

Working with the body; transforming unpleasant feelings and stuckness

The essence of mindfulness is staying awake and being aware of everything that is going on, internally and externally. That means on one hand opening up our senses to the full *experience* of every moment (external stimuli), and on the other hand being aware of how we *perceive* these stimuli, through feelings in the body, thoughts, emotions and gut reaction (internal movements).

To cultivate mindfulness, or to stay mindful more often, takes training. It won't happen just because we'd like it to, or by 'being mindful' every now and then. It means scheduling in daily practice, both making time for *formal* practice in meditation (or meditative movement), as well as through *informal* application, maintaining mindful awareness during activities and challenges during the day, taking pauses, re-centring etc. We need both.

There has been a lot of work done by neurologists and psychologists on how trauma and experiences which have not been fully processed, get stuck within the body, and can cause illness. You may need expert help to identify and help release this *stuckness*, but you will find that in deep states of meditation the body may involuntarily jerk and twitch, enabling the release. If this occurs let it happen without analysis; after some years this stops.

This is why we spend time tuning-in to the body. The more we come aware of the subtle energies at play within the body, the greater our emotional intelligence will be, and the more we can be liberated from unpleasant feelings. Emotions and difficult thoughts are not resolved by thinking, or they will re-appear; we need to get at the roots.

Depending on your preference and learning type, you might develop this skill in different ways. The classic starting point in mindfulness is the body scan, which can be delivered and practised in various ways. For example, you can simply tune in and explore where tensions are held, and this is valuable; but you can also deliberately target areas where you find tension or a sense of contraction, and use various tools to let the knots untie. This could include using sound, such as working with a mantra and letting its vibration be felt deep into the tissues; it could include working through the discipline of yoga or chi-gong sequences.

Remember that when doing this releasing, we work on a body-feeling plane. We do not need to analyse what the feelings are nor how they arose in the first place. Images and thoughts may pop into your mind as you do this work, but do not get drawn into a cognitive process. The body-mind will resolve things more effectively at the body-feeling level.

The prefrontal cortex is an amazing biological asset that allows us to plan and respond creatively. It makes sense of things. However, it's quite slow compared to somatic response times; how we feel things in the body – our early warning system.

It can be a source of refuge to do this bodywork outside in nature, ideally in a natural place such as an ancient woodland or by the coast. But for day-to-day work, just being in the garden will do. If you're doing this work sitting still, it can be really grounding to sit with your back against a big old tree, say mantras, and feel yourself melt into the environment.

With all emotional processing, it's essential to take the stance of an *objective observer* and be curious and patient. For example, by maintaining mindful awareness of internal feelings, you might be aware of an unpleasant sensation. So just say to yourself 'unpleasant feeling' as you breathe in, and as you breathe out. Let it do what it will; just follow it as it evolves. You can then identify and name the emotion it represents, such as anger. With detached, yet friendly interest, observe it and

notice the energy it holds. This energy is the life force in you manifesting as anger. So you then aim to *transform* that energy into a positive direction; for example anger might turn into compassion for yourself and others who may suffer from the anger. If you do this work repeatedly, the energies naturally transform and the old, negative forces dissolve in the light of your innate lovingkindness.

Exercises (see notes and downloads at <https://simonmichaels.co.uk/ms724/>)

- basic body scan and variants – see below
- mindful slow walking
- working with the clearing the senses – see below
- working with sounds – see below
- Chi Gong or T'ai Chi

Body scan

There are many basic body scan meditations out there, and these are great for generic tuning-in and relaxation. There are notes and audio downloads on the webpage.

A variation is to work through the *body parts*, feeling into each one and wishing it well:

- **Bones:** skull, neck and back vertebrae, ribs, clavicle, bones of the arm, wrist and hands (one side at a time), pelvis, leg bones, ankles and bones in the feet
- **Flesh:** work through the internal organs – brain & neurological system, heart & cardiovascular system, lungs, kidneys, liver, digestive tract, reproductive system; then down through the body for all muscles and sinews, eyes, ears, nose and mouth
- **Skin:** the skin all over the body, and hair
- **Biome:** the countless micro-organisms that live on and in the body, especially in the digestive tract

Clearing the senses

- **Eyes:** You focus attention first on the left eye, feeling right into the socket; spend at least five minutes here releasing, wishing all cells to be well; you then switch to the right eye, and finish by focusing on the point between the eyebrows
- **Ears:** as above, then finish by focusing on the point between the ears in the brain
- **Nose:** each nostril as above, finish by focusing on the point at the tip of the nose
- **Mouth:** as above with top lip, then bottom lip, tongue and palette, finish by focusing on the point at the tip of the tongue
- **Whole body:** as above for the body as a whole energetic being, finish by focusing on the heart

Working with sounds

- make a long **ahhh** sound so that it vibrates in the belly; do this for 5-15 minutes (this can be quite powerful and generate odd feelings and emotions)
- use a mantra such as **Om** (felt in between the eyes with white light), then **Ahh** in the throat (rose pink light), the **Humm** in the heart (dark blue light) – this purifies body, speech and mind
- create your own mantra, for example **may all be well**, letting it resonate and act as a blessing to all life forms around you in all directions