your awareness down again to the top of your chest at the front, into your right shoulder, into the top of your back, your left shoulder, just present, just simply aware.

Moving your awareness down again, into the area of your chest on the level of your heart, starting on the left side, the right side of your chest, your right arm pit, your upper back in between your shoulder blades, your left arm pit, becoming aware of your arms themselves, your right upper arm, your left upper arm. Moving your awareness down into the lower part of your chest, your sternum, your solar plexus, simply being present, being aware of what is right now. Now to the right side of your body, roughly on the level of your elbow, your back on this level, the left side of your body at the level of your elbow. Becoming aware of your left elbow, your right elbow. Moving your awareness down to the level of your navel, just being present, just being aware what's here at the front of your body, the right side of your body on the level of your navel, your lower back, the left side of your body.

Moving your awareness down again to the level of your pubic bone in your lower belly, just present, aware; now to your right hip, your sacrum, your tail, to your left hip. Moving your awareness into your right lower arm, your left lower arm. Moving your awareness down into your left buttock, your right buttock.

Now allowing your awareness to come into your right upper leg, first the front, the right side, the rear side of your right upper leg, the left side, moving your awareness into your left upper leg, first the front of your upper leg, the right side, the rear side, the left side of your left upper leg, moving your awareness, your presence into your right wrist, what happens when an area comes into your awareness like this? Moving your awareness into your right palm, the back of your

hand, your right thumb, your right index finger, middle finger, ring finger, little finger.

Moving your awareness into your left wrist, the palm of your hand, the back of your hand, your left thumb, your index finger, your middle finger, your ring finger, your little finger; moving your presence, your awareness down into your right knee, first the front of your knee, the right side of your knee, the back of your knee, the left side of your knee; moving your awareness into your left knee, the right side of your left knee, the rear side of your knee, the left side of your knee; moving your awareness down again, into your right lower leg, the front of your leg, the right side of your lower leg, the rear side of your lower leg, the left side of your lower leg; moving your awareness to your left lower leg, the right side of your lower leg, the rear side, the left side and back to the front; moving your awareness down again into your right ankle, first the front of your ankle, the right side, the rear of your ankle, the left side, back again to the front, moving your awareness down into your left ankle, the front of your ankle, the right side of your ankle, the rear side and the left side of your ankle.

Moving your awareness into your right foot, the topside of your foot, your right heel, the sole of your foot, your right big toe, your second toe, your third toe, your fourth toe, your fifth toe, moving this presence, this awareness into your left foot, the topside of your foot, the left heel, the sole of your left foot, your left big toe, your second toe, your third toe, your fourth toe, your fifth toe.

Now moving your awareness again up to the crown of your head, letting your awareness just sweep down through your body, perhaps a little faster now, a little more easily, through from the crown of your head all the way through and over your face you head, your neck, over your shoulders, your chest, your upper back, down through your upper arms, down through your mid-back, your abdomen, your elbows, your lower arms, your hands, down through your pelvis, into your legs, down through your upper legs, your knees, your lower legs, your ankles, your feet, that's right.

As you become aware of all these areas you may find your awareness can slip down through the body even more readily, even more easily, just letting this happen very naturally, and now, allowing your awareness to be generalised through your whole body, particularly

allowing yourself to be aware of any places of any kind of discomfort, tension, stress, anything that's not 100% how it might be; allowing these areas to be held in this gentleness, in this curiosity, this presence of your awareness.

Don't try to change anything; just being aware, being present; the changes come when they're ready, and even if they don't come, that's fine too. When you're in this quality of awareness, your relationship to all these things changes in a very beneficial way, and when you feel your awareness very diffused throughout your body, very present and very gently become aware of your fingers, your toes, gently starting to move into your fingers, your toes, gently, gently, allow yourself a really good, deep stretch, a really good stretch, allowing your body to open up, to wake up so that you're ready to carry on with the next thing.

Week 3/4: Counting the Breath (20-25 mins)

This week we're going to continue our meditation practice but instead of moving our awareness through the body, we're going to practice keeping our attention on one object of meditation, the breath.

