

# Mindfulness for Life

## Session 3: Embodied Presence

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

### Happiness

*Happiness cannot be found through great effort and willpower,  
But is already present, in open relaxation and letting go.*

*Don't strain yourself, there is nothing to do nor undo.  
Whatever momentarily arises in the body-mind  
Has no real importance at all, has little reality whatsoever.  
Why identify with, and become attached to it,  
Passing judgment upon it and ourselves?*

*Far better to simply let the entire game happen on its own,  
Springing up and falling back like waves without changing  
or manipulating anything  
And notice how everything vanishes and reappears, magically,  
Again and again, time without end.*

*Only our searching for happiness prevents us from seeing it.  
It's like a vivid rainbow, which you pursue without ever catching,  
Or a dog chasing it's own tail.  
Although peace and happiness do not exist as an actual thing or place,  
It is always available and accompanies you every instant.*

*Don't believe in the reality of good and bad experiences;  
They are today's ephemeral weather, like rainbows in the sky.  
Wanting to grasp the ungraspable, you exhaust yourself in vain.  
As soon as you open and relax this tight fist of grasping,  
Infinite space is there - open, inviting and comfortable.*

*Make use of this spaciousness, this freedom and natural ease.  
Don't search any further.  
Don't go into the tangled jungle looking for the great awakened elephant,  
Who is already resting quietly at home in front of your own hearth.*

*Nothing to do nor undo,  
Nothing to force,  
Nothing to want,  
And nothing missing.  
Marvelous! And everything happens by itself.*

*By Ven. Lama Gendun Rinpoche*

## **Embodied Presence**

In order to make mindfulness a habit in our lives we need to learn to reside in the body – to train our awareness to rest in the body. This is what we mean by embodied presence. We become awake to the present moment, to our senses, to what is happening in the environment, and to our inner psychological experience by becoming aware of the body. Furthermore, mindfulness is not something we only do when we engage in formal practices. Rather, it is a way of awareness that we can bring to any activity at any time of the day. To do this, we need to train ourselves to be embodied as we go about our daily lives.

The breath is like a bridge between the body and the mind. When we bring our attention to the breath, our body and mind come back together and we can quickly become less dispersed. When we make a cup of tea, we can do so mindfully by following our breath as we pour the hot water or wait for the tea to brew. When we wash the dishes, we can come back to our breath and notice if there is any striving to complete the task. It may be possible to let go of any striving and instead just be fully present for the experience of washing dishes. The quality of attention we bring to the activity can transform our experience of the activity. Crucially, in order for mindfulness to flow into the

actual experience of our life (and not solely be an isolated activity we engage in for just 20 minutes a day) we need to learn to be mindful while moving.

### ***Mindful Movement***

Mindful movement can be formal or informal. Yoga is an example of formal mindful movement, where we breathe into the flow of movement in the body, become truly present to each stretch and turn of the body, nourishing the body with awareness and conscious breathing.

There are also several forms of simple structured mindful movement such as the ones we practice in this course. A regular practice of mindful movement in the morning helps to begin the day by connecting into the body, allowing us to sense into where there might be tension and pain and to bring release to the places of holding - and strength and support to our muscles, bones and internal organs.

We can also consider all the actions of our daily life as informal mindful movement; the satisfying stretching motion of taking off a jumper, the calming rhythms of brushing our teeth or vacuuming the floor. In a world so full of mental activity, it can be very refreshing to come into the bodily simplicity of these tasks, joining our awareness of breathing together with the sensations of the body. This practice can also offer a very helpful 'barometer' of our mind states. As we tidy the kitchen, wash the dishes, pack our bag in the morning the energy of our movement tells us something intimate about our state of being in that moment: are our movements hurried? jagged? impatient? brittle? or do they feel soft? light? easeful? Every act of noticing is a moment of mindfulness and an opportunity to bring softness and ease to our experience.

### **Walking Meditation**

Walking meditation is a beautiful bridge of practice between formal sitting and daily life. Every day we walk, even short distances, to get from one place to another. But when our mind is elsewhere, already at our place of destination, or lingering in the places we have come from, we don't have the chance to enjoy the nourishment and refreshment of a body that can move, the

ease of walking and the potential beauties of our environment.

