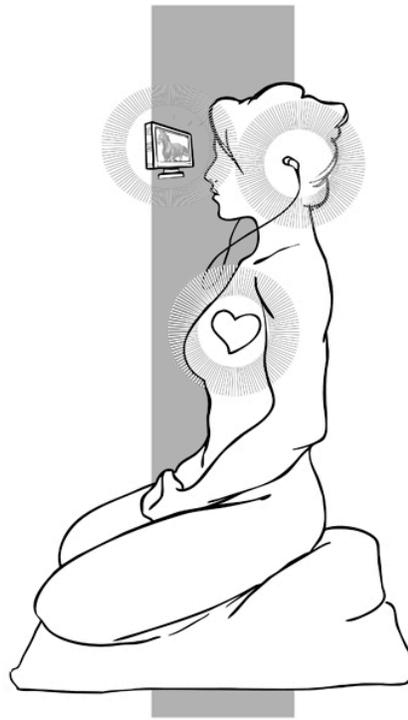


See-Hear-Feel

Retreat Prep for March 14 2015



What is Mindful Awareness?

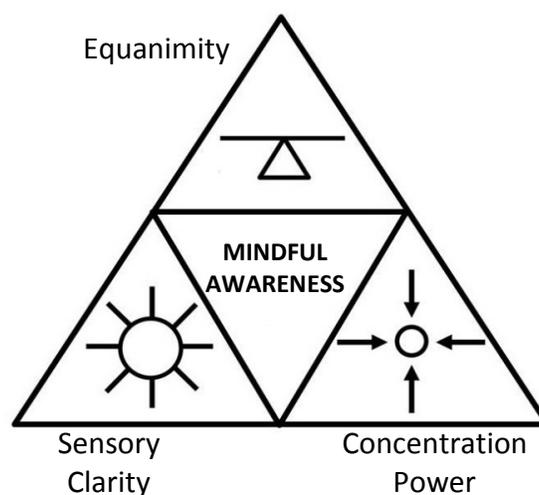
Basic Mindfulness is a way to think about, practice, and teach mindful awareness. It is but one system among many that are currently available. Each approach to mindful awareness has strong points and weak points. The strong point of Basic Mindfulness lies in its conceptual clarity and comprehensiveness. Its weak point is its complexity. Also the large number of focus options it offers can be a bit overwhelming at first. It may be helpful to remember that you don't have to try all or even most of those focus options. If you can find one or two that really work for you, that's all you need.

Within the Basic Mindfulness System, mindful awareness is defined as:

Concentration Power, Sensory Clarity, and Equanimity working together.

What does this mean? It means that mindful awareness is a skillset, a collection of skills. A skill is an ability that can be improved with practice. Most skills involve some sort of external performance but mindfulness skills are "internal." Mindfulness skills are a way to process your sensory experience. By sensory experiences, I mean not just outer physical experience like sights and sounds but also your inner experience of thoughts and emotions. So, Mindful Awareness is a certain way to pay attention to what is happening around you and within you. It involves three core skills. Each skill is distinct from the others, and they work together to reinforce each other. Let's consider what each of those skills involve.

You can think of Concentration Power as the ability to focus on what you consider to be relevant at a given time. You can think of Sensory Clarity as the ability to keep track of what you're actually experiencing in the moment. You can think of Equanimity as the ability to allow sensory experience to come and go without push and pull. We could represent this symbolically as a triangle:



Or we could represent this as a rectangular table:

	<p style="text-align: center;">Concentration Power Staying with what is relevant.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Sensory Clarity Brightness, high resolution, untangling.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Equanimity</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A kind of inner balance; A third possibility between pushing the senses down (suppressing) and being pulled away by the senses (grasping).</p>

The easiest way to understand these descriptions is to look back on your own experience. Have you ever experienced anything like this?

- In a certain situation, you suddenly fell into a state of high focus. Things slowed down, you were totally in the groove, in the zone. As a result, you were able to respond with great effectiveness.

If you ever experienced anything like this, then you know what a *temporary* state of high concentration is. With practice, you can develop the ability to get into that state *anytime you want*.

- Your senses suddenly became unusually bright and clearer. You could detect great detail and everything seemed unusually vivid and rich.

If you ever experienced anything like this, then you know what a *temporary* state of high sensory clarity is. With practice, you can develop the ability to get into that state *anytime you want*.

- You were going through some physical, emotional, or mental discomfort. For some reason you stopped fighting with the discomfort and just let it flow through you. When you did that, the sense of problem or suffering became much less (or perhaps even totally vanished).

If you ever experienced that, you know what a *temporary* state of equanimity is. With practice, you can develop the ability to get into that state *anytime you want*.

