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24 HOUR MINDFULNESS

This is a book about what it might be like to turn meditation on its head. While we're all interested in being that little bit more mindful, most of us find it hard to create the time and space for the formal sitting meditation as it is most typically presented. But what if we could do it wherever we are and whenever we want? What would it be like to free mindfulness and meditation from the confines of being a dedicated activity we only do for ten or twenty minutes a day, and instead bring it naturally and effortlessly into wherever we are and whatever we're doing? That's where *24 Hour Mindfulness* comes in.

24 Hour Mindfulness is an invitation to use the busyness and chaos of everyday life as the primary place where we train ourselves in mindfulness. It is an incredibly powerful idea. When we understand the basic techniques of developing awareness, calm and kindness, and we've learnt them in all situations and all environments, we can then use them in any situation or environment. Since we'll have trained mindfulness in a natural everyday way, mindfulness becomes a natural everyday part of our lives. And an invaluable resource always available to us in the times when we need it the most.

Conventional sitting meditation remains important but it plays more of a supporting role. We do not need to be locked into lotus position from dawn to dusk. Instead, we just have to be open to the possibility that we can use anything and everything that we encounter in our day

to support our natural ability to be aware, calm, kind and wise. Now doesn't that sound good?

Mindfulness is a habit. When we have really built that habit up, not only is mindfulness available on demand, but it can be our natural default way of moving through, and engaging with, the world. When we hear promises like that, they can sound so unattainable and so far away from where we are, to the point of being intimidating or a turn-off. This is a shame. The key to making our way past that is to understand the idea of 24 Hour Mindfulness as an intention and an attitude, not an endpoint against which to judge ourselves. We may be surprised at how much progress we make, and, to get there, it is best to invoke the wisdom of ages. Fake it till we make it.

24 Hour Mindfulness can be read in two ways, either as the means or as the end. When we read it as the end, these pages describe what it might be like to spend our day with natural mindfulness. The problem that comes with this lens is that our inner critic or negative voice is easily stirred, judging ourselves at every page-turn on how far away the description is from the neuroses and niggles of our own lives. The more skilful, and therefore recommended, way to approach these pages is to read them not as the end but as the means. With this much more hopeful lens, we can then start to see the practices as things we can actually do, finding the techniques and ideas that work for us so that we can access more lightness and insight in any moment. And the wonderful thing about the economics of mindfulness is that not only do we receive the benefit of being present in

that particular moment, but we are also more likely to be present in the future.

Training ourselves up to achieve momentum in mindfulness does take some energy and effort, so why bother at all? The practice of mindfulness has the potential to unlock a host of qualities. These include greater self-awareness, steadiness, calm, kindness to ourselves, kindness to others, and an increased ability to deal with difficult emotions and experiences. There are many different routes through mindfulness and many different results. Which way we go depends on our interests, our motivation, what kind of practices we enjoy, and what level of energy we bring to them.

The ideas, the exercises and the practices you find here are ones I regularly use in the course of a normal day. I share them, not as a

template to follow blindly, but as inspiration. While many aspects of our lives are similar, we are also very different. If there is a secret to realizing 24 Hour Mindfulness for yourself, then it is curiosity and interest. Curiosity and interest enough to ask the question – how can I engage with this moment so as to support awareness, calm and connection? To support you in your curiosity, alongside each of the practices presented below you will also find a simple prompt or question to help you design your own.

So let's get to it. If we notice any resistance to the idea of always-on mindfulness or indeed any self-judgement about how far away that might feel, that's fine. It's closer than we think.

07:16

I wake up. I'm not sure how it happens, but it happens. The first thing I notice is the warmth of my mind and body. There is a delightful fuzziness in those first few moments of the morning as I reluctantly let go of sleep. The second thing I notice is the urge to reach out and check my phone; my arm and my hand primed to move and fish for it by my bedside.

I feel the impulse but I don't follow it through. My inbox will get enough of my attention today as it is. I hear a car drive by in the distance and, as with the urge to check my phone, I let the sound come up and then watch it go. My body feels warm and relaxed lying on the bed. With so many pleasant sensations

around, it'd be a shame to waste them. Scanning from my feet to my head, I let my attention rest most in the places where it feels most lovely, drawing as much value out of this precious time as I can.

