**Week 8 - Conclusion**

***Developing a Practice of Your Own***

***Time to reflect...***

This brings us to the final week of the course, and if you have been watching the videos, reading the recommended material, and doing the practices, you have accomplished a lot! As a result of your dedicated learning and practice, it's likely that there have been some changes in you since you began, so now might be a good time to ask: *What changes have you noticed since you began the course?* The changes may be different than you expected and they might not be monumental. They could include subtle shifts, such as discovering that you are sometimes able to find space in the middle of a busy day, or that you are a little more resilient in encounters with others, or you're just a little kinder to yourself in difficult situations. It's often the subtle changes that are actually most profound, because they indicate learning that has been integrated, that they come from the inside-out rather than top-down.

***Developing a practice of your own***

Although there are videos and readings for this week, there are no practice sheets. Sometimes, we say that the eighth week of an MBSR class starts now but does not really have an end. If this course has been useful for you so far, you may want to consider the question: *How will you continue practicing mindfulness in your daily life, on your own?* You may decide that you would like to continue the practice in a formal way, incorporating in your schedule a sitting meditation or yoga, for instance, or you may already have an idea of how you would incorporate into your life one or more of the many informal practices (e.g., simple awareness, mindful eating, STOP, Soften-Soothe-Allow, or PAIN processes). Of the people who take the MBSR course and have found ways to incorporate mindfulness into their lives, every one of them does it in a unique way, a way that suits their temperament and needs. One person might continue with a 30-

minute per day meditation practice, another might take a regular yoga class, another may have made their daily walk into a meditation using present-moment awareness of their inner and outer worlds as they walk, and yet another may intentionally use one or more of the many informal practices throughout their day. The important thing is not the specific practices you choose, but that you make them yours, and that they resonate with you in a way that they help you to be

more alive, engaged and joyful in your daily life.

**CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS**

**Beginning or Deepening a Personal Meditation Practice**

1. The real meditation is how you live your life.

2. In order to live life fully, you have to be present for it.

3. To be present, it helps to purposefully bring awareness to your moments – otherwise you

may miss many of them.

4. You do that by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and

non-judgmentally to whatever is arising inwardly and outwardly.

5. This requires a great deal of kindness toward yourself, which you deserve.

6. It helps to keep in mind that good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, the present moment is

the only time any of us are alive. Therefore, it's the only time to learn, grow, see what is

really going on, find some degree of balance, feel and express emotions such as love and

appreciation, and do what we need to do to take care of ourselves – in other words,

embody our intrinsic strength and beauty and wisdom – even in the face of pain and

suffering.

7. So a gentle love affair with the present moment is important.

8. We do that through learning to rest in awareness of what is happening inwardly and

outwardly moment by moment by moment – it is more a “being” than a “doing.”

9. Formal and informal meditation practices are specific ways in which you can ground,

deepen, and accelerate this process, so it is useful to carve out some time for formal

practice on a regular daily basis – maybe waking up fifteen or twenty minutes earlier than

you ordinarily would to catch some time for ourselves.

10. We bring awareness to our moments only as best we can.

11. We are not trying to create a special feeling or experience – simply to realize that this

moment is already very special – because you are alive and awake in it.

12.This is hard, but well worth it

13. It takes a lot of practice.

14. Lots of practice

15. But you have a lot of moments – and we can treat each one as a new beginning.

16. So there are always new moments to open up to if we miss some.

17. We do all this with a huge amount of self-compassion.

18. And remember, you are not your thoughts or opinions, your likes or dislikes. They are more like weather patterns in your mind that you can be aware of – like clouds moving across the sky, – and so don’t have to be imprisoned by them.

19. Befriending yourself in this way is the adventure of a lifetime, and hugely empowering.

20. Try it for a few weeks – it grows on you.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR DAILY PRACTICE**

1. A good place to start cultivating mindfulness is in the body.

2. Befriending your breath is a good idea, since you can’t leave home without it – and it is so

related to our states of mind.

3. See if from time to time you can just feel the breath moving in and out of your body.

4. Locate where the breath sensations are most vivid, and “surf” with full awareness on those

breath waves, moment by moment – in the belly, at the nostrils, or wherever.

5. Try lying in bed for a few moments after you wake up, and just ride on the waves of your

own breathing moment by moment and breath by breath.

6. Experiment with expanding your awareness around your breath until it includes a sense of

the body as a whole lying in bed breathing.

7. As best you can, be aware of the various sensations fluxing in the body, including the

breath sensations.

8. Just rest in the awareness of lying here breathing, outside of time, even if it is only for a

minute or two by the clock.

9. When you notice that the mind has a life of its own and wanders here and there, keep in

mind that this is just what minds do, so there is no need to judge it.

10. Just note what is on your mind if you are no longer in touch with the breath or with the

sensations of the body lying in the bed, and without judgment or criticism, just let that be part of your awareness in the moment, and feature once again the breath and the body center-stage in the field of your awareness.

11. Repeat step 10 a few million times.

12. It is very easy to fall into the thought stream and get caught up in the future (worrying,

planning) and the past (remembering, blaming, pining) and in reactive and often painful emotions.

13. No need to try to stop any of this from happening when you can just bring a big embrace of openhearted, spacious, accepting awareness to it and, lo and behold, you are once again sitting on the bank of the thought stream, listening to the gurgling but not so caught up in the torrent for the moment.

14. You can cultivate mindfulness in this way lying in bed for a few moments in the morning, or in the evening before going to sleep.

15. You can also cultivate mindfulness sitting, standing, walking, and eating – in fact, in any position or situation, including brushing your teeth, taking a shower, talking on the phone, running, working out at the gym, cooking, picking up the kids, making love, whatever is unfolding in your life in the present moment.

16. It helps to be present for it and for yourself.

17.Remember – the real meditation is your life, and how you inhabit it moment by moment.