

Mindfulness of the body

Many students mistakenly think they're being mindful of the body when they're actually focusing on their concept of the body. For instance, your knee may be hurting and you think you're being mindful of it but you're actually focusing on your resistance to the pain, not the pain itself.

Therefore, it's helpful to practice dropped attention by moving your attention from being in your brain down to where the actual experience is occurring. Describe in detail what the experience is, for instance, "This knee pain is throbbing, twisting, burning."

Use your body as your object of meditation. Watch the arising and passing of various sensations and see if you can distinguish between the felt sense of the sensation and your ideas about it. Begin to distinguish between the actual experience of the body and your resistance to that experience. For instance, notice if you are judging or comparing what's happening in your body and trying to fix it. All three of these represent resistance rather than just being with the felt experience. As you learn how to stay with the felt experience you are learning to discern what is true now, versus your reactions to it. When you learn this in the body, you prepare yourself for being able to do this with your emotions and your mind states.

Is it possible for you to cultivate a quality of relaxed attention in daily life while being mindful of the body? As you're reading this, observe if you are holding tension somewhere in your body and then notice if your mind is also tight. Then invite your body and mind to relax as best you can. Practicing in this manner can bring about a dramatic sense of ease in the body even when you have a physical challenge or chronic pain.

Body awareness includes all your senses. Start to include awareness of hearing in your practice. For instance, when you're speaking on the phone, listen to the other person's breathing. Then become aware of your own breathing. Notice what effect this has on your mental state.

The next time you're in a group setting such as a meeting at work watch your body's experience as you're listening to the others. Invite your body to be more relaxed and again reflect on how this affects your mental state.

Start to cultivate awareness of the body while walking. When you are going from one room to another, see if you can maintain constant awareness of your body during this transition. Likewise, see if you can start to develop the habit of awareness of the body while you're walking down the street. Such cultivation can bring a sense of well-being and confidence.

Pause each day to reflect on your immediate attitude toward your body. How do you view your body? Is it a burden? Are you disappointed with it? Do you blame it? Are you anxious about it? Is the way you view your body causing suffering or not causing suffering?

A kind and compassionate attitude toward your body may require a shift in your consciousness. Think about how much you have asked of your body during your life. You work it to exhaustion; you often don't feed it correctly or allow it to rest. And you're willing to risk injuring it to get something you want. Notice that you have a sense of ownership over your body and do whatever

you want with it. Is this really true? What is an appropriate attitude toward your body? Does it not include feelings of appreciation and compassion, and taking responsibility for caring for it?

[Excerpt of an article by Phillip Moffitt, <http://dharma wisdom.org/teachings/study-guides/mindfulness-body>]