The comfort I can feel makes me smile and my smiling makes me feel more comfortable. I love it when that happens. I can notice some tension kicking around and a few worries about the proposal that I have to get done by the end of the day, but I don't let those be in the foreground. I soak in everything that I can. Just for a couple of indulgent minutes.

Over the years, I've noticed how even a little bit of meditation time like this really affects the rest of my day. So I give myself an additional boost and set myself a simple intention. May my day be fruitful and productive. May what I do help others. And when it gets hard, because it

will, may I remember that it is not always going to be like that.

Then my alarm goes off. It's time to get going.

What feelings and impulses can you notice when you first wake up?

07:49

Breakfast tastes good. And to be honest, it's just good that I'm tasting it at all. Even though I'm moving through the house, there is so much to gain from paying attention to the experience of eating. The satisfying crunch of the toast. The wave of sweetness, thanks to the jam. That little buttery richness that is hiding underneath. Enjoying the full sensual experience that is eating.

Food is one of the few sense pleasures that we can reliably count on on a daily basis, but we still manage to divert our attention elsewhere whilst consuming it. Even though it's that very attention which gives us that pleasure in the first place. We can't all dedicate as much time as we'd perhaps like to eating, especially

in the morning, but we can at least put it in the foreground of our minds, placing as much attention as we can on the details of what it feels like to eat. Knowing the texture and taste of the food. If we can, also knowing the subtle play of movements – often involuntary – that come with it. The arm and hand movements that get the food into our mouths in the first place. The biting. The chewing. The swallowing. Even the licking of the lips.

I have to leave for work soon but it's the coffee pot that makes me stop. It knows the value of taking a few minutes to settle before taking the plunge and it's a welcome reminder. After I plunge, I sit down and pour myself a cup, offering myself the everyday luxury of doing nothing else than drinking my coffee. It is too hot to drink right away and I notice my wanting to just get on with my day. I also notice how much I want to fill that silence by checking my

phone or turning on the radio. But I don't. The coffee has come all the way from Costa Rica to be with me, so I'm happy to wait for it that little longer and I relax into the silence as I wait. Noticing the quiet delight of that.

Something about sitting quietly with my coffee reminds me of how tea drinking is ritualized in places like Japan. So when I do pick up the cup, I do so with reverence. With eyes closed, I place as much attention and awareness as I possibly can into the tasting. The reward is that I become aware of flavours and feelings that I would have otherwise missed. I even start to understand how things like coffee and wine can have such pretentious tasting notes. Perhaps it isn't pretentious at all, just the sign of paying attention.

With my mind now open and relaxed, I even notice the little jolt that the sharp caffeine

gives me. The chemical brightness. I follow its lead, swing my bag over my shoulder, kiss my goodbyes and leave the house.

What details and sensations can you discover while eating breakfast with extra attention?

08:32

With a lot to get done by the end of the day, I know that work is going to be pretty stressful. Which means I don't especially feel the need to add any stress to my journey by thinking and worrying about what's ahead. So I do some walking meditation. While sitting meditation has a better marketing department, walking has just as long a history as a traditional style. The basic idea is to be aware of as much of our movement as we can, and so that's what I try to do while walking from the train to the office.

Keeping my attention in my legs and feet. Feeling the contact of my feet on the street. Not trying to do anything else other than walk. And know what it's like to walk. There's a cool

pleasure to being in the simplicity of the body instead of the complexity that comes with being stuck in our heads. There'll be plenty of time for that later on, no doubt.

There's a lot happening around me – other people, advertising, my thoughts. All of which leads to my attention being pulled away from where I've intended it to be. Over and over again. So I place it back. Over and over again. Back in the walking. Sometimes, before returning to the simple sensations of what it's like to walk, I try to see if there was any pattern to what distracted me.

I've heard my friends who are serious runners and cyclists talk about how they can become so absorbed in the activity that they feel as if the movement they are engaged in is just happening. I get the tiniest inkling of that and appreciate the sense of stillness

that exists even though I am moving.

How easy is it to rest your attention in the body while walking? What tends to pull you away?

