

Week 3 - Attention and The Brain

Introduction to Sitting Meditation



How many amazingly beautiful things do we miss in a day, simply because we don't expect them to be there, or because our attention is somewhere else, or because we are not even focused on anything present right now, but on a past or anticipated future event?

Videos

This week's videos include **The Monkey Business Illusion** by Daniel Simons, a cognitive scientist at University of Illinois, who illustrates the limitations inherent in our ability to perceive fully what is going on around us. You may be surprised at just how specific (and limited) our powers of attention are. Shauna Shapiro gives a compelling account of how meditation creates physical changes in the brain in **Mindful Meditation and the Brain**. Finally, there is a short piece by Jon Kabat-Zinn, **Coming to Our Senses**, followed by an entertaining **All it takes is 10 Mindful Minutes** that includes juggling and a provocative challenge to do "nothing" for 10 minutes.

Readings

Sitting Meditation describes the practice we are introducing this week. **Mastering Your Own Mind** discusses the growing body of research that demonstrates how meditative practice, even when done for a relatively short period of time (weeks not years), can physically alter the brain in positive and adaptive ways.

Daily Practices

This week, for the **formal practice**, we introduce the **Sitting Meditation**, using breath as the primary object of awareness, alternating this with the Body Scan (Sitting one day, Body Scan the next, etc.). It can seem that the goal of the Body Scan or a Sitting Meditation is to stay focused on exactly one thing at a time (ankle, wrist, breath) and that when you notice your awareness has moved (to a memory, internal narrative, sound and wonderings about the sound), that you are somehow failing.

These practices will increase your ability to focus and concentrate, but they will also expand your ability to be with whatever comes into your field of experience, non-judgmentally.

Your **NOTICING** that your attention has moved to another object is, in itself, mindfulness in action. Mindfulness includes both a concentrative attention (think laser beam) AND a capacity to perceive a larger picture (think floodlight). Both are important. Focusing on only one thing leaves the larger picture unseen, and maintaining only a broad focus does not allow exploration of the parts.

The **informal practice** this week is about becoming aware of how we experience and process pleasant events. They don't need to be major events, they can be something as simple as noticing the sun on your face or someone smiling at you. Just as we did last week, allow a few minutes before going to sleep to complete the informal practice log. **Below are your materials for this week:**

Videos [with most browsers, once you start the first video, the others will follow automatically]

The Monkey Business Illusion by Daniel Simons [2 min]

Mindful Meditation and the Brain video by Shauna Shapiro [6 min]

Coming to Our Senses by Jon Kabat-Zinn [9 min]

All it takes is 10 Mindful Minutes by Andy Puddicombe [10 min]

Reading [print these for your manual or read them online]

Sitting Meditation by Jon Kabat-Zinn [excerpted from Full Catastrophe Living]

Mastering Your Own Mind by Katherine Ellison

Practice sheets [print PDF file to record your daily practices]

Formal Practice [PDF] - Body Scan, Sitting Meditation

Informal Practice [PDF] - Pleasant Events Calendar

The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice.
And because we fail to notice there is little we can do to change.
Until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds.
- R.D. Laing