

# Mindfulness for Life

## Session 8: The rest of your life

Access more documents and the guided practices at  
[youthmindfulness.org/mindfulness-for-life](http://youthmindfulness.org/mindfulness-for-life)

*When asked “How would you have lived your life differently if you had a chance?” Nadine Stair, an 85-year-old woman, from Louisville, Kentucky, provided these poetic words as her response...*

*If I had my life to live over again,  
I’d dare to make more mistakes next time.  
I’d relax. I’d limber up. I’d be sillier than I’ve been this trip.  
I would take fewer things seriously.  
I would take more chances,  
I would eat more ice cream and less beans.  
I would, perhaps, have more actual troubles but fewer imaginary ones.  
You see, I’m one of those people who was sensible and sane,  
Hour after hour, day after day.*

*Oh, I’ve had my moments.  
If I had to do it over again,  
I’d have more of them.  
In fact, I’d try to have nothing else – just moments,  
One after another, instead of living so many years ahead of each day.  
I’ve been one of those persons who never goes anywhere without a  
thermometer, a hot-water bottle, a raincoat, and a parachute.  
If I could do it again, I would travel lighter than I have.*

*If I had to live my life over,  
I would start barefoot earlier in the spring  
And stay that way later in the fall.  
I would go to more dances,  
I would ride more merry-go-rounds,  
I would pick more daisies.*

– Nadine Stair

## **Sustaining a daily practice**

Rather than seeing the final session of this course as an end, it may be helpful to see it as a beginning. Over the course of eight weeks we've learned mindful movement, mindful walking, the bodyscan, and sitting meditation. We've explored how to bring mindfulness into daily life and learned to become more embodied. We've also learned to relate to our experience new ways – with awareness and acceptance, with gratitude, and perhaps more perspective. We've learned to ground our attention in the body before bringing awareness to our psychological experience – our thoughts, emotions, and moods. Finally, we've begun the practice of cultivating kindness and compassion both to ourselves and to others.

The meditations we've learned continue to deepen and unfold the more we practice. Although all of them are essentially quite simple, they continue to evolve as the journey of self-discovery unfolds and new ways of relating to ourselves, to others and to life become possible. Indeed, all of these meditations can be practiced for a lifetime and they will continue to nourish us. Mindfulness can become a habit – increasingly a way of living. What's crucial to this, of course, is that we continue to practice.

We each find our own points of connection into mindful living, the practices that nourish us and the practices that challenge us. It can be help to work with both, sustaining your practice with the joy of all that brings ease and comfort as well as growing your practice through the 'learning edges' that challenge and confront.

You might find it helpful to make a note of the practices that really bring you energy and ease and make the commitment to yourself that you will nourish yourself with at least one of these every day, whether deep relaxation, mindful walking in nature, enjoying sitting with the breath or bringing mindful awareness to the first cup of coffee in the morning.

And at the same time, you might offer yourself the courage and commitment of working with your challenges, perhaps exploring mindfulness of difficult feeling in a situation that challenges you in your life just now or exploring practices that meet with resistance. So often our resistance is a protective layer where there is a lot of stored energy. With gentle, patient persistence, we are able to get beneath our habitual strategies of resistance and distraction to access the places where energy can express itself as feeling and where that access to feeling can bring real insight, healing and transformation.

Here are some suggestions that may be helpful in sustaining our own daily practice, and which we encourage you to explore, to test and taste for yourselves:

- **Maintaining a regular daily formal practice.** It's very helpful to have one dedicated space in which to sit. Try to ensure that this space feels safe and nourishing: it's hard to release the patterns of holding and reacting in an environment that may be interrupted or that feels cluttered with other projects and demands. Even a quiet corner of a room, just with a cushion and something beautiful such as flowers, stones or candles signifies a place that is dedicated to the beauty and stillness of cultivating internal spaciousness.
- **Be gentle with your intentions in formal sitting.** If sitting practice becomes difficult, practice in a way that feels manageable; even 15 minutes of conscious breathing upon waking establishes a pattern of practice. You might then move to 15 minutes of sitting. Generally, it's helpful to start small and expand your sitting time as feels natural and pleasurable. Furthermore, it's helpful to sit everyday – even if it's only for 5 minutes. This establishes the habit.
- **Find nourishing ways to integrate mindfulness with your daily life.** We don't want to make mindfulness another aspect of our to-do list! Choose practices that feel nourishing and pleasurable and begin by making these your 'mindfulness bells'. It may be the walk to work, your morning tea, 5 minutes of birdsong upon waking, deep relaxation in the evening, a mindful shower... whatever evokes real joy and pleasure brings energy to our practice and helps us to sustain it through our daily life.
- **Remember resting is practice too!** enjoy deep relaxation, sitting by a sunny window watching the day go by, baking, eating the baking!, sitting for 5 minutes with our eyes closed feeling our breath and the lightness of a smile, watching someone we love gardening, playing, sleeping...it doesn't have to be 'doing' to be mindfulness so long as a listening presence is there.
- **Feed your practice.** Read books, set aside longer periods of time for stillness and quiet (maybe a morning or a day) and go on a short retreat if the time and opportunity arises. Retreats are a wonderful way to deepen your experience of practice freed from the constraints of everyday life. You don't have to pay money or travel to go on retreat. You can have a mindfulness day or weekend at home alone or with a friend. Some readings, a beautiful environment to walk in and the space to sit in mindfulness and share your experience is all you need. If you're practicing alone, you can tailor your day of mindfulness to all your favourite practices.

## What to read?

Great books to nourish and sustain your practice...

*Mindfulness* by Mark Williams

*Wherever you go there you are* by Jon Kabat-Zinn

*Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn

*Miracle of Mindfulness* by Thich Nhat Hanh

*Peace is Every Step* by Thich Nhat Hanh

*Radical Acceptance* by Tara Brach

*The Places that Scare You* by Pema Chodron

*When Things Fall Apart* by Pema Chodron

*Lovingkindness* by Sharon Salzberg

*Breath by Breath* by Larry Rosenberg

*A Path with Heart* by Jack Kornfield

*Path of Emancipation* by Thich Nhat Hanh

Finally, don't be disheartened if you lose your practice. It's always waiting for you to return. The practice of mindfulness doesn't unfold in a linear predictable fashion. It ebbs and flows, waxes and wanes. At times we may doubt ourselves and our ability to draw any benefit from practicing, but all of this is just what happens. Just continue, breathing and watching, befriending, receiving and letting go of each moment just as it is...