09:40

One of the good things about breathing is that we don't have to do anything for it to happen. Which is pretty useful since most of the time we're hardly aware of our breath at all. But the more aware of our breath we are, the more we know how good a barometer it is for how we're doing.

When I'm at my desk and whenever I remember, I make sure to notice what my breath is like. Without having to pause at all and by reserving just a little portion of my awareness, I am able to stay in contact with what breathing feels like. Not forcing the breath in any way. Not wanting it to be special. Just knowing what it is like. Letting the simple act of being connected with the breath ground us.

If the breath does become very sharp and agitated it is a fairly reliable early warning signal that I'm starting to get tense. The same for when I forget to breathe at all, holding my breath in some sort of defence. Despite the useful information and the calming effect that the breath can gift us, it is the remembering to remember that is often the challenge, especially at work. To give myself a better chance, I've placed a sticky note on the bottom of my monitor with the letter B. It is a simple reminder always in my eye-line. It works and I love its invisibility, since, to date, no one has ever asked me about it. I once tried using the letter B on my keyboard in the same way but it just didn't work as well.

Try experimenting with different visual cues around your place of work to see which is most effective in reminding you to be present.

10:03

My inbox is the place that tests my calm the most. Email is such a poorly designed system that just by existing it causes anxiety to so many millions of people. That's before we have even had a chance to read what's there.

I used to measure the success of a work day by whether I had been able to clear out my inbox. But then one day I realized that that not only kept me trapped in an infinite anxiety loop, but it also effectively meant I was little more than an electronic shit-shoveller. Thankfully, now I understand productivity more through quality of creative output than quantity of bits of information moved from one server to another. But even though I allow my inbox to judge me less than I used to do, dealing with

email and other messages is still a major part of my work day.

What I've found most useful is to connect with it all. It only takes a couple of seconds. Before I read an email from someone I know, I take that tiny amount of time to think about them. Not as an email address or as a sender of information but as a person. I reflect on how, whatever they've sent me, at some level they're trying to just get stuff done and are in some way trying be helpful – even if it is manifesting as passive-aggressive blah. The emails can still be difficult to read but I'm now seeing my inbox as a group of actual people to connect with instead of a stream of data to joust. It makes a difference.

I do the same when sending: recognizing that whoever I'm sending an email to has their own stuff going on, and letting there

be an intention that the information I share can in some way be of benefit for them.

Relaxing the need to constantly check my messages is an ongoing practice. Watching the urge come up and, if our awareness is flexible enough, being able to catch it there and not always fall for it. Being 'always on' when it comes to information and communications isn't perhaps all it's cracked up to be. But being always on when it comes to mindfulness is another thing entirely. And I know which one I aspire to more.

Does seeing the humans behind all the information change your relationship to how you receive and send messages?

10:41

One of the most important superpowers that comes with 24 Hour Mindfulness is invisibility. There is no longer the need to attract the attention and admiration of your colleagues by sitting atop the desk in lotus position. Instead, we can take a break wherever we are. One of the best places to do that is at our work desk, since not only are we already sitting relatively comfortably but it can be done in complete stealth.

Stress is a normal part of life and especially work. One of the best ways to understand how stress manifests for us is getting to know our stress signature. With a document on my screen, so that it appears that I'm reading something important, I relax my eyes so I'm not

looking at anything in particular and instead turn all my attention inside my body, scanning my upper body and seeing where I notice most tension. Having done this many times before, I know that the areas where I tend to hold most tension – my stress signature – are in my jaw and hands. I notice a tiny bit of holding there and I allow those areas to relax a little bit, diffusing whatever is there.

Tension can build up in our bodies over the work day but often we only notice it when it has become very loud and we're caught up in difficult stress. This technique of checking for tension at all times, and intentionally relaxing it wherever I notice it, means that I'm less likely to allow it to build up too much.

The tell-tale parts of the body where we tend to hold most tension are different for different people. They are, however, most commonly in

the upper body. They should be straightforward to find. Scanning the front of the body – the belly, the chest and the face. Scanning the back of the body – the lower and upper back and the neck. Having got to know my own particular stress-signature has been an incredibly useful tool to signal that I'm tightening up and getting stressed even before I realize it through my thoughts.

Where in your body can you feel the most tension right now?

