

Jon Kabat-Zinn Body Scan Transcript

In practicing the body scan, coming to rest lying on your back on a padded surface on the floor or on your bed in a way that will be comfortable, perhaps with support under your knees and head, whatever will make for minimal discomfort, with your arms alongside but not touching the body and the palms open to the ceiling or sky if that feels comfortable to you, and with your feet falling away from each other.

If lying on your back is difficult, then lying in whatever posture works best for you, or even changing your posture when you have to, all the while maintaining a continuity in the awareness of what is happening in each moment.

Keep in mind that the body scan is an invitation to fall awake over the next 30 minutes rather than to fall asleep, no matter how relaxed you may become. To that end, it may be helpful to practice with your eyes open from time to time if any feelings of drowsiness arise.

It is also an invitation to step out of clock time altogether into this very moment and rest in this presence with an open mind and heart, following along with the instructions as best you can, but keeping in mind that what is most important is not what I am saying, but your awareness of what you are experiencing in any and every moment, even in those moments when difficult or unpleasant sensations, thoughts, or emotions arise.

In fact, it is important, especially in such moments, to put out the welcome mat for such experiences and rest in open-hearted, non-reactive attending as best you can. No one is saying that this is easy, but it is the heart of the being mode that we are cultivating here.

As best you can, letting go of the tendency we all have to want things to be different from how they are right now, and allow things to be exactly as you find them. Allow yourself to be exactly as you are. This is a time set aside entirely for you, an opportunity to be by yourself and with yourself fully, seeing if you can allow it to be a nourishing time, a time you deserve to give yourself some positive energy and attention.

Use the instructions for guidance as best you can, watching your body and the activity of your mind as we go along, letting go of judgmental and critical thoughts in particular, and just doing what it says to do, again, as best you can, and being aware of how you feel. Remember that there is no right way to feel as you're doing this. The way you are feeling is the way you're feeling right now. Just accepting it and giving yourself permission to feel what you're already feeling, whatever it is, and seeing that it's okay.

As we go along, seeing if it is possible for you to stay in your own experiencing of what is unfolding moment by moment in your body and in your heart and mind, even as you follow along with my directions. But if at any point you need to tune out my voice to find a deeper silence underneath what I am saying, then by all means doing so and coming back to the guidance when it feels appropriate.

Let's begin now by bringing your attention to a sense of your body as a whole, lying here, however it is in this moment, keeping in mind that from the perspective of mindfulness practice, as long as you're breathing, there's more right with you than wrong with you, no matter what the condition of your body and its history and no matter what you are facing in this moment.

So right now, as you lie here, simply giving yourself over to feeling the sensations of contact in all those places that your body is being supported by the surface you're lying on, feeling how the air surrounds the body and caresses the skin as it moves even subtly in the room and in the form of the breath as it moves through the body, and slowly letting your attention light on the breath, feeling the rhythmic waves of the breath as it moves in and out, riding on the waves of the breath sensation sensations, perhaps at the belly, which rises and falls with each in-breath and each out-breath, perhaps at the nostrils, wherever the feeling of the breath moving is most vivid for you.

And as we lie here, seeing if it is possible to open to and rest in an awareness of the body as a whole, breathing, moment by moment and breath by breath, Feeling it melt or sink deeper and deeper into the surface you're lying on with every out breath as all the muscles in your body let go.

Noticing if there are times when the mind wanders or is carried away by the thought stream. And in those moments, noticing what is on your mind and then gently bringing

your attention back to the breath and to the body lying here or to the region of the body we are focusing on as the body scan unfolds.

Keep in mind throughout this practice session, and in all the others as well, that it is in the nature of the mind to wander and to think. So it is bound to happen a lot, and it's not a sign that you're doing anything wrong.

Now, when you feel ready to, let's let go of the body as a whole and shift the focus of our attention to the toes of the left foot, featuring them center stage in the field of our awareness.

Taking a moment to really tune into them, perhaps distinguishing each toe from all the others, bringing a gentle, interested, affectionate attention to the various sensations we find here, perhaps a sense of contact between the toes where they are touching, or a sense of coolness, of warmth, of moisture, of tingling, or numbness. Whatever the particular sensations are is not important. Just feeling your toes as they are. And that might include no sensations at all if that is your experience when you tune into this region in this moment.

Then being aware as well of whether you are experiencing noticing these sensations or lack of sensations as pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. And also being aware of any emotional reactions that may arise, whether it be aversion, impatience, boredom, or sadness, or judging yourself harshly, allowing all of this to merely be held in awareness moment by moment as we lie here, without having to do anything at all, just being present with what is unfolding, continually coming back to the toes themselves.