If you answered yes to any of the above, then you already have some understanding of how improving the quality of your mindfulness could improve the quality of your life.

Now, let's consider the reverse situations....

Have you ever experienced anything like this?

- There was something important that didn't go well because of your lack of ability to keep focused on it.

If you ever experienced something like this, then you're aware of the negative effects of *lacking* concentration power. Through systematic practice, you can *avoid such problems*.

- You went through an experience where so much was happening so fast that you couldn't keep track of it. What part is body? What part is mind? What part is emotion? As a result, you became overwhelmed, flooded, and that overwhelm caused you suffering or made you do something you later regretted...or both.

Such experiences of sensory chaos are examples of the problems that can develop if you *lack* sensory clarity. Through systematic practice, you can *avoid such problems*.

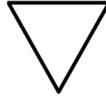
- There was something pleasant in your life but you were so worried about losing it or not getting enough of it that you couldn't really enjoy it.

If you ever experienced something like this, then you know how a *lack* of equanimity can decrease the satisfaction you derive from pleasure, or perhaps even turn the pleasure into frustration. In other words, you've experienced the negative results of non-equanimity. Through systematic practice, you can *avoid such problems*.

So that's the "Good News" of Mindfulness—you can dramatically increase your satisfaction and decrease your suffering by systematically training your attention skills. Such systematic training is referred to as your practice. Practice consists of one or several techniques that you do on a regular basis.

Techniques

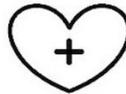
The most recent version of the Basic Mindfulness system is organized around three main techniques. You can learn all three, or just one, or just two, and in whatever order you want.



