

## **Mindfulness – a rough guide for tough times**

**by Rev. Alan Stewart**



Mindfulness is a very helpful way of bringing us into a deeper awareness of the present moment. It can be helpful in dealing with stress or anxiety. Until our fortnightly sessions resume, you may wish to try this at home.

*You may want to light a candle.*

The two great principles of Mindfulness are:

- 1 Curiosity – Having a beginner’s mind; not judging; allowing our curiosity to help us enter into the experience of being here now.
- 2 Kindness – Kindness towards everything, especially towards ourselves.

Find a position that is comfortable but alert. It’s good to have our feet anchored to the ground, our abdomen straight (imagine a helium balloon is lifting your head!). We want to breathe from our depths, not the shallows. Find the natural place for your hands to rest – you may want them to be upturned as a gesture of being open to what this moment has for you. For most of us it will be helpful to close our eyes. If at any time you feel anxious, you can open your eyes slightly and focus on the candle.

We begin with a moment to catch our breath, to become more present to our bodies and our surroundings.

We then take a few moments to become aware of any sounds around or within us.... the sounds from the streets outside, the sound of our own breathing, our heartbeat perhaps.... We are trying not to judge or label. We simply allow each sound to be what it is, allowing each to bring us into a deeper experience and awareness of the ‘now’.

After a few minutes, we then take our attention to the breath. Notice the quality of each breath... the sensations in the nostrils as the cooler air enters, the diaphragm lifts, and then the air as it escapes, warmed from its short time within.

Don't try to labour your breath. Each breath is different. Each in breath is a new beginning, each outbreath a letting go and a letting be.

The breath is the anchor to the present moment so in those moments when our minds wander (which is what minds do!) we simply and kindly escort our attention back to the breath.



You may want to imagine that with each in breath you are breathing in kindness and releasing with the outbreath all that is not kind. You can then move on to breathing in love, breathing out all that is not love; breathing in calm, releasing stress etc.

Now imagine that you can take your breath all the way down your body to the toes, allowing each in breath is be curious about what you find there; any sensations, any discomfort; not judging or labelling; simply allowing what is to be what it is.

Now letting go with the outbreath, and taking our next breath down to the soles of your feet... being curious about what you find, the interaction with the socks and shoes, their relationship with the ground.

Now letting go, and with the next breath we spend time with the whole foot; then the lower leg, knees, thighs, lower back, upper back, shoulders, belly, diaphragm; then fingers, hands, lower arm and elbows, upper arm, neck, mouth, nose, eyes, and finally the whole head.

If, in any place, you feel tension or discomfort, just imagine the breath is softening what you find there. This is called the **Body Scan**.

You may also want to use the **Prayer of Loving Kindness**; a threefold blessing:

- Silently we bless ourselves with the words, **'May I know love, may I know peace, may I be free'**.
- Then to each one who comes to mind; **'May you know love, may you know peace, may you be free'**.
- Finally widen the circle of blessing out into the streets and homes of this town and these villages, and lastly to the whole of creation; **'May you know love, may you know peace, may you be free'**.