

Week 2 - Attention and The Brain

Introduction to Sitting Meditation



The range of what we think and do
Is limited by what we fail to notice
And because we fail to notice
There is little we can do
To change
Until we notice
How failing to notice
Shapes our thoughts and deeds.
- R.D. Laing -

Joshua Bell Plays a \$3,000,000 Violin ...and almost nobody notices

In a Washington, DC Metro Station, Joshua Bell, one of the world's greatest violinists, played a beautiful, intricate, moving piece on a violin worth over 3 million dollars. During the 43 minutes he played, **1,097 people walked by. Only seven stopped to listen**, and even those seven paused for only a few minutes. Three days before, Joshua Bell had played the same music to a sold-out audience in Boston where the seats averaged \$100 each. His minimum fee for playing a public concert was \$75,000. *How could so many people have walked by?*

The fact that so few people stopped was not a demonstration of the cluelessness of these commuters, but how the busyness of our daily life can sometimes prevent us from noticing the beautiful and miraculous world all around us. **How many amazingly beautiful things do we miss in a day, simply because of the pace of our lives and the intense focus on getting to the next thing?**

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Videos

This week's videos include **The Monkey Business Illusion** by Daniel Simons which illustrates both the incredible power of attention **and** the inherent limitations in our ability to perceive fully what is going on around us. Michelle Maldonado, in **Mindfulness Practice**, gives a beautiful definition of mindfulness: *"To be fully present in the moment to the mind, body, and surroundings, with curiosity and kindness"*. **Mindful Meditation and the Brain** and **How Meditation Can Reshape Our Brains** give a compelling account of how meditation creates physical changes in the brain. Finally, there is **Coming to Our Senses** by Jon Kabat-Zinn, followed by an entertaining **All it takes is 10 Mindful Minutes** that includes juggling and a provocative challenge to do "nothing" for 10 minutes.

Readings

Sitting Meditation describes the practice we are introducing this week. **Joshua Bell Plays a \$3,000,000 Violin (and almost nobody notices)** is a more detailed account of the "concert" described above. The next two readings, **How the Brain Rewires Itself** and **How Meditation Affects the Gray Matter of the Brain** discuss the growing body of research that demonstrates how meditative practice, even when done for a relatively short period of time (weeks not years), can physically alter the brain in positive and adaptive ways.

Daily Practices

This week, for the **formal practice**, we introduce the [Sitting Meditation](#), using breath as the primary object of awareness, alternating this with the Body Scan (Sitting one day, Body Scan the next, etc.). It can seem that the goal of the Body Scan or a Sitting Meditation is to stay focused on exactly one thing at a time (ankle, wrist, breath) and that when you notice your awareness has moved (to a memory, internal narrative, sound and wonderings about the sound), that you are somehow failing. These practices will increase your ability to focus and concentrate, but they will also expand your ability to be with whatever comes into your field of experience, non-judgmentally. **Simply noticing that your attention has moved to another object is, in itself, mindfulness in action.** Mindfulness includes both a concentrative attention (think laser beam) AND a capacity to perceive a larger picture (think floodlight). Both are important. Focusing on only one thing leaves the larger picture unseen, and maintaining only a broad focus does not allow exploration of the parts.

The **informal practice** this week is about becoming aware of how we experience and process pleasant events. They don't need to be major events, they can be something as simple as feeling the sun on your face or someone smiling at you. Just as we did last week, allow a few minutes before going to sleep to complete the informal practice log.

Week 2 Materials

Video List *[with most browsers, once you start the first video, the others will follow automatically]*

- ☐ [The Monkey Business Illusion](#) by Daniel Simons [2 min]
- ☐ [Mindfulness Practice](#) - Michelle Maldonado [17 min]
- ☐ [Mindful Meditation and the Brain](#) - Shauna Shapiro [6 min]
- ☐ [How Meditation Can Reshape Our Brains](#) - Sara Lazar [8 min]
- ☐ [Coming to Our Senses](#) - Jon Kabat-Zinn [9 min]
- ☐ [All it takes is 10 Mindful Minutes](#) - Andy Puddicombe [10 min]

Reading List *[print these for your manual or read them online]*

- ☐ [Sitting Meditation](#) - Jon Kabat-Zinn [excerpted from Full Catastrophe Living]
- ☐ [Joshua Bell plays a \\$3,000,000 violin \(and almost nobody notices\)](#)
- ☐ [How the Brain Rewires Itself](#) - Sharon Begley
- ☐ [How Meditation Affects the Gray Matter of the Brain](#) - David R. Hamilton, Ph.D.

Practice Sheets *[print PDF file or download WORD file to record your daily practices]*

- ☐ [Formal Practice PDF](#) or [WORD format](#) - [Body Scan](#) & [Sitting Meditation](#)
- ☐ [Informal Practice PDF](#) or [WORD format](#) - [Pleasant Events Calendar](#)

All of the guided practices can be found through the top menu

Supplementary materials related to this week's topic *[optional]*

- [Life is Right Now](#) - video by Jon Kabat-Zinn [7 min]
- [Why a Neuroscientist Would Study Meditation](#) - video by Willoughby Britton [10 min]
- [Measuring Mindfulness](#) - video by Judson Brewer [7 min]
- [Whodunnit](#) - video by Shamash Alidina [4 min]
- [Neuroscientist Richard Davidson's Wake-Up Call](#) - video by Huffington Post [5 min]
- [Altered Traits](#) - book by Daniel Goldman and Richard Davidson
- [Mastering Your Own Mind](#) - article by Katherine Ellison

Once you have done at least six days of practice (over a span of a week or more) and feel that you've gotten the essence of this "Week" through the videos and reading, you are ready to go to [Week 3](#). It's not necessary to read/view any of the Supplementary materials - these are totally optional.

Practice Log - Week 2

FORMAL PRACTICE: Read the [description of the Sitting Meditation](#). Between now and next week, practice at least six times, alternating the [Sitting Meditation](#) with the [Body Scan](#). As before, don't expect anything in particular from either of these exercises. See if you can give up all expectations about it and just let your experience be your experience. **NOTE: One of your six formal practices can be one of the live meditations from a meeting on the [Zoom Meeting page](#).**

Record on this form each time you practice. In the comment field, put just a few words to remind you of your impressions: what came up, how it felt, what you noticed in terms of physical sensations, emotions, thoughts, etc. ***It's important to write the comments immediately because it will be hard to reconstruct later.***

Once you have done at least six days of practice and feel that you've gotten the essence of this "Week", you may go to the next week, although you can stay here longer if that feels right.

INFORMAL PRACTICE: At the end of the day before you go to bed, recall one specific pleasant event and record it on the [Pleasant Events Calendar](#).

Date	Formal Practice Comments (include whether Body Scan or Sitting)
7th day & beyond is optional	

Informal Practice Log (Pleasant Events Calendar) – Week 2

What was the experience?	Were you aware of the pleasant feelings while the event was happening?	How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?	What moods, feelings, and thoughts accompanied this event?	What thoughts, sensations, emotions do you notice now as you write this down?
EXAMPLE <i>Heading home after work – stopping, hearing a bird sing.</i>	<i>Yes.</i>	<i>Lightness across the face, aware of shoulders dropping, uplift of corners of mouth.</i>	<i>Relief, pleasure, “That’s good”, “Pretty song”, “it’s so nice to be outside”.</i>	<i>It’s such a small thing but I’m glad I noticed it. I get a warm feeling and a tingling in my body..</i>
<i>7th day & beyond is optional</i>				