See-Hear-Feel



Do Nothing



Nurture Positive

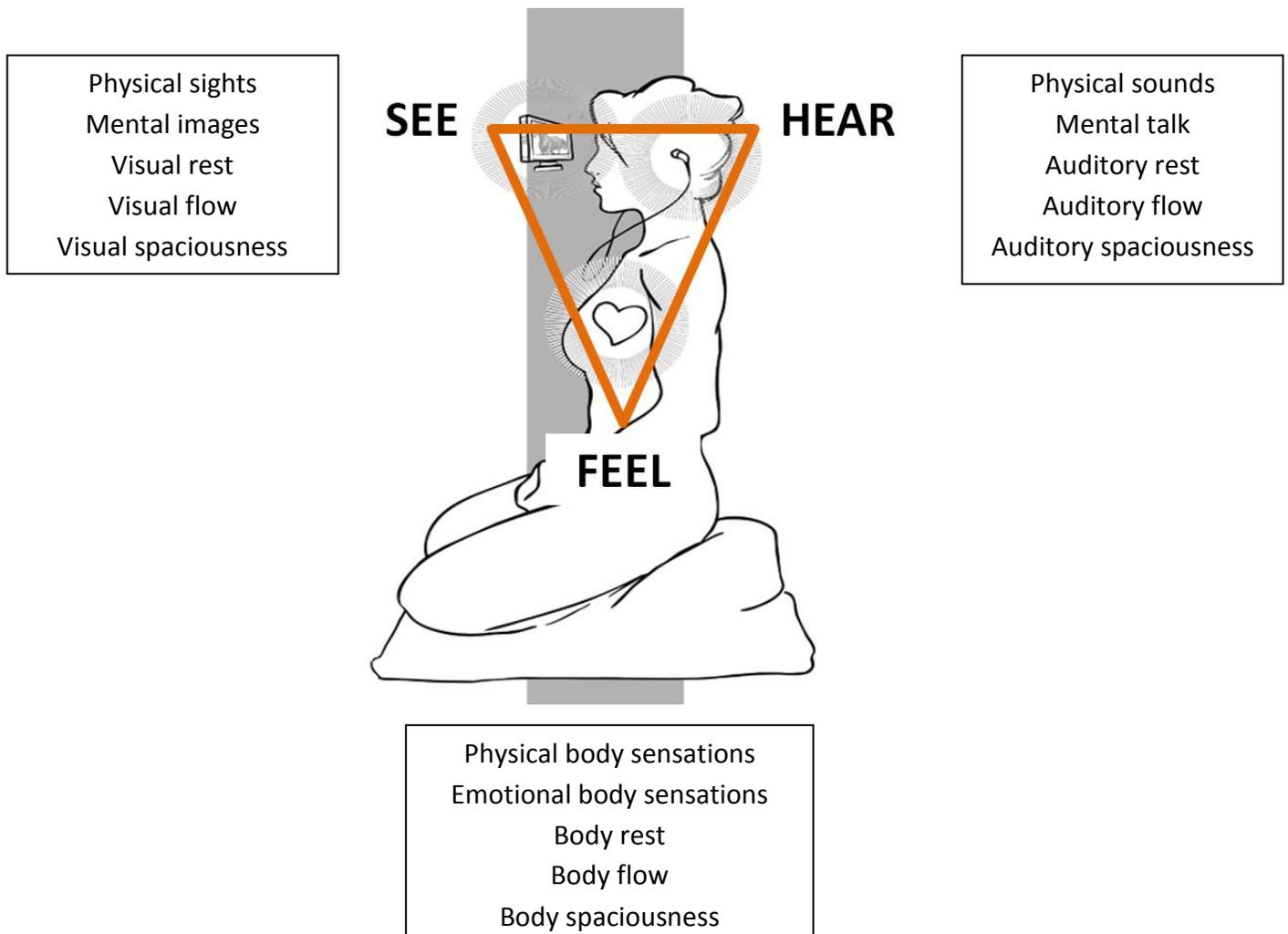
See-Hear-Feel

The Saturday March 14 program that you'll be participating in is an introduction to the See-Hear-Feel technique.

When you do See-Hear-Feel, you use a process called noting to track which sensory modality you're focusing on at a given moment: visual experience, auditory experience, or body experience. The label for visual experience is "See." The label for auditory experience is "Hear." The label for body experience is "Feel."

Noting and labeling are explained in more detail on the next section.

Look over the graphic below. Notice how the words See, Hear, Feel are arranged at the corners of an inverted triangle. Practice drawing this triangle with those words a few times on your own without looking at the graphic. Notice also that next to each label is a box and each box contains five items. Those five items are the five basic themes or types of experience covered by the label. Don't worry at this point about what those phrases mean; that will be explained in the program.



Noting and Labeling

A period of Noting practice consists of a sequence of acts of Noting.

An act of Noting usually consists of two parts:

1. An initial acknowledging.
2. A moment of focusing on what you acknowledged.

Thus, Noting typically consists of a sequence: acknowledge, focus, acknowledge, focus, acknowledge, focus. Associated with each thing that can be noted is a word or phrase—its label. As you note something, you have the option to think or say its label. When you speak the labels out loud, intentionally use a low, gentle, matter-of-fact, almost impersonal tone of voice. When you think the labels, create the same tone in your mental voice. The tone of voice helps put you in a deep state.

The relationship between Noting, labeling, and mindful awareness is as follows:

- Labeling can facilitate Noting.
- Noting can facilitate mindful awareness.
- Mindful awareness is a key skill for achieving True Happiness.

Noting need not be accompanied by labeling, and labeling may be mental or spoken. This gives us three possibilities:

1. Just Noting without intentionally labeling.
2. Mental labels accompanying the Noting.
3. Spoken labels accompanying the Noting.

Within the spoken labels there are three sub-types:

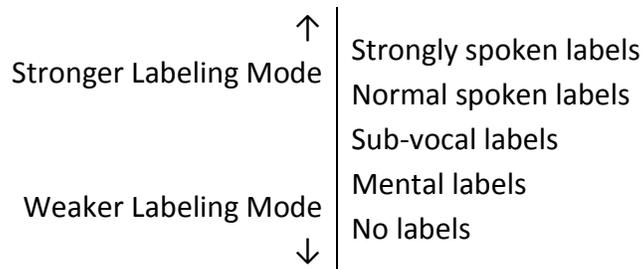
1. Sub-vocal labels (mouthed, whispered, or sotto voce labeling that would be inaudible to people near you.)
2. Ordinary spoken labels.
3. Strongly spoken labels.

Obviously the latter two can only be done in appropriate environments.

This gives you a spectrum of five possibilities analogous to gear positions in a car. We will refer to these five possibilities as “labeling modes.”

You can freely shift back and forth between labeling modes. You may shift frequently or seldom as circumstances dictate. By circumstances, I mean what is going on inside you (how focused or scattered

you are) and what is going on around you (whether there are people you might disturb, etc.). As a general principle, as soon as you get spaced out or caught up, immediately shift to a stronger mode of labeling. Once you get well focused, you can drop to a weaker mode of labeling if you so desire.



Noting the Label

Making a mental label is obviously an instance of mental talk, and speaking a label out loud creates a physical sound. Both are auditory experiences. Should you note them as “Hear”? No, you don’t note/label the labels. They belong to a category by themselves. They are not part of your focus range (focus range = the set of experiences you’re intentionally tracking).

Dividing the Attention

As a general principle, put no more than 5% of your attention on the labeling process itself. The other 95% goes into focusing on what you’re noting.

