

Body Scan

Inviting you to do yourself the kindness of setting aside this next 40-minutes of peace and quiet to pay focused attention to what is present in the body. This is a way to practice the ability to stay present to whatever is here in your life at any given moment. So, lying on a mat on the floor or on a bed and with a blanket if that is comfortable for you. Or for some, sitting in a chair may be most comfortable. Just choosing whatever is right for you, and perhaps taking a moment to set your intention to stay awake for the duration of this exercise. Noticing what is here with openness and curiosity.

And when you're ready, gently closing your eyes. Letting your arms lie along side the body. Palms open and facing toward the ceiling if that is comfortable for you. Your feet a little wider than the hips, and allowing your feet to fall gently away from one another.

And bringing your attention to the fact that you're breathing. Not manipulating your breath in any way, but just simply experiencing it as the air moves in and out from your body. Your breath is always here and it happens on its own. So, without needing to change it, just being aware of the breath here. Here and now, just as it is.

Noting the rise and fall of the belly as you breath in and out. Aware of the belly expanding with each in breath and contracting with each out breath.

Feeling the sensations in the area of the abdomen. Just following with your mind's eye the movement of the belly with each breath... The rising of the belly on the in breath and the falling of the belly on the out breath...And on each out breath, letting go. Letting your body become heavy as it sinks into the mat or floor.

Paying full attention in each moment to your breathing...The in breath and the out breath following, one after the other. As the body sinks with each out breath into the floor, into your mat, as you let go.

As best you can, letting go of any need to feel different as a result of this exercise. There's no need to achieve anything, such as becoming more relaxed or more calm. This may happen, or it may not. And either way is okay. The commitment here is to observe the body as you find it. And if you notice your mind starting to wander away from this instruction or the body, no problem. It's not a failure, it's just what minds do. Just gently noticing without judgment that your mind has wandered away from what's here in the body right now, and gently coming back to pay attention again. It is this, paying attention to the mind and body, noticing how the mind tends to wander again and again, and coming back to the moment at hand...This is the practice.

And now, when you're ready, bringing your attention to the big toe of the left foot. Just taking your mind and moving it away from the belly, and moving it down the left leg all the way down to your left big toe.

Paying attention to whatever there is in this region of the body. Experiencing the big toe, and if it's possible, the little toe and the toes in between. Not moving them, but just feeling them individually, if you can. Noticing whether there may be any sensation of one toe touching the others. There may be sensations of tingling or moisture. Of itching or warmth. Or there may be no sensation at all. Just feeling the toes as they are. Breathing with these sensations.

And as you breathe in now, if it's right for you, just imagining that the breath is moving in through the lungs and continuing down, all the way to the toes of the left foot. And as you breathe out, that the breath is moving back up from the toes through the body and out your nose. So that you're breathing in down to the toes, and breathing out from the toes...

Now, when you're ready, on an out breath letting go of the attention to your toes completely, just allowing the toes to dissolve in your mind's eye and gently move your attention to focus on the bottom of the left foot, and whatever feelings there are in this region. Breathing with it...feeling the bottom of your foot. The ball of the foot, the sole, and now breathing down the leg to the bottom of the foot and breathing out from the bottom of the foot.

And now, bringing your attention to the heel. Where your heel is making contact with the mat or the floor. Noticing the sense of touch or pressure. And when you're ready, breathing into the heel.

And on an out breath... letting go of the heel, and becoming aware of the top of the foot and whatever feelings are present here. Letting the top of the foot be the object of your awareness. Not thinking about your foot, but just being here with it. Feeling it. Breathing into and out from the foot. Now letting that awareness spread to the left ankle. Noticing what's here. The sides of the ankle, the top, the skin around it and the bones within. Breathing with it, and when you're ready directing your breath all the way down to your ankle.

And on an out breath letting go of the ankle and the entire left foot. Shifting attention to the lower left leg, the calf and shin. Awareness of the skin and muscle, and bone. Experiencing this region as it is, without needing to make it any different. Just breathing with it.

And when you're ready letting go of this part of the body as you breathe out. Letting your focus move up now to the knee. Feeling your knee, paying attention to sensations, or lack of sensations in the kneecap. The sides of the knee, the back part where the joint bends. Breathing with it...the left knee.