12:08

I am highly trained in distraction. The good thing about distraction while sitting and working is that it's just so obvious. If I'm supposed to be working on my proposal and I end up checking the cricket scores, then that's a fairly good sign. If I'm working on my computer and then ten minutes later realize I've spent the last while checking my Twitter stream on my phone, then that too is a fairly good sign.

Since it's going to happen anyway, I see if I can turn every time I get distracted into something I can learn from. The incident might manifest itself by a very clear and convincing thought that says something like 'I really need to see if any major news has broken in the last five minutes', or the much more seductive

'I'll just check my Facebook feed quickly'. Often it will manifest without any noticeable thought at all, and instead I will know it has happened because my fingers have started to move towards the address bar in my web browser or towards my phone.

This time I don't catch the thought and only notice the movement, the twitch in my hand as it moves to the mouse. Just by seeing it, I now have the space to do something about it rather than blindly being sucked into the vortex of clickbait headlines and cat gifs. A strange thing happens. Just by noticing it, the impulse loses power. Like something of the night scuttling away once the light is turned on.

At this point I ask myself a quiet question: is there anything sitting behind the distraction that I can notice? While it's not fully clear, the feeling I notice most is one of agitation.

Reflecting on that, I understand that the distraction most likely came about in response to that agitation. Restlessness and agitation are quite uncomfortable as experiences and so, out of twisted kindness for myself, I was looking to the Web for something more pleasant. And my agitation is just a natural result of my situation, working on this proposal is not only quite hard but there's also the time pressure of having to submit it by the end of the work day.

To counter that I take a few calming breaths to relax my body. Grounding myself by feeling the sensations where my feet touch the ground and my body sits on the chair. I also dangle myself the carrot of some social-network time once I've got this next section done. Cat pictures aren't all bad, after all.

At other times the distraction force is strong indeed and despite all my best-laid plans, a

lack of mindfulness bypasses everything. One moment I'm working on something important and the next I'm checking who's at the top of the league table in the third division of Bolivian football. With fascination. Ridiculous indeed. When that happens, what I find strangely useful is to say the word 'distracted' out loud. Committing to doing that every time Distraction with a capital D rears its beguiling head can be an amazingly effective way to increase my sensitivity to getting carried away. Especially in an open-plan office.

What are your most common patterns of distraction? Can you notice the feelings that come just before the urge to check your phone or favourite website?

14:22

It's a bit of a misconception to think that a life of mindfulness is one without stress. Difficult experience is just a normal part of life. When the right ingredients and the right conditions are in place, it's going to show up. All we can hope to do is to respond well.

The proposal I need to send off by six o'clock is only half-done. I have enough time to complete it but the pressure of the deadline and the thoughts that are spinning around my head are stopping me from making the progress I need to. I can notice my heartbeat thumping for the first time today, and the tell-tale tension in my jaw has kicked in and has also invited a nice bit of tightness in my shoulders as well. Great.

All of which means I turn to my go-to technique when experiencing any full-blown stress – flipping out of the mind and into the body, ignoring, for now, the whirlwind of thoughts and worries, and dropping as much awareness as I can into what my physical experience feels like. The feelings are not particularly pleasant but I hold onto them. Staying with them is safer for me than the thoughts, in the same way that a bashed-up old rowing-boat is a better thing to cling to during a storm than the waves. With an overall sense of kindness to myself, I start to recognize and label what I can notice. Tension. Throbbing. Heat. Pulsing. Heat again. Tension. Nothing. Tension.

It's not easy. Every now and again one of those very believable thoughts slips in and I flip out of the physical experience. I'll never get this done. It's going to be a disaster tomorrow when

they find out I've not sent through the information in time. Why do I always leave things to the last minute? Without getting caught in the content of the thoughts, I see them just as thoughts and name and label those in the same way. Doubt. Fear. Self-criticism.

Just through the simple act of naming, I notice the intensity of the stress I'm feeling come down a notch or two. It's not fully gone away. The pressure of doing my task is a real one but there now is a little bit of space from it. A sliver of freedom.

I can now see that I'd been holding the stress about getting the proposal done more tightly than anything else. Making it more important a story than the task itself. Now that I'm holding it much more lightly, I can tackle my work with a quality of attention and focus that I wasn't able to even just a few minutes ago.