So come to your sitting meditation position. First, we settle the body in uprightness. A quality of uprightness and balance in your body will create a corresponding mental state. So, if you're sitting on a chair, have your knees separated and your feet flat on the floor. If your back is weak in any way, you can use the chair back for support, perhaps with a cushion. Otherwise you might want to explore sitting on a stool without a back. Adjust your position so that your body is as upright as you can manage.

If you're kneeling, have your knees wide with some kind of a support under your tail, a cushion or bench. If you're sitting cross-legged, use a cushion to lift your pelvis, and sit on the front half of it to tilt your pelvis so that your knees can come to the ground.

In any case, we want to create a stable, triangular foundation between your knees (or feet if you're on a chair) and your sitting bones. Sway your body a little side-to-side, forwards and backwards, to help you settle into a balanced uprightness. Take a few moments now to become really aware of that solid, grounded, relaxed but upright feeling.

Rest your hands in your lap. Let your shoulders relax, have your neck long, your head balanced right above your sitting bones. Let your gaze rest down on the floor in front of you, and you can either keep your eyes open or allow them to close.

Have your mouth closed, and your tongue soft and resting on your roof of your mouth.

Allow your whole body to relax.

Breathing gently through your nose, become aware of the gentle in and out movement of your belly with each breath. Take a moment just to tune in to how the breath feels in your belly right now.

As you become aware of your breath, start to mentally count. In-breath, one; out-breath, two. In-breath, three; out-breath, four. And so on, up to ten – and then coming back to one. Your awareness, your focus, resting in your belly. Very simple - just counting, just breathing.

Just taking very natural, relaxed breaths. Not trying to change anything, just counting your normal relaxed in and out breaths.

And anytime you get distracted and lose count, just coming back to one. In-breath one, out-breath two, and so on. Doing your best not to judge, or blame, or look at why you lost count, just simply coming back to one.

Any thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations, anything at all can arise and pass through your awareness – but you just stay with the breathing in your belly, staying with the counting.

As your body relaxes, your mind can become more focussed and concentrated, and naturally you'll find your breath becomes more light and gentle.

As your breath becomes more light and gentle, your body becomes more and more relaxed, and comfortable.

Remembering that anytime you get distracted and lose count, just simply come back to one. No judging, no effort, no trying, simply coming back to one and continue counting.

Very simple. Just breathing, counting, relaxing.

Sometimes you may feel like there are so many thoughts or feelings arising that you can barely hear your breath or your counting. That's fine – just stay with it. Sometimes things can become much quieter. Either way your meditation is equally valuable. Your focus, concentration and awareness is the most important thing.

All you do is stay with the breathing in your belly.

You may find as your mind naturally becomes more and more settled and you're regularly getting to 10 that you might want to explore just counting your out-breaths. So out-breath, one; in-breath. Out-breath,

two; in-breath. And so on all the way up to ten, and then back to one as before. Just if that's good for you.

Or if at any point you feel more distracted, like you need a stronger anchor for your awareness, then come back to counting both your in- and out-breaths. Just exploring and finding whatever is good for you. Counting both your in- and out-breaths, or counting just the out-breaths. Keeping your awareness on the breathing in your belly.

[bell]

When it's the end of the meditation period, it's always important to be very gentle and give yourself plenty of time. So, very gently, becoming aware of the edges of your body, your skin, the crown of your head. Begin swaying your body a little side to side.

Taking a nice deep breath, and having a good stretch.

Week 5/6: Following the Breath (read slowly, 25 minutes)

In this week's practice we're going to be following the breath rather than counting it. As with all the meditation practices on this course, you can practice them lying down, sitting, standing, or walking. But now we're going to practice the meditation sitting. So bring yourself into a comfortable sitting position. Either sitting on a chair, kneeling with a cushion or bench, or sitting cross-legged.