And as we lie here attending to the toes of the left foot, seeing if you can feel or imagine the breath entering your lungs and then passing all the way down the body, through the left leg and into the toes of the left foot in one in-breath, and seeing if you can feel or imagine the breath coming all the way back up from the toes and through the foot and the leg and the torso and out through the nose on the out breath.

And now, when you're ready, taking a slow, deep, more intentional breath in, right down into the toes, cradling it for a moment or two. And then on the out as the breath lets go,

letting go of the toes, watching them dissolve in our mind's eye, so to speak, as we gently shift the focus of our attention to the bottom of the left foot, the sole in the instep, and to the heel in contact with the surface you are lying on, aware of any and all sensations or lack of sensations, just as we were with the toes, and breathing in to and out from this region of the body, moment by moment as we lie here, and bringing the mind back now to this region whenever we find that it has been carried away by the thought stream.

And now, when you're ready, breathing right down into the bottom of the left foot and on the out breath, letting go of it as the breath releases as we shift our attention to the top of the foot and the ankle, to sensations on the surface and right down into the bones and joints of the foot. Not so much thinking about the foot as feeling it and opening to whatever we are experiencing in this region, moment by moment. And breath by breath.

And when you're ready, on an out breath, here too, letting go of the entirety of the foot now as we drop into a deeper stillness and awareness and shift our attention to the region of the left lower leg, the shin in front and the calf in back, on the surface and deep, opening to whatever sensations are here, inviting our awareness to take up residency now in this region of the body, allowing it to be as it already is, however it is, as we rest here in full awareness accepting the feelings that we are feeling, breathing with them, moment by moment by moment.

And when you're ready, here too on an out breath, letting go as you come to focus your attention now on your left knee, opening to any and all sensations, breathing with the knee as it is, feeling the kneecap and the sides of the knee and the back of the knee.

And on an out breath, when you're ready, letting go of the knee now as we move into the region of the left upper leg, the thigh, all the way up to the groin on the inside and the left hip on the outside, feeling the entirety of this region of the body, whatever sensations are here to be felt moment by moment.

And when you're ready, taking a deep breath down into the thigh, and then on the out breath, letting go here too, as our awareness shifts now to take in the toes of the right foot, noticing how readily our attention can move to the other leg and foot, and as we do without even wiggling the toes, just opening to whatever is already present.

And on an out breath, once again, letting go as we move into the region of the bottom of the right foot. And this time, let's include as well the top of the foot and the ankle, breathing with the whole of the right foot, moment by moment, however it is, tuning to whatever is here to be felt, and sustaining our awareness as best we can in this region of the body as we lie here breathing.

And again, when you're ready on the out breath, letting go of the whole of the right foot as we shift our awareness to the right lower leg and let's include the knee as well, allowing our awareness to fill and bathe this region of the body, tuning to whatever sensations are here to be felt as we lie here.

And once again, on and out breath, letting go here too, as the breath lets go, watching the right lower leg and knee dissolve in the mind's eye. As we move now into the region above the knee, the right upper leg and thigh, tuning to whatever is here to be felt and known in the entire area from above the right knee up to the right hip on the outside and the groin on the inside. Any sensations at all. Being as precise as you can be in discerning these sensations, whatever they are, whether they are of heaviness or lightness or warmth.

And when you're ready, breathing into the whole of the right thigh and on the out breath, letting go here too, as we move now into the region of the pelvis, aware of the hips, the groin, the genitals, the buttocks in contact with the mat or the bed, cradling the whole of this region in awareness, in touch with whatever sensations or lack of sensations we are experiencing.

And when you're ready, letting go of the whole of the pelvic region on an out-breath, just watching it soften and release as you sink even deeper into stillness and awareness, totally present in each moment, content to just be and to just be right here as you are right now.

And let's direct our attention to the lower back, to the lumbar spine coming out of the sacrum, which forms part of the pelvis itself, the low back being a region that can be particularly prone to tension and fatigue and strain, and just breathing with whatever sensations we are aware of as we tune into the lower back, letting the breath penetrate

the entire region, allowing whatever sensations we are experiencing to be as they are, cradling them in awareness, letting any tension or tightness or holding on or embracing any intensity of sensation just be included and invited to flow out with the out breath to the extent that it will.

And as you breathe out, just letting go of the lower back now and moving into the region of the belly and the sides of the lower torso, right up to the bottom of the rib cage all around, feeling the belly rising with each in breath and falling back towards the spine with each out-breath, in touch with any and sensations in this region, and recognizing any thoughts or emotions that might be arising and passing away as we rest here in awareness, moment by moment by moment, and breath by breath by breath.