There's still a bit of worry about how it's going to go but that's to be expected and I can see it clearly. The difference now is that I can use the remaining nervousness as a motivator instead of a road block.

What are the sensations, thoughts or mind-states that you can name right now?

18:10

I used to hate commuting. Such dead time. A monotonous journey that I just had to put up with. So I dealt with this gross inconvenience by plunging my attention into whatever I could. My particular vices are audiobooks, podcasts and mobile games. Anything to avoid my having to engage with the world around me. Please. Anything but that.

I am there right now. My earbuds are actually already in and waiting. So I pull them out, lean back in my seat and make the decision that I'm going to engage with being on the train and not escape elsewhere. The rhythmic rocking motion of the carriage. The feeling of my body as it sits here. The way my attention is called to by the adverts all around me. There's

so much to be aware of in this space. And of course there are the people.

So much of our day is spent caught up in our own stories. So when we have a little time while in a space with other people, it is a lovely opportunity to relax our entanglement a little bit. To allow the stories of others in. So I pick someone at random – a man a bit older than me who looks pretty ordinary. And in as not-creepy a way as possible I move the centre of gravity of my mind towards him. Because it becomes tiring when it's all about me.

I observe the details of what he is wearing and how he is sitting; just letting the experience of another person become the object of my mindfulness. And of course remembering the golden rule of invisibility and making sure I'm not staring at him like a weirdo.

I become aware of his appearance. His clothes and hair are neat, even at the end of the day. I see his closed eyes and how he leans back into his seat listening to something through his headphones. Some thoughts of judgement about how he looks begin to come up and I start to guess what job he might do. But I know that is just adding more story onto what is happening right now, so I don't follow them or give them any more attention. Taking some time just to be present with how he is right now.

Having started by seeing him as an object, I now see him as a human being. I go deeper and see the troubles and stresses and pressures that he's had today. I see the tiredness in his body. I see how precious it is to him that he can listen to some music at the end of a difficult day, and how that is an act of kindness he's given himself. I see the pride and care he puts into

how he looks. I see his generosity as he make eye contact with an elderly lady standing in the carriage and points out the empty seat next to him. It makes me smile.

I find it so easy to get stuck in my personal soap opera as if it's the only one that exists. As I reflect on my new friend's experience, the tightness around my own drama quietens down. I also start to notice a real sense of warmth and kindness towards him. He's clearly exhausted and so, turning my awareness as fully towards him as I can, I start to wish him well. Silently, saying a few words internally to myself as a way to express and actually train that kindness. May you be well. I hope you had an OK day. I'm sure it was hard but I hope you got done what you needed to get done. May you be happy. May you know peace. Whatever words come to mind and whatever feels most natural.

After a couple of minutes of that, I pull my attention back into myself. Closing from him and, closing my eyes for just a moment, I get a sense of the space around me. A space full of people. Full of people like me and him, who are just trying to get by and do OK for themselves and the people who rely on them. Letting the momentum of the kind intention I've built up spread itself around. Letting my eyes and my awareness be a little more freestyle. Using the simple thoughts of well-wishing to connect with everyone around me. You with the hat, may you be well. You. The lady with the antisocially loud headphones. May you know peace. You. The guy who just barged into the carriage. May you be happy.

While it did feel a little forced at the beginning, my mind now feels much more open and free. And I feel that little bit more human than when I first stepped on-board. I lean

back into my seat for the last couple of stops, reflecting on the paradox of how, even when we are moving quite fast, we can always access a special kind of stillness.

How often do you notice the people around you? Or do you tend to be stuck in your own story most of the time?

18:48

I love doors because every door gives me a chance to start again. And it's the door to our home that I love the most. I've really come to understand just how important these first few minutes when we get home can be. Work is chaos and that's OK, but just as the tone of how we get out of bed can affect the tone of the day ahead, so too can the mind we bring across the threshold after a hard day's work affect our evening. And whether you live alone or with others, the less momentum we give the difficult and negative aspects of the day behind us, the greater chance we have for our home time to be light. And maybe even a little bit joyful.