And on an out breath letting it dissolve... And now the left thigh. Paying attention to what's here. The top of the thigh, the sides, the back. Noticing whether there may be any sensations associated with the muscles of the thigh...the bones. Allowing it to be soft. If there is any tension here, or any other region when you come to it, just allowing it to exit on the out breath. Allowing the thigh to be soft and relaxed.

Noticing with acceptance of what your current experience is. Breathing into and out from the left thigh.

And when you're ready as you breathe out, letting it dissolve as you let go... And now, when it feels right moving your attention to the right side and becoming aware of the big toe of the right foot. Breathing with it. And now, all the toes of the right foot. Without moving them, becoming aware of any sensations here. Breathing into and out from the toes.

And now, the ball of the foot. The sole, the heel. Breathing into and out from the bottom of the right foot.

And when you're ready, letting go on an out breath as you let go. And now becoming aware of the top of the right foot, and the ankle. Noticing what might be here to be observed. Breathing in, breathing out, experiencing this region of your body. Objectively, as a scientist would....with curiosity and interest.

And when you're ready, letting it go, letting your ankle soften and dissolve in your mind's eye. As you become aware of the lower right leg. Perhaps appreciating this part of the body, that like other parts of the body go so often overlooked. Breathing into this region, and out from it.

And letting go of this part of the body on an outbreath and becoming aware of the right knee. And breathing into and out from the knee.

And on an out breath letting go of the knee and now attending to the right thigh. The entire region between the knee and the right hip. Feeling any sensations that might be here. Being as precise as you can about feeling these sensations. And when you're ready breathing into and out from the thigh. And as you breathe out, just letting go of this region as well. Now letting go of the focus on your legs, and shifting the spotlight of your attention to the pelvis. The entire region from one hip to the other. Aware of the buttocks in contact with the matt or floor. The sensation of contact if you can. Of weight. Becoming aware of the region of the genitals and whatever sensations or lack of sensations you experience in this region. This is where the reproductive organs are located, or previously were. Just becoming aware of whatever might be here.

Becoming aware of the hips, joints of the hips, ...and making the entire pelvis the focus of your attention just now. Breathing into the pelvis.

And on an out breath letting it dissolve as you let go. Sinking deeper, totally present in each moment. Content to just be here, as you are, right now.

And now allowing awareness of the lower back. Just paying attention to what may be here. This is a region that for many of us is a source of struggle. Just for now, experiencing your lower back as it is.

Noticing if there may be thoughts or memories that come up as these various areas of the body receive our attention. And as thoughts arise, just knowing there is no reason to follow the thoughts. No need to push them away either, they are here. Yet becoming aware that these are only thoughts and that it's possible to stay here with what's present in the lower back rather than becoming lost in these thoughts or in any struggle to push away any part of this experience. Breathing into the lower back and out from the lower back.

And as you breath out, just letting go of the lower back and moving up to the region of your upper back. Feeling the sensations...breathing with them. Connecting with the breath here...noticing the expansion of the ribs on the in breath. And if there is any tension or tightness, just letting it dissolve and move out with the out breath as you sink deeper.

Now allowing your attention to move to the belly again, and experiencing the rise and fall of the belly as you breathe. This is the part of the body that we refer to as the gut. And we sometimes think of it as the source of intuition...as when we describe a gut feeling. Paying close attention to any and all sensations here in the abdomen.

And allowing awareness to expand to the area of the chest as well. Where is the breath noticed here? Feeling the movements of your diaphragm. Experiencing the chest as it expands and contracts with the breath.

And there may or not be a sense of the deeper structure of the lungs in your experience...just noticing whatever is here.

Now being aware of the heart. Here, while you may or may not be able to perceive it...the heart beats persistently. And it has continued to do so every single moment since you were born...without any instruction from you...Here is the heart center, the place we often consider the source of our emotions. We talk about things that are heart felt. Being whole hearted about something. Experiencing heartache. This is the part of the body connected to love and compassion.

Noticing if there are thoughts and emotions that arise. Noticing that we can choose at any time to return to the breath.

And now taking a moment to breathe into and out from the entire torso. And if the mind has wandered, lightly noticing and coming back to the body and the present moment.