And now, when you're ready, taking a slow, deep, more intentional breath in and feeling it fill the entirety of the abdomen and sides, cradling it for a moment, and just letting it out. And as the breath dissolves into the air, allowing the entirety of this region of the body to dissolve in the mind's eye, as we now bring our awareness to the region of the upper torso, the rib cage in the chest housing the heart and the lungs and the great vessels of the bloodstream, the chest wall and breasts, the upper back, the shoulder blades, the collar bones, the shoulders, just breathing with any and all sensations in this region of the body. Perhaps seeing if you can be in touch with the heart beating in the chest, and feel the rib cage expanding and contracting as the lungs fill with air on each in-breath, and release it with each out breath.

And recognizing as well any sensations of contraction or tension that may have accumulated in this region, and any thoughts or emotions that might also be arising and passing away as we linger here.

And when you're ready, taking in a long, slow, and more intentional breath, cradling it here for a moment in the lungs, feeling the ribcage expanding all around in back as well as in front and on the sides, and now letting the breath release. And as the breath lets go, noticing what happens as the mind lets go of this region of the body as well.

As we now bring our attention to focus in on our hands, which we'll do both at the same time, feeling the sensations in the fingers and in the thumbs, in the palms and the backs of our hands.

And now, including as well the wrists and the forearms, and the elbows, the upper arms, and the armpits, and the shoulders, feeling the entirety of our hands and arms from the tips of the fingers up to the shoulders, moment by moment by moment as we lie here.

And when you're ready, once again, on and out breath, just letting go of the hands now and the arms and shoulders as the breath lets go. And as we drop deeper and deeper into awareness itself, just being present in each timeless moment. And as best you can, letting go of whatever thoughts may come up or impulses to move, and just experiencing yourself lying here, resting in awareness.

As we move now into the region of the neck and throat, opening to whatever is here to be found. This region, along with the lower back and the shoulders, is another one in which tension and stress tend to accumulate. So perhaps being aware of any tension or fatigue as well as other sensations, and including as well any sensations in the throat and larynx, and just resting with this entire region in awareness as it is, moment by moment and breath by breath.

And when you're ready, here too on an out-breath, letting go now of the neck and throat, letting them dissolve as we move into the region of the head and face, another region that stores tension over the course of a day, experiencing it as it is in this moment, perhaps feeling the place where the back of the head is in contact with the surface you're lying on, and feeling as well the whole of your face, allowing it to be at rest as it is, sensing perhaps the breath moving in and out past the gateways of the nostrils, the sensations in the chin and the jaw, the lips and the mouth and the teeth and the tongue, the entirety of the nose and the cheeks and the ears, including an awareness of whatever sounds may be coming to the ears, the region of the eyes and what you are drinking in through the eyes if they are open, the eyelids, the eyebrows, and the space between the eyebrows, the forehead, the temples, the entirety of the scalp and cranium, allowing awareness to hold and embrace with friendly acceptance the whole of your face and head, just as they are in this moment, breathing with them, cradling them in awareness as we lie here, moment by moment.

Recognizing as well as we've been doing any thoughts or emotions that might be moving through the mind, like clouds or weather patterns in the sky.

Then when you're ready, taking a slow, deep, more intentional breath in, right into the whole of your face and head, and on the out-breath, letting go of this region of the body as well, watching it too dissolve into neutral, into stillness, into a natural peacefulness as the breath lets go and as the mind itself lets go, and we come to rest in awareness itself. An awareness that we can invite now to once again hold the whole body from the toes and the bottoms of the feet, right up through the legs and torso, through the hands and arms, to the shoulders and neck and face, and all the way up the top of the head, embracing the whole of the body as we find it, however it is in this moment, and just resting now in awareness and stillness, a deep inner silence and wakefulness as we lie here, complete just as we are, whole just as we are, in touch with our essential completeness, a realm of well-being in which our limitations are not confiding, open to things just as they are, and seeing the disorientation to experience this stillness, this awareness is itself, profoundly healing.

And so, as this practice comes to its natural conclusion, and we open once again to the world of clock time, you might want to take a moment to congratulate yourself for having made the time to nurture yourself in this way.

Perhaps as well, forming the strong intention and resolve to keep practicing regularly over the days, weeks, and months to come, to befriend yourself in this way over and over and over again, and let your deep inner resources nourish your life as the tendencies of the habitual and driven doing mode are recognized and held and guided and healed in this way by the domain of being. And keeping in mind that this awareness is portable, that it is always as close as this breath and this moment.

Perhaps over time, you will find that the mindfulness you are cultivating here spills over naturally from periods of formal practice, such as this one, into every aspect of your day and your life.

And so resting here now, as long as you like, in silence and stillness until the bells ring, allowing your awareness to hold and know directly whatever arises within the field of the body and within the field of the mind, over and over again, allowing things to be as they already are, moment by moment by moment, as we lie here, fully awake, fully alive, bathing in the air, in the breath, in silence, in awareness itself.