After putting down my jacket and my bag, I sit on the sofa and take five minutes to arrive. Relaxing the body, I look around the room. Slowly moving my eyes from one thing to another. The bookcase is so full we have a growing overflow pile, and seeing that triggers a thought of how I need to go to the charity shop this weekend. One of my wife's little trinkets makes me smile. I hear the sound of someone walking past the house. A car in the distance starts its engine. The room is warm and it feels comfortable, and my body relaxes when I notice the temperature. I pay attention to the space around me and doing so gives me a sense of space.

A work-thought pops up. I wonder if there's been any response to the proposal already. My hand impulsively, and seemingly without my control, moves to my pocket to check my phone. I notice that happen

and I put my hand back on the armrest of the chair. The proposal will be fine. There won't be any feedback until next week anyway, so there's nothing more I can do on it, now that it's sent. I let my fingers feel the textured fabric of the chair. I lean back, resting back into the physical sensations of my body as I sit here.

Taking these couple of minutes to just land is one of my everyday luxuries. There is a natural safety and comfort that I feel at home, and I let myself really feel that. Breathing fully and smoothly, I let everything that is wonderful about being in this space brighten my mind. I feel insulated. I am home.

There are still some work worries kicking around. But they are now much more quiet, and when I notice them I let them bubble away, no need to give them any more of my

energy, thank you very much. Lucy will be home soon and it's my turn to make dinner.

Give extra attention to the time when you arrive home and notice how it changes the tone of your evening.

18:55

I like to think that one of the reasons we appreciate home-cooked food so much is that we can taste the love. So while getting dinner together, I try to keep in touch with two things: The simple generosity of making something for myself and my wife, and the experience of cooking itself. The sensations. The feeling of the knife handle as I cut. The smells and the noises. The texture of the wooden spoon as I stir.

I also reflect on all the people who have made making the meal possible. From the farmers to the truck drivers to the shopkeepers and all the rest, all round the world. Trying to get a sense for the incredible interconnected-vastness of that is a bit too much, and my mind

spins away into a bit of a daydream. I notice that and just let the sensuality of cooking bring it back into the direct experience. The weight of the casserole dish as I put it in the oven. The funny feeling of the button as I set the timer.

When next preparing or eating food, try to reflect on how many people all over the world play a part in keeping you going.

19:24

Developing awareness, calm, kindness and insight in all parts of our day is what 24 Hour Mindfulness is all about. But just as it can be a mistake to think formal meditation practice the be-all and end-all for how we approach mindfulness, it is just as much a mistake to throw it out entirely. The magic happens when we can prioritize the dynamic 'always-on' practice of mindfulness, accessible wherever we are, but commit to regular sitting meditation as a way of deepening and growing our understanding. It's necessary, since the stillness and steadiness available in formal meditation provide us with an important laboratory for looking into our minds in more detail which is not normally

accessible to most of us in the ordinary chaos of day-to-day life.

I sit with eyes closed, knowing that dinner still has half an hour to cook, and knowing there is nothing else I need to do than what I am doing right now. I allow my back to be straight and my belly to be soft. Settling into the felt experience of the body. Knowing how it feels. Letting the breath do what it needs to do. Giving it permission to drop anchor.

There are ten-thousand different techniques that we can use in sitting meditation but I always prefer to start like this. Settling down. What technique I choose is based on my intuition of what feels most right for this moment. I have a number of go-to techniques that I've collected over time. If there's a lot of tension in the body, or obsessive thoughts running around, I'll just rest the mind on

breathing. Keeping in contact with the full sense of the body as it breathes. Enjoying the warm, gathered steadiness that comes with that. Knowing, then letting go, of distractions that arise. Coming back to base again and again. The body breathing.

Today, though, maybe thanks to having taken those few minutes to arrive when I got home, I already feel collected and settled. So after settling down I take a different route. With the mind steady I look at the physical sensation that is most prominent in my awareness right now. The signal is quite clear. There is a light piece of tension in my upper back. Up there on the left. Then I do what I call zooming. I deliberately invite my attention to become more magnified, to notice more subtle detail. Seeing if I can zoom-in on that sensation and see what additional level of detail I can notice.

It takes a bit of time and hanging out with the tension but with the resolution of my awareness turned up a notch, I perceive very clearly that what before felt like a flat dull tension actually has more going on – it's pulsing. And there's also some heat that I hadn't initially been aware of.

