

When I pay attention, something in me wakes up, and that something is much closer to who I am than the driven or drifting self I usually take myself to be. When I pay attention, I myself am straightened somehow, brought to a deeper life.

(Roger Housden, "Why Poetry is Necessary")

Definitions and Concepts

1. **Bodymind** - The bodymind is the place where all our experience occurs. Mind and body, although often perceived and presented as separate from each other in thought and language (exemplified by their apparent duality in this sentence), are interdependent. They are a unity – the bodymind where all our experience takes place.
2. **The Mind (mindfulness)** - is an embodied, relational, self-emergent process that tracks the flow of energy and information within self and others, and between self and others (Daniel Siegel). For our purposes mind = self. More mindfulness = a more expansive self.
3. **Attention** is directed awareness. It is the main tool of mindfulness where it is intentionally directed to track the flow of energy and information.
4. **Sensations** – specific information and energy felt in the body and represented in the bodymind as images (i.e., sounds, pressure, heat, texture, taste, smell, balance, visceral sensations, pain, hunger, thirst, etc.)
5. **A Felt Sense** - the sensations occurring on subtle and overt levels in all areas of your body that you can become aware of -- “the embodiment (bringing awareness inside the body) of one’s ever-changing sensory/energetic/emotional landscape” (Levine) - - "a special kind of internal bodily awareness ... a body-sense of meaning" (Gendlin, 1981: 10) which the conscious mind may be initially unable to articulate
6. **Nervous System Activation** - occurs as sympathetic arousal - high energy alarm, alertness, inflation, hyperarousal; or parasympathetic settling - lower energy calming, deflation, collapse, hypoarousal, which can be felt as sensations or combinations of sensations in the body, and which are expressed in body postures and gestures; heart and breathing patterns and rates; tone and prosody of voice; gastrointestinal rumblings; changes in skin coloration, texture and heat; and changes in the tone of facial and voluntary muscles.

7. **Body States** – Our bodies automatically change state physiologically in response to changing internal and external stimuli. This takes place mostly outside our conscious awareness. Shifts in body states can wake us up into conscious awareness of our embodied experience, which often results in an enhanced sense of self.
 8. **Sense of Self** - the bodily felt sense of selfhood, often experienced as the part of us that witnesses or observes our sensations, thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Selfhood is not fixed or concrete – we don't always “have a self”. Our sense of self fluctuates in accordance with the quality and focus of our attention, at times disappearing or dissolving into the bodymind, and emerging at other times as we become mindful of our sensations, thoughts, feelings, body states and postures.
 9. **Core values/Core Needs** – those values that we aspire to embody and achieve, often universal and archetypal, and evoking our “best possible selves,” but also intricately tied to our particular relational/emotional histories wherein we developed conditioned, and now unsatisfactory or dysfunctional reactions to situations in which our core needs are not met, often evoking our failed or worst possible selves. Our core needs are often the source of, or reflected in our core values.
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THE PRACTICE

This practice borrows some components from various meditation traditions, and is like them in many ways. However, unlike some of these traditions, our explorations are specifically psychologically oriented to achieve;

- more emotional regulation and resilience; which is to say
- more capacities to be with, and contain the difficult, often painful and vulnerable parts of ourselves; which requires
- more access to, integration, and coherence of all the parts of the bodymind;
- more presence and mindfulness, leading to ...
- more choice and flexibility about how we construct our experience in the bodymind

It is ideal to have someone knowledgeable in this kind of work guide you through this practice several times, as it is easy to get lost and over, or underwhelmed in the process. You may need to practice Steps 1 and 2 many times before moving onto the other steps. People trained and familiar with this, and similar processes can help and guide you.

Step 1: As soon as you notice that you are activated or triggered, tell yourself the following .

- **“My nervous system is activated.”**
- **“I have an opportunity to practice.”**
- **“I am curious about what is happening in my body in this moment, and will pay attention to it now.”**

Step 2: Locate in your body where you sense the activation, and shift all of your attention onto that place, focusing on any sensations you notice.

Note: Ideally you will be able to locate and feel sensations in the throat, chest, and/or stomach areas. However, for many people it is often difficult to locate a specific place where they sense something in their body. People will commonly say, “I feel it everywhere or all over my body,” or “I feel it in my head”. Whether you feel something in a specific place or just have a general overall felt sense of it, practice the following.

- **Focus all of your attention on the sensation or the felt sense, allowing it to be just what it is**
- **Give the sensation or the feeling all the room it needs to be or do what it needs to do**
- **Your task is to just hold it in the foreground of your attention, observing and watching it without judging it, or telling yourself anything about it.**
- **Try to be curious about what you are sensing.**

Note: One effective way to help you focus is to use your breathing as a guide. Pay attention to your in-breath moving into the area where you sense the feeling, and follow your out-breath infusing, or dissolving into the area. Let your attention on your breathing gently lead you into and through the area with each inhalation and exhalation, and try to notice and feel all the sensations of the breath going in and through this area.

Note: If you notice a lot of thoughts, self-talk or stories going on in your head about the sensation/feeling, or what you are practicing, or anything else, try not to get distracted by paying attention to them. Let any thoughts that come and go on their own in the background of your consciousness. If you do get distracted and find yourself disappearing into this thought-generating/story-telling part of your mind, you can start again by shifting your attention to where in your body you experience specific sensations and/or a felt sense. Practice staying focused on the sensations or the feeling, keeping them front and center in your attention. Let anything else that is happening be in the background.