Make sure your knees are wide so that you can make that triangular base. With this stable triangular foundation, you can allow your upper body to, as it were, float upwards effortlessly. Sway your body a little side to side like a pendulum until you can find the most comfortable upright position for you, right in the middle.

Bring your gaze to the floor in front of you, down along the line of your nose, and you can either keep your eyes softly open, or if you want letting them close. Rest your hands in your lap. Have your mouth closed, your tongue soft and resting against the roof of your mouth. Take a moment to allow your shoulders to relax, your whole body to relax.

Draw your awareness down to the feeling of your breath in your belly – the gentle in and out movement of your belly. Not trying to change the breath or influence it in any way, just be aware of your natural breathing.

So, previously we counted the breath to maintain and anchor the awareness. This practice is a little more advanced in that we simply follow the sensation of the breath using our awareness. Obviously there are many places you can be aware of your breathing, for example in your nostrils or in your throat, but in the Zen school we emphasise being aware of your breathing in the belly as this helps you to remain grounded.

When your body is relaxed, your breathing very naturally moves right down into the belly, so relax as much as you can, allowing your body to remain upright, and begin to just follow your breath. Follow the gentle in and out movement of your belly with each breath. Like this, resting your awareness in the movement – in your belly.

Very simple, your awareness is riding on the breath, anchored on the movement of the belly. But this doesn't mean you need to exclude anything or suppress anything like thoughts or feelings. You simply don't involve yourself with them. So allowing thoughts, memories feelings, sights, and sounds to come up and fade away, to arise and pass, You just stay with your breathing.

Staying with the gentle in and out movement of your belly. And any time you notice yourself getting involved or distracted by a thought or a sensation, or indeed anything at all, simply bringing your awareness back to the breath. No judging, no effort, no trying. Just notice that you've been distracted, and come back to the breath.

Sitting in meditation is a little like sitting by the side of a busy road. We just sit there and watch all the traffic of our thoughts rumbling by, and we just allow it to come and go, to arise and pass. If at any time you find you've been hitchhiking and gone off in a car, then all you do is just get out, and come back to sitting by the side of the road again. Coming back to the breath.

Maintaining your awareness, your presence. Making sure that your body stays as upright as you can, trying not to droop. This helps your mind to stay bright and awake. But at the same time, doing what you can to relax, to let go as deeply as you can.

Maintaining the awareness of your breath, and of each time you get distracted.

And as you continue to relax, you may feel your breath becoming slower, perhaps becoming lighter. But however light, however slow it becomes, just staying with that gentle in and out movement of your belly.

And any time you get distracted, just coming back to the breath... ten times, a hundred times, a thousand times, just coming back, coming back to the breath. Coming back to the present moment.

If you feel any discomfort in any place, do your best to release it, to relax around it. Maybe that means you need to move slightly, and if so moving as steadily, as slowly, as mindfully as you can. Otherwise see if you can mentally relax that area – allow it to soften. Then returning your awareness to your breath.

In this very simple and yet profound meditation practice there may be times when all sorts of memories, feelings, insights about the reality about your life, all sorts of things. Just allow them too to come and go, arise up and fade away. Try not to focus on them, do your best not to hold on to them. Anything that you really need to know will stay with you after your meditation practice.

And sometimes it can happen that as you're relaxing, maintaining your awareness, deep levels of suffering, things from the past, grief, anger, jealousy, all sorts of things can arise. Just allow these things to arise and pass, arise and pass, without any particular focus, without any particular worry or investment in them in any way. Your job is very simple: just stay with the breathing in your belly.

Just breathing, allowing. Resting your awareness on your breath. Doing your very best to keep your body relaxed and yet upright.

Breathing, and being aware of your breathing, that's all, very simple,

[bell]

Becoming aware of the edges of your body. Very gently beginning to sway your body a little side to side. Take a deep breath. Good, and when you can feel ready, have a good stretch: stretching in the arms, the legs, and the whole body.