With my awareness more refined and having hung out at the level of detail where I felt pulsing, I gently ask the question if there is any more detail I can see. The answer is yes. The pulsing resolves into several individual sensations and I do the same again, taking one particular feeling and seeing what is the finest detail I can notice.

At some point I reach a limit of how fine a detail I can notice and I start trying too hard. I know this because my jaw and hands get tight. So I back off and relax into the feelings of the

body as it breathes. When I look again, I do so with a more gentle attitude.

I love this meditation technique since it feels a bit like a game. There's a real sense of playfulness and it's also strangely fascinating. Looking at a level of detail of experience which I'd not otherwise have access to in any other part of my day. Moving my mind closer and closer to the fine detail of life. Like moving closer and closer still to a painting or picture so we start to even see individual brush strokes or pixels.

Deliberately dedicating time to sitting quietly, supports me with a steadiness that I don't find elsewhere. Training my awareness to be not only subtle but also quite sharp. Just as going to the artificial environment of a gym means we can run for the bus when we need to, so too does formal meditation give me a

deepening of skills which I deploy throughout my day.

Using the zooming technique has my awareness on the edge of its seat. After a while it's actually quite tiring and so I duck out and relax back into full body breathing. Sitting steady, I hear the oven alarm telling me dinner is ready and I gently finish up my sitting practice for another day.

When is the best time of the day for you to dedicate even a few minutes to simply sitting in silence?

19:56

Although I have been in a relationship for many years, listening well is still a hard thing to do. Maybe it's the most difficult mindfulness practice that we can do with another person. It definitely has been difficult for me. The first thing I notice when Lucy comes in and we sit down for dinner is that I'm still full of my story. I don't want to listen to how she is, I want to monologue. All about myself. I want to tell her all about what happened today, how hard it was for me. Now that she is home, I can really feel that desire to offload. I have to tell her about how awful it was. The emails. Oh, the emails. Poor me.

But instead I do listen. It's taken a lot of practice and every day I get that little bit

better at it. I notice an impulse to bombard her with my own story, let it go and let her talk. I notice all the reactions and distractions come up. I even feel the desire to check my phone while she's talking. The often brutal mirror of mindfulness means that just seeing those reactions is enough to avoid my actually playing them out. Thank goodness, because otherwise I'd get myself into even more trouble.

I listen in three ways. The words she speaks. The reactions that come up for me. And the way her body is while she speaks and what that shows. If the way I arrive in the house is important in setting the tone for me, that first conversation is absolutely critical for us. Good, skilful, generous listening is not easy but the rewards are invaluable.

What stops you from listening to the important people in your life as fully as you'd like to?

21:00

Sometimes all we want to do after a tough day is sit on the sofa and watch a few episodes of one of our favourite TV shows. Great telly is just so absorbing and, like games and music, it is incredibly effective in drawing and locking our attention into the story.

All of which makes watching TV actually one of my favourite times for getting my mindfulness on, since if you know how, it can really build flexibility of mind. There are three main techniques that I like switching between.

Channel one is watching my mind as if it was the TV. Doing this, I notice and observe the thoughts and emotions that come up while watching the show. It is as if my mind was

the screen. Noticing the reactions and quality of our attention – whether it's contracted or expansive, tense or relaxed. It may sound a bit meta but because most TV shows are deliberately produced to create strong responses, it's an amazing way to learn about our emotions.

Channel two, or the second technique I often use, is noticing the screen itself. Our minds tend to be locked onto the content of the screen and we don't notice the screen of the TV itself. So I expand my awareness so that I am looking at the frame of the TV screen and the space in the room around it. And notice what it's like to watch the show within that bigger physical frame.

Channel three is the most lovely. And the most simple. I let my attention drop away from the TV and into the full felt experience of sitting

there. The feeling of my body on the sofa. The temperature and spaciousness of the room. The warmth of Lucy's body with my arm around her. Sensing the joy of that.

What can you notice about your body sensations or your emotions while watching TV?

PAST. PRESENT. FUTURE. AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN.

I've never been one for writing a journal or diary. Be it my chronic laziness or my illegible handwriting, it's just never become a habit. However, I do highly value the practice of reviewing the day just gone. It is perhaps the single most important element of my mindfulness practice.

