



Mindfulness for Professionals Course - Week 4

Sounds and Thoughts Meditation

Settling with breath and body

Allow yourself to find a comfortable seated position, with the back straight so that the spine is self-supported. It may be useful to sit a little bit away from the back of the chair to prevent you from falling asleep.

1. As you sit in an erect manner, check that your shoulders are relaxed, with your head straight and the chin tucked slightly in.
2. For a few moments bring all of your attention to the fact that you are breathing and notice the movements of the breath as it enters and leaves the body. Continue this focus of attention until you notice that you begin feeling reasonably settled. At this point allow your attention to expand to bring attention to the body as a whole, as if the whole body were breathing, helping you to be aware of all the sensations in various parts of the body.
3. Spend a few minutes continuing this mindfulness of the breath and body. Remembering that the breath is always with you and therefore can be an anchor to gently bring you back to the present moment anytime your mind wanders too much or becomes overwhelmed.

And moving on now to meditating on Sounds

4. Now, when you are ready, simply allow your attention to focus from the body and bring your attention to your hearing sense, becoming aware of sounds as they arise spontaneously on a moment-by-moment basis.
5. There is no need to deliberately search for any sounds or to remain focused on one sound in particular. Instead let the sounds find you and gently pay attention to the sounds coming from all directions as they arise – sounds near, sounds far, sounds in front, behind, to the side, above or below. In this way, you are opening to the whole space of sound around you: the 'Soundscape'. Perhaps notice how the obvious sounds can easily crowd out the more subtle ones; noticing any spaces between sounds, becoming aware of the sound of silence. Perhaps in these moments of focusing on sounds you might notice the sound of your own heart beating, or once again noticing the sound of your breath.

6. You might perhaps at this point become aware of the tendency of the mind to label sounds. As best you can, be aware of the label and then drop the labelling and hear sounds simply as sounds, as raw sensations. As you go deeper you might even notice sounds within sounds, or the varying intensity of each sound that you hear.

7. You may become aware that you have drifted off into thinking about the sounds. A sound may trigger memories of the last time you heard a particular sound. Even if that is a pleasant memory it is not reality, it is not the present moment. Gently redirect your attention back to sounds that are occurring right now, in this present moment. Perhaps focus on the duration of each sound as a way to keep your attention in the present.

8. Whenever you notice that your awareness is no longer focused on sounds, gently acknowledge where the mind has moved to and then retune the attention back to sounds as they arise and pass away from moment to moment.

9. Spend around four or five minutes focusing on sounds and then letting go of your awareness of sounds.

So sitting now for four or five minutes - you will need to pause the mp3 for these minutes to allow you to focus on sounds.

And now moving the focus of attention to Thoughts

10. And noticing now what thoughts are to the forefront of your mind. Seeing them as something your mind does naturally. Not attempting to suppress them in any way, instead seeing them as simply as events that happen in the mind.

11. In the same way as you did with sounds, where you noticed their arising, lingering and passing away, so now, as best you can, do the same with any thoughts that arise in the mind, noticing them arriving, seeing them as they linger in the space of the mind (like clouds moving across the sky). Perhaps you may even notice the moment when they dissolve.

12. You don't have to try to make the thoughts come or go. In the same way that you noticed the arising and passing away of sounds, just let thoughts come and go on their own. Noticing this movement as the thoughts drift on by.

13. In a similar way as clouds move across a vast spacious sky are sometimes dark and stormy, sometimes light and fluffy, so thoughts take different forms. Sometimes clouds fill the entire sky. Sometimes they clear out completely, leaving the sky cloudless.

14. Another way of attending to the thoughts in the mind is in the same way that you would watch if the thoughts were projected onto a cinema screen – you'd sit, watching, waiting for a thought or image to arise. When it does, you attend to it, so long as it is there 'on the screen', and then you let it go as it passes away. Notice when you get drawn into the drama, finding yourself up there on the screen. When you become aware of this, congratulate yourself for noticing, for that in itself is mindfulness, and then return to your seat and wait patiently for the next sequence of thoughts to arise, as they definitely will.

15. If any thoughts bring with them intense feelings or emotions, pleasant or unpleasant, as best you can, simply notice this emotion and intensity and let them be as they already are.

16. Remember, that if at any time you feel that your mind has become unfocused and scattered, or it keeps getting repeatedly drawn into the story created by your thinking, see if it is possible to come back to the breath and a sense of the body as a whole, sitting and breathing, and use the breath to anchor and stabilise your awareness back in the present moment.

Reflection on Sounds and Thoughts Meditation

This meditation is different from the previous meditations in that the sounds and thoughts are purely random. Some meditators say it is more like how one might experience mindfulness in daily life. When we go about our day-to-day activities we are not focused on our breath or our bodily sensations per se. In this sounds and thoughts meditation we are learning to see the randomness of sounds and thoughts as they occur in our daily lives and how they affect us, by examining our bodily sensations with whatever experience comes forth, as these random thoughts and sounds emerge.

Some people have found when doing the “Sounds and Thoughts” meditation that their mind began to wander very quickly, especially if for example, a sound of distant music triggered a childhood or adolescent memory. They may have found themselves becoming transported off back a time when that particular music was heard. The sound of the music may have triggered emotions from that time, leading to more thoughts. Bringing the attention once again back to the “Sounds and Thoughts” meditation allowed the random thoughts and their associated bodily sensations began to slowly dissolve.

Other clients have reported that when doing the “Sounds and Thoughts” meditation that they didn’t have any thoughts at all. They could definitely hear sounds but the sounds did not result in any thoughts emerging. Clients may report feeling angry or frustrated or feeling that no progress is being made in their meditation practice. It's important to reassure clients that any and all experiences are correct during meditation. That the mention of sounds and thoughts in the meditation does not mean that the lack of thoughts represents a "failed" meditation. Being mindful is being aware of the present moment, pleasant or unpleasant and even if no thoughts appear that is entirely okay, as this is your present moment.