And when you're ready, on an out breath letting your attention to this region dissolve and shifting your awareness to your fingers. We'll do both hands at the same time and just becoming aware of the sensations at the tips of your fingers – these most sensitive of structures. There may be a sense of warmth, or dampness, or coolness, or throbbing or numbness...Whatever is present. Just noticing the fingers, whatever is already here, all the way to the tips.

And now expanding your field of awareness to include the palms of the hands. The backs of the hands. The wrists, the seemingly fragile but essential part of us. And seeing if it's possible to pick up pulsations of the arteries of the wrists, as the blood flows to and from the hands. Breathing into and out from the hands and wrists.

And on an out breath letting that dissolve and becoming aware of the forearms and the elbows. These all-important joints that do so much work for us. Noticing any and all sensations of both outer elbows and the soft tissue on the inside of the elbows.

And now when you're ready letting go on an out breath to the attention of your elbows and focusing on the upper arms. Skin, muscle, bones...right up to the armpits.

And now paying particular attention to the shoulders. The shoulders are an area where our day-to-day tension is often felt by many of us. And for some it's the cause of pain or neck problems. Just noticing what's here now, and perhaps letting go of any tension that does not need to be held here. Possibly becoming aware that the sensations that you're noticing change from moment to moment. Sensations come and they go, appearing and disappearing as we observe closely in this way. And breathing into and out from the arms and shoulders as a whole.

And on an out breath letting go...sinking deeper...just being present in each moment. Letting go of any thoughts or any impulses to move. Just experiencing yourself in this moment.

And now on an out breath shifting your attention to the neck and throat. This place that houses the vocal chords that brings the gift of speech and song. Perhaps experiencing what it feels like when you swallow, if that's possible, or when air passes through this channel to support your whole body.

And on an out breath letting attention to the neck and throat dissolve and becoming aware of your face. Focusing first on the jaw. And now the chin, experiencing it as it is. Any sensations. And in the hinge region of the jaw. Again, softening, letting go of any tension that doesn't need to be held here. Breathing with this region.

And on an out breath letting it dissolve and becoming aware of the mouth...the lips...teeth... tongue. The roof of your mouth...and the cheeks. Breathing with this region.

And on an out breath letting this region dissolve as well, and becoming aware of the nose. Any sensations in the nostrils as the air moves in and out. Aware of yourself as the breathing goes on.

And now noticing the ears...these receptors of sound. Noticing the skin of the ears, the interior of the ears. And when you're ready letting the attention shift on an out breath and attending to the eyes. And the softness that can be experienced here. The eyelids...and the eyebrows...and that space between the eyebrows. And now the forehead...and temples. Just breathing with your forehead...allowing it to soften.

And if there's any tension here...just noticing it. And if you sense any emotions associated with this tension in the muscles of your face, just being aware of that. Breathing in and letting it go. Letting any tension leave as the breath leaves. P And now breathing with the entirety of your face, and letting your face relax and be still and neutral. At peace.

And now attending to the entire head area. The scalp and skull region. Noticing the effect of gravity, if you're lying down, where the skull and scalp make contact with whatever is supporting it. Or if you seated noticing that the way your body knows how to balance the head on the neck. Seeing if there may or may not be a sense of the deeper structures within the skull. The brain, with all its amazing connections. As you allow your skull to be heavy and sink deeper into the mat.

And when you're ready on an out breath letting go of this region of focus, and now being here fully present for the entire body. Connecting to the breath. Open to things just as they are. Realizing here that you are whole and complete. This body breathing. Just as it is.

Just this breath...this life...as it is.

Resting in stillness and the peace of this precious moment.

Relaxed...open...allowing. Allowing life to be as it is right now. And perhaps seeing that this attitude and this stillness itself is healing. Experiencing the fullness of our capacity to love and to care, and experiencing being fully awake right now.

And as we prepare to end this time of practice...bringing your awareness back to your whole body. Allowing this sense of calmness and centeredness to stay with you as you prepare to go about the rest of your day. And you may want to congratulate yourself for taking the time and energy to take care of yourself in this way. And remembering that this state of clarity and calmness is accessible to you at any moment simply by attending to the breath as an anchor to the present moment, no matter what's happening any time of the day.