Note: If the sensations are negative, painful and difficult to feel, it may be hard to stay focused on them. If you find yourself freezing up, going numb or drifting away

as soon as you sense them, practice sensing just a little bit of them, maintaining your focus for short periods of time, taking 30 second breaks, and then going back in with your attention to sense them some more. If you experience intense anxiety or fear at any point while attempting this practice, and find any of your efforts to contact sensations extremely difficult, painful or emotionally overwhelming, stop and seek out help from someone who is trained to accompany you with this process, or another more suitable process.

Step 3: Track with your attention any shifts that may occur in the intensity and/or the quality of the sensations or the feeling.

Note: Remember we are just practicing attending, focusing, and allowing at this point. The only effort made is to shift your attention onto the sensations or felt sense, and to practice allowing and noticing what happens. We are not looking for, or trying to get any specific results or outcomes.

- **If you notice a shift in the sensation or felt sense, allow it all the space it needs to be just what it is, and continue to follow it with your attention**
- **If gets bigger or smaller, harder or softer, faster or slower, tighter or looser, etc., try to stay with it**
- **If it disappears, focus on where it was and if there is some new sensation or feeling to focus on in its place (at least two to three minutes)**
- **If there is nothing, allow yourself to just sense the “nothing” (at least two to three minutes)**

Step 4: Do the following:

- **At every shift, track your sense of self (does it feel bigger, smaller, more substantial, present, calmer, grounded, open, etc.)**
- **Chances are if you sense more self, it will probably feel good. Focus your attention on this sense of goodness (at least two to three minutes).**
- **If you sense anything that feels better, move your attention to the sensations of the “better”, staying focused on this (at least two to three minutes)**
- **If a new shift occurs that feels better in a different way, focus on this (at least two to three minutes)**

Step 5: At every shift, continue doing the above while asking yourself the following questions:

- Does this state feel better (i.e., easier, lighter, more open, less tight, more comfortable, etc.) than before the shift?
- How does it feel to be me right now in this moment?
- Do I prefer this “me” in this state to the “me” in the pre-shift state. If so, take two to three minutes to anchor all of your attention on what it feels like to be this preferred “me”.

Step 6: If you have identified and know what your core values are, at any shift you can pivot your attention to them, and track the following:

- Does this shift resonate with my core values?
 - Say a core value out loud to yourself and sense into yourself to see what you feel. (This in itself can create a shift – a new felt sense, or sensations that evoke a state change.)
- Does this state feel like an embodiment of my core value(s)?
 - If it does, anchor your attention onto the embodied sensations or felt sense of that core value.
- Again, if you feel better, or experience a more satisfying sense of self, take at least two to three minutes to anchor all of your attention on these sensations.

Step 7: Repeat all steps throughout the day as often as possible whenever you notice you are activated.

Between the stimulus and the response, there is a space. In that space you can find your freedom and choice. (Victor Frankle)

Here is some more information and some variations that could help with Steps 1 and 2 of The Practice (notes from a lecture by Tara Brach).

- Because we are often highly identified with our thoughts, we are not very good at stepping back from them, putting them aside, or holding them at a distance. We need to practice being deliberate and intentional about putting our conscious awareness, our attention, on what is occurring in the present moment in our experience that is most salient, important, and potentially meaningful. Usually, this first manifests as sensory information or energy in the body.

- This requires a commitment to turning towards and focusing on what we experience in any given moment, even when, especially when, it feels difficult, painful or negative.
 - All sentient beings experience pain and suffering. We cannot eliminate the fact that we experience pain, but we can choose to reduce suffering by actually turning towards our pain with our attention.
 - Physical and emotional pain is the body's messaging system for informing us that we need to pay attention. Avoiding, dismissing, or otherwise resisting these pain messages usually always causes more suffering. **PAIN X RESISTANCE or AVOIDANCE = SUFFERING**
- In the practice of Vipassana meditation the three portals to awakening and the diminishment of suffering are:
 - a. Focusing awareness on experience of the present moment
 - b. Focusing awareness on the self being aware in the present moment
 - c. Focusing awareness on relationship and sense of connection in the present moment
- Another meditation practice technique is to name what we are experiencing as it arises. What arises can be a sensation, a thought, belief, an emotion, story, felt sense/intuition, an impulse to act, etc.. The idea here is that by naming the object of our experience we hold both a namer, and that which is being named in consciousness. This allows for some space and distance between these two components of conscious experience. Without this space, without a conscious namer or witnessing self, it is hard (sometimes impossible) to know, be aware of, and communicate what we are experiencing to ourselves or someone else.
- The process of deliberately naming the objects of our experience can regulate the nervous system up or down. In the case of negative, potentially overwhelming affects, naming them can tame them (i.e., turn down the volume or intensity of their impact on our nervous system).
- Mindfully feeling, naming, and creating a coherent narrative about our experience **integrates** various parts of our brain and nervous system, thereby increasing our sense of self, others, and meaning in our lives.
- **Integration and coherence = health and wellbeing.** Chaos and incoherence = distress and dis-ease