The present moment has a great PR department. We have to live in the now, the self-help books tell us. Now. All our problems will be solved in the Now. There is some truth in this. When we are in the so-called Now, when we are in touch with what is happening in ourselves

while it is happening, we have the space and the freedom and the awareness to bring the best of ourselves to whatever is there to be faced. Our problems might not be magically solved just by being in the now but they will at least be seen. And that is the essential first piece because, without the seeing, there is nothing we can do.

There is danger in making too much of a big deal about the now to the extent where it gets a capital N. We miss out on a real opportunity if we relegate the importance, or worse still – the realness, of the past and the future. We might feel that we are getting our inner mystic on by making it all about the present moment, but if we start to ignore our conventional sense of time then chances are that our now won't last very long.

Including the past as part of our mindfulness practice is a very reliable way of giving it a real boost. I do this near the end of the day but before my mind is too tired. Just spending a few minutes recollecting what I can remember from the time I woke up until now. Dedicating this time, not to the here and now, but to the there and then. Most importantly, what I am recalling is not the outside events of my day, but what was it like in the inside. How I felt when I woke up. What my reactions were to all that went on at work. What particular patterns of thoughts turned up again and again.

My highlights-reel tends to include the most dramatic moments of the day in its first edit. So I take a bit more time to see if I can recollect anything more ordinary. How my mind was during the walk to the office in the morning. Whether I can remember anyone from my lunch

break at all. What the quality of my listening was like over dinner.

This is not a memory game. It is about spotting patterns. If I can remember which parts of today had the least awareness or none at all, then I can prime myself with the intention to bring more mindfulness at those moments tomorrow. If I can remember which times of the day my calm and balance and kindness felt most natural and stable, then I can prime myself to enjoy them even more when they come up again.

Mindfulness pays off twice. It's a two-for-one deal. There is the value in the moment itself; the space that comes with knowing that this is happening and knowing it in real-time. Then there is the value of mindfulness becoming a habit. But that only comes about if we can appreciate the first kind of value. When we see

that clearly, we naturally want to have more of it and that's where the momentum kicks in. Present moment. Then present momentum. And nothing helps that momentum like taking some time to review how we're getting on.

23:33

Using mindfulness to help us get to sleep is a bit of a paradox. Because mindfulness is all about us being more awake. But it is possible, and it is possible in so many different ways.

What unites them all is using mindfulness meditation techniques to quiet the mind. A quiet mind not only makes it easier to go to sleep, but it can also improve the quality of sleep. How we go to sleep affects how we sleep. How we sleep affects how we wake up. How we wake up affects how our day plays out. This is a vital time indeed.

Tonight my mind is still quite active and I know it will be the thing blocking my path to falling asleep well. On nights like this, I

know that the most reliable way to start is by dropping out of my head and into the body. So that's what I do.

Feeling the bed supporting my body as it lies there. Feeling the heaviness of my own body. Feeling safe and protected.

Letting my body act like a satellite receiver for whatever is going on, I pick up the signal of my breathing. Relaxing into it, I use the breath like a cradle. Letting it rock its gentle rhythm. A hand lightly on my belly to really connect. When I notice thoughts come up, they are just blips on the radar. Crackles in the air. No need to follow them. Letting them come up by themselves and drop away by themselves. Every time I wander away, just returning myself to the breath. The cradle of the breath and the belly. Feeling the whole body as it breathes.

The mind is becoming more and more quiet. I notice my senses starting to fade. There is nothing to see, so my sight is already dialled down. There is only blankness in smell or taste, so these are dialled down too. It is quiet outside but there is the occasional car or creak in the house. I let sound turn itself down too and rest back into the body breathing. Flickers of thoughts still make their show. I dial them down by paying more attention to the gaps between them than the thoughts themselves.

Then there's just the feeling of the body. Lying here. Breathing. Letting it all fade away.

Notice the relationship between what your mind is like when going to sleep and the quality of the sleep you get.

07:23

I wake up. I'm not sure how it happens but it happens.

THIS IS HAPPENING

Redesigning Mindfulness for
our very *Modern Lives*

ROHAN GUNATILLAKE

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