Week 7/8: The practice of presence (20-25 minutes)

Coming to your normal sitting meditation position. Make sure you're sitting on something that will allow your pelvis to tilted forwards slightly so that your back can be up nice and straight. If you're on a chair, have the soles of your feet down to the floor, and whatever position you're in, let your knees be wide so that you can form that stable triangular base. Start to sway the body a little side to side so you can find that central, upright, balanced poise, with your spine and neck long.

Let your gaze rest downwards, and you can either keep your eyes softly open or let them close. Let your mouth be closed your tongue rest against the roof of your mouth so that you're breathing through your nose. Rest your hands in your lap, and let your shoulders relax. Let your whole body relax.

This week's practice has no one object of focus. It has a few different names: in Japan it's sometimes called *shikan taza*, which literally means "nothing but only sitting", or "just sitting". It's also called *moku sho*, where "moku" means silent and "sho" means "illumination", "brightness" or even "reflection". Often this practice is also called *fusho*, where "fu" means "not" and "sho" means "born" – so the "unborn meditation". Like all the other practices it's very simple yet very subtle, and not always that easy.

Remember, *moku sho* means "silent reflection" or "silent illumination" – in this silent stillness you allow anything at all to arise and pass and you just remain aware and present in the way that a mirror is just present. The mirror reflects everything that passes its surface without any kind of discrimination, judgment or holding on.

Fusho, or "unborn" refers to all of these things that arise and pass. Thoughts, memories, sights and sounds, whatever they are, they all arise – they are born – but our awareness doesn't arise in the same way, it's not born. The mirror is unborn, it's not something you can hold onto but it's also something that never goes away. So in this meditation we staying in this quality of awareness, this quality of presence and allow anything at all to arise and pass and be reflected in your mirror.

So as you sit here right now, your body upright and relaxed, your mind similarly aware and yet relaxed, just allowing all those thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, ideas, happenings to come and go, to arise up and pass away. Noticing, being aware, staying relaxed and present with every moment.

Anytime you feel yourself getting caught up or distracted by any of these arising and passing things then just notice that and let go. Come back to the quality of awareness, the quality of presence itself - very simple.

What we're doing here is providing a space in which you can allow absolutely anything can come up, be seen, and pass away. There's no censorship, no attempt to control anything at all, just staying with this spaciousness. There's no need to stay specifically with the breath - just stay with this open presence.

Sometimes things may become very quiet, very still, other times it may feel like thoughts and feelings are crowding in one after another. Don't worry. Neither situation is a measure of how good your meditation is becoming. What is important is how you relate to all these things arising and passing. Just allow and do your best not to get involved. That's the key skill that we're developing here, this light touch, neither suppressing nor getting involved... simply allowing.

Doing your best to maintain that upright, open quality through your posture. Try not to slump, try to be still and yet very balanced, as relaxed as you can be, so your posture itself embodies the awareness, stillness, the presence, and the relaxation that this meditation is about.

Allowing the thoughts and feelings to arise, be reflected in your mirror-like awareness, and pass away. As you do this practice, it will become more and more clear that you are not your thoughts, you're not your feelings. These things come and go.

Sometimes it can feel like quite deep memories, suffering from the past can arise in this spaciousness. That's fine, again just allowing these feelings to come and then go. You don't have to do anything at all, just provide the space and the healing looks after itself.

Sometimes it can feel like you don't really know if you're doing this meditation or not. In one sense there's so little to do, but don't worry. If you're remain aware and relaxed, if you're allowing things to arise and pass and doing your best to let go when you feel yourself getting caught up or involved with things, then you're doing this meditation. It can sometimes take a little time to become clear about the wonders of this practice, but just continue doing the simple things, and over time some of the depths will clarify.

In providing this open spaciousness, sometimes very deep insights into who you are, into relationships, into reality or the universe, all manner of things can come up. Again, don't try to hold onto or store away any of these things, just let them go. Trust that anything you really need to know will stay with you after the meditation period.

[bell]

So very gently becoming aware of the edges of your body. Gently swaying your body a little side to side like a pendulum. And when you can feel ready, take a deep breath and give yourself a good stretch.