The primary purpose of walking meditation is to enjoy our walking. We don't walk with any goal or destination. We just enjoy the rhythm of the moving, breathing body as each step lifts from and rests to the ground. When we begin walking meditation, it can be helpful to synchronise the rhythm of our steps with our breathing, noticing how many breaths flow with each step we take. Or we might like to use the walking meditation poem below with each step:

I have arrived, I am home.

Sounds and sights in our environment can also call us back to the present moment. You might like to walk just with the breath and the sounds of the trees and birds, or to walk with the sensations of the body and your eyes open to the field of vision moving before you. Walking in nature can be particularly nourishing, bringing mind and body in harmony together and widening your awareness to the beauty of your surroundings.

As we become practiced in dropping down into the breath, the body, the soles of the feet as we walk we can also integrate this way of walking into our daily life: from the car park to our work, from one city building to another, as we walk to meet a friend. Walking in this way provides a space of stillness, of embodiment, of connection with the earth - and means that when we arrive at our destination, we arrive uncluttered, refreshed, and able to be present to whatever we encounter.

Walking meditation can also be especially supportive when a strong emotion is present in you. Sometimes when the energy of feeling is very strong; the burning of anger, the weight of sadness or the agitation of anxiety, sitting with the energy in the body can feel too painful. In these times, we can take our painful feeling for a walk. The rhythm of movement offers some expression for the strong energy moving within us, and the feeling of our steps offers an additional anchor for our mindfulness, together with our breath. We can walk holding the hand of the painful feeling, walking not to eradicate our pain but to allow the energy of mindfulness to recognize and embrace our

feelings. The role of mindfulness is to be in better contact with whatever is there. If the feeling becomes very strong we can stop and take some mindful breaths, bringing our attention to the stable base of the abdomen while the storms of emotion and thinking pass through. When we feel calmer, we can return to our steps and lift our eyes to the trees and the sky, which also offer nourishment and care.

## **Mindful Eating**

In the practice of mindful eating, we bring the quality of awareness to the simple act of eating. Often when we eat our mind is elsewhere; engaged by a TV or computer screen or thinking about future worries or past experiences. When our mind and body are tense, we can literally swallow down this tension with our food. With the practice of mindful eating, we bring our concentration and awareness to the experience of eating and drinking so that we can really enjoy the colours, smells, tastes and textures.

You might like to choose one meal in the day, one cup of coffee or one portion of time at the beginning of eating when you can do this practice. It's helpful to begin by stopping all activity to rest into the body. You could begin by noticing the flow of your breath and the sensations in your body as it is in that moment, before it receives food: is there hunger or an absence of hunger? what is the quality of that sensation? is there thirst? or anything else? - pain, tiredness, anticipation, ease? After taking a few mindful breaths, we can turn our attention to the food or drink, just absorbing the visual information before us: what do we see? how do these appearances register in the body? in the mind and emotions? We can then expand our awareness into the other senses; perhaps you can hear the tiny sounds of the froth moving on your cappuccino, you can feel the heat coming from the mug or steam rising from the plate, you can attune to the particular aroma of your food, continuing to notice the way that all of this registers in the body, the mind and the emotions.

For many of us eating can have an old and deep emotional undertow. It can be very interesting to really notice the kinds of thoughts that emerge around eating: 'I'm not allowed this'; 'there won't be enough'; 'this will make me fat'; 'I haven't time' and also any emotions such as guilt, craving or

resistance - that come up around eating. Again, the role of mindfulness is simply to notice whatever arises with gentle curiosity. Remember to stay embodied, softening into the breath. Then we can bring our attention to the first sensations of taste, the activity of chewing, of swallowing. When we eat mindfully, it's as though we are eating for the first time. And in a way we are: since we have never drunk this particular coffee or soup, or eaten this particular bread: the experience is unique to this moment. With full awareness, we are able to truly enjoy the pleasures of eating and drinking and to do so with a deep awareness of our body, thoughts and emotions. In this way we learn to live the moments of our life more deeply.