An exception to this is the case of strongly spoken labels, which are used when you really “hit the wall” and you need a period of strong feedback to fight with wandering mind and unconsciousness. When using strongly spoken labels, about half of your attention should go into the thing you’re noting, and the other half should go into listening to the labels themselves. That way as soon as the label stream ceases, you have instant feedback letting you know that you are getting spaced out and caught up.

Some Frequently Asked Questions

1. Question: Noting makes me think a lot. I think about if I’m doing it right. I think about what to look for next. I think about thinking about thinking. What should I do?

Answer: Just be patient. Those are common initial reactions. They tend to go away with time because: (1) tracking experiences becomes more second nature for you and (2) your mind gets tired of playing games with itself.

Remember also to intentionally make your noting voice impersonal and matter-of-fact. That may help reduce the “tripping out on yourself” aspect you’re reporting.

2. Question: It seems that a lot of my labels are just guesses.

Answer: That’s okay. You have to start somewhere. Confidence comes with experience.

3. Question: It seems that my labels often come late, after the fact, especially when I'm trying to track mental talk.

Answer: That's to be expected at the beginning. You are still much more alert than you would be otherwise. With practice, Noting becomes concurrent with the arising of each experience.

4. Question: The Noting seems to interfere with or change the thing I'm focusing on so I can't detect what's really there.

Answer: Sure you can. What's really there is whatever was there plus any change produced from the act of paying attention to it. Any sensory experience is a valid candidate for focusing on, even if that experience has been caused by or modified by the act of focusing itself.

5. Question: Noting seems to reinforce a strong sense of an "I" doing the Noting.

A: That's natural at the beginning. At some point the Noting goes on autopilot.

Here's a metaphor. You can do the complex task of driving a car without needing much of a "driving self." In the same way, eventually you will be able to quickly and accurately label complex phenomena without needing a "meditating self." When that happens, the sense of distance between noter and noted collapses.

6. Question: I just keep labeling the same thing over and over again. What's the point?

A: Remember that Noting is not just noticing. Each time you note something you focus on it and open up to it. The magic is in the moment-by-moment focusing and opening. When you do that, you are learning a new way to process sensory experience. You are not wasting your time even if you just note the same seemingly banal event over and over.

7. Question: Why should I note and label?

Answer: There are many reasons. Here are a few.

- The gentle loving tone that you create in your voice as you label can be very powerful. Your own voice can put you into a deep state of reassurance, safety, and self-acceptance. We'll refer to such a state as equanimity.
- Noting allows you to focus on just what's present in the moment. This reduces overwhelm, which in turn reduces suffering.
- Noting allows you to break experiences down into manageable parts and deal with them one at a time. A 500-pound weight will crush you, but ten 50-pound weights can be carried one at a time.

- Some of the things you'll be noting represent windows of opportunity—pleasant aspects of experience (such as rest and flow) that are often present but usually go unnoticed and, hence, un-enjoyed. Sensory categories used in Basic Mindfulness are set up to call your attention to such windows of opportunity.

8. Question: I cannot seem to separate mental image from mental talk. Any suggestions?

Answer: It depends on what you mean by “separate.”

If by separate you mean preventing image and talk from happening at the same time, or stopping them from interacting back and forth, then you're right. Neither you nor anyone else can separate them in that sense. However, the good news is that there's no need to separate them in that sense. Even when mental talk and mental image are intertwined, it is still possible to experience them as qualitatively and spatially distinct sensory events.

Qualitatively speaking, mental images are visual. Mental talk is auditory. Spatially speaking, images tend to be centered more forward; for example, in front of or behind your eyes. Talk tends to occur further back, usually somewhere in your head/at your ears.

Just as you can distinguish external sights from external sounds, you can “separate” internal images from internal conversations.

9. Question: Can you summarize some basic guidelines for the labeling process?

Answer:

- If you are noting without labels and are getting spaced out or caught up, start to mentally label.
- If that doesn't help, intentionally modulate your mental voice to be more gentle and matter-of-fact, even if that seems artificial and contrived.
- If that doesn't help, speak the labels out loud in that gentle and matter-of-fact tone.
- If that doesn't, use strongly spoken labels.
- If the effort to speak the labels causes uncomfortable reactions (resistance, emotion, and so forth) label those reactions. (Those reactions are proof that you're doing the procedure correctly. The stronger labeling mode is forcing you to go toe-to-toe with the unconsciousness itself!)

10. Question: I don't like to label.

Answer: The solution is easy. You don't have to! Labeling is an option within the apparatus of Noting. But if it's a choice between effortful labeling on one hand and being grossly spaced out on the other, go for the labels!