

Chapter 1

Motivation

Each of us knows a genuine encounter from one based on deception. We've all been had at one time or another by people who seemed sincere in their intentions but whose motivations were insincere and who turned out to be deceitful. Conversely, we also know when we've been addressed honestly and respectfully; when someone, whether a loved one, a teacher or mentor, or even a patient, has seen within us our inherent goodness and that "self" that is beyond even our own perceived limitations.

In the same way, we also know when we're being genuine with our patients versus when we're showing up simply because we have to. When our motivation has been dampened by the hardships of our position or by the strain of compassion fatigue, when we're not showing up at the bedside fully present, we fail ourselves in what is our most selfless potential. Instead of seeing our patients with a mind free from distractions and remaining present and undistracted, we glance at the wall clock, ruffle through the chart, carry out our planned intervention, and beat a hasty retreat for the door.

Our patients sense when we're showing up at the bedside and when we're not, though they may not directly express it to us. Because our intention and motivations can have a direct impact on our patients' well-being, it is imperative that we check our motivation every time we engage with our patients... or really anyone, for that matter!! By making our primary motivation to be of service and to create a healing relationship no matter what barriers exist, we instill each encounter with a focused, attentive, and heartfelt presence that can transcend all manner of difficulties and obstacles.

In the book, *Medicine and Compassion: A Tibetan Lama's Guidance for Caregivers*, authors Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche and Dr. David R Shlim write:

When...[one]...walks into a room with a patient...[one's] true attitude toward the patient will be immediately visible, regardless of the attitude that...[one]...attempts to portray.

Something intangible is revealed that reflects...[one's]... actual motivation or attitude. The caring motivation needs to be genuine, because it is perceived by the patient. It can't be faked. (*In this quote, I've inserted "one" in the place of "a doctor(s)" to note that this applies to anyone within the health-care profession.*)

The training in mindfulness (focus), meditative awareness (attention), and compassion (caring) has within its heart the greatest benefit when the intention for doing so comes from the true motivation to *change oneself for the benefit of others*. This point cannot be stressed too much or too often: our motivation to work with our mind has the greatest benefit when the heart of that motivation is to *change how we are for the benefit of others*. This way of thinking, of benefiting others through working on oneself, can become a powerful motivator for change, especially when we come up against our limitations. Changing ourselves for the benefit of others can be an invigorating and refreshing motivator in the struggles that we encounter as we begin our work on becoming less distracted and more compassionate. Instead of isolating ourselves in the process, our motivation for continuing on the path can be infused with the spirit of doing so for the benefit of our family, friends, and patients. The Dalai Lama describes this as a "wise selfishness," whereby the work that we do in our own self-interest can benefit others in its results.

For myself, I know that whenever my mind is too far from where it ought to be, if I can bring myself back to the primary motivation of working to change myself for the benefit of another, then it can transform how I am and the quality of my moment-to-moment awareness and presence. This kind of transformation of one's awareness, repeated again and again over the course of a work shift, can be the antidote to feeling burned out at the bedside and can infuse one's work with a vital intent on bringing care and compassion into patients' lives.

In learning to become more mindful, aware, and compassionate, it's vital to use *all of our interactions* with our patients and clients as opportunities to reaffirm our motivation and to practice mindfulness and compassion. We are presented daily with numerous opportunities to see what it is that motivates us in our profession. If we get into the habit of ignoring certain situations that we find particularly challenging, believing that we can't possibly change our perceptions or reactions to them, then it will be impossible for us to change our motivation and to remain mindfully aware and compassionate when difficulties arise. As long as we give a "special exemption" status to particular situa-

tions, for example when a patient is combative or noncompliant, then it will be difficult to fine-tune our mind's way of relating to the world. When we accept any and all situations as invitations to practice being our most mindful and most compassionate self, then no matter the hardship, we can face anything knowing that what we are doing is furthering our progress on the path and we can "participate joyfully in the sorrows of the world."

It's fair to assume that our motivation for being in health care is, for the most part, rooted in the heart of caring for another. Whether our vocational decision has also been informed by consideration of monetary gains, flexibility in the type of work that we do, a sense of duty, or any number of views, when working with those in need or who are suffering, we all have a basic concern for our patients' and clients' well-being. In the course of our career or even within the course of one shift, our motivation will vary; we may be unenthused with a particular rotation, assignment, or patient, or we may be tired or challenged by our own personal circumstances. We may have lost our initial idealism due to years of thankless shift work. Whatever the reasons and motivations, it's vital that we reaffirm an attentive and caring practice on a daily basis.

I remember a peer of mine saying that each time she arrived at work, before she went in the door, she breathed a sigh of resignation at having to go into a thankless job once again. I thought about that statement and shortly thereafter began breathing out a strong breath of determination just before I entered the door that whatever I did, I would do wholeheartedly and with the intention of helping all those who I worked with, patients as well as peers. Not only did this seem to shift my perceptions and my negative attitudes at work, but when I shared this idea with the peer who had verbalized her resignation, she delighted in the idea and soon began to change her attitude in how she showed up at work as well. I also began to use this one-breath-meditation frequently throughout the shift and found that it helped me stay more focused and attentive in the most pressing of situations.

Throughout this book, you'll encounter passages in this font. These passages will either be exercises, reminders, or opportunities to reflect on the current discussion. Treat the exercises as moments to practice the principles and topics of discussion, putting the book down as time allows, trying out the method or methods being discussed. Treat these moments as a time out for your mind.

Before you enter your workplace or when you come home from work, take a deep breath, reaffirm your reason for being where you are, and breath out any

resistance to being there. Reaffirm your commitment to providing the most present, undistracted, attentive, and compassionate self to your patients, your peers, your family, and your friends. And then, just let it all go.

If we reflect on it for even a moment, we can see that our motivation is most altruistic when it emanates from a place of genuine, compassionate, and mindful caring, from a place of unconditional positive regard for another, with a sense that that person matters just as much as we do. When we connect from a place of compassion, *born not out of pity* but out of the realization that the other person—like us—wishes to be happy and free from suffering, the end result will be evident in how our patients experience us, regardless of other pressures or other motivating factors. They'll get the sense that our motivation is to do whatever we can, including remaining undistracted, to make their outcome a more positive one.

The kind of motivation that we're working on here is a deep and abiding respect for another's suffering and a conviction and desire to do whatever it takes to alleviate that person's suffering...even if doing so seems impossible!

In defining *compassion*, which we'll discuss in more depth in Chapter 4 of this book, Sogyal Rinpoche writes,

What is compassion? It is not simply a sense of sympathy or caring for the person suffering, not simply a warmth of heart toward the person before you, or a sharp clarity of recognition of their needs and pain; it is also a sustained and practical determination to do whatever is possible and necessary to help alleviate their suffering.

When our motivation is “a sustained and practical determination to do whatever is possible,” then laxity of purpose and burnout have a more difficult time enticing us with their promise of ease and apathy.

Tempering our motivation comes slowly and is sustained by an ongoing reaffirmation of that motivation. When we get out of bed in the morning, while eating, before entering the door to work, while walking the halls on rounds—in every moment we are offered the opportunity to reestablish our motivation and intention for our presence in the healing environment. By investigating our intentions and motivation at the bedside, catching ourselves in the act of checking out as well as finding ourselves showing up, we gain a deeper glimpse into our truer nature, the union of our heart and mind that finds as its primary motivation the alleviation of suffering.

For a moment, reflect on times in your life when you felt a sense of motivation based on altruism and compassion, when thoughts of duty, pride, and responsibility faded into the generous mind of some greater good. Focus on the moments when you had “a sustained and practical determination to do whatever...[was]...possible.” Focus on those moments that might have moved you, even surprised you; when your concern with yourself lessened and your determination to help another was primary. Think of the times when the outcome of the moment wasn’t linked with how your professional image would or wouldn’t be viewed. How did it feel? What didn’t you feel in terms of anxiety, pressure, and time constraints?

Try taking “motivation breaks” throughout the day. Just stop. Remember why you’re here. Imagine yourself at your very best. What is your motivation for being at the bedside?

We may find that as we begin to reflect on motivation and intention, our mind wants to shift to a motivation based on an altruistic impulse. In this way, we can affirm the inherently compassionate nature that is the basis of our decision to care for others. The more that we can reflect on our motivation and strengthen it through mindfulness, meditative awareness, and compassionate practices, the more we will contradict the less-than-altruistic impulses that arise in our daily encounters. It is through the ongoing and repeated shifting of one’s motivation that one begins to attend mindfully and compassionately toward those one is serving.

One major benefit that may result from our reestablishing our motivation continually throughout the day is that doing so can work as a powerful antidote to the fatigue and burnout that can occur when we’re working in a less-than-idyllic environment or when we’re overly taxed due to work-related stress. By constantly reaffirming our motivation, coming back to a mindful understanding of our intention, we can contradict the transient negative thought patterns and emotions that occur when we’re compassion-fatigued. So, whenever we find ourselves wondering why we went into our profession, establishing a *compassionate motivation* helps remind our mind of its goodness. It may also help us to get out of a routine of less-than-beneficial thinking that we may have become entrenched in.

Throughout the remainder of this book and while doing the exercises that are presented, you may wish to establish your motivations for working with yourself by using some statement of affirmation. There are many ways of do-

ing this. One method is simply to recite a few lines or a verse from something that inspires you, perhaps a phrase or lines of a poem. You can think, or say quietly, “May everyone I work with today be greeted by my best self,” or, “May I remember that my patients are suffering and that they want to be happy just like I do.” It’s not necessary to make an elaborate motivation; anything that can help you to connect with your most positive reasons for helping others will do.

You also may wish to create a more elaborate motivation, where you include different aspects of what it would be like to care completely from an awakened heart. One such verse that I use and that I’ve modified for the context of working with patients goes something like:

By the power and the truth of my fundamental goodness,
 May all those I work with have happiness and its causes,
 May they be free from suffering and its causes,
 May they never be separated from this happiness, devoid of
 suffering
 And may they remain in a state of equanimity, free from all
 attachment and aversion

This is just one verse. There are infinite ways for you to establish your motivation. In this case, the affirmation that it is my fundamental goodness that is at work reminds me to not get caught up with the distractions that can arise in my mind. By wishing that all those I work with will have happiness and its causes, I’m also wishing for them that they too can rely on their fundamental goodness. By wishing that they be free from suffering, I’m essentially wishing for them what I’m wishing for myself—a recognition of a greater self that can deal with life and so lessen the effects of adversity. Wishing that they never be separated from this happiness is also what I wish for myself, that I can remain in this undistracted and compassionate presence. And finally, wishing that they remain in a state of equanimity is wishing that the thoughts and emotions that do arise in their minds will not prevent them from finding their own inner peace and happiness. Whenever I focus on these lines and put their words into practice, I see a difference in how I attend to others, whether the other is my wife, my friend, a homeless person on the street, or a patient at the bedside.

Summary and Reminders:

1. Our patients sense when we're showing up at the bedside and when we're not.
2. By setting our motivation first, to be of service and to create a healing relationship no matter what barriers exist, we instill each encounter with a heartfelt presence that can transcend all manner of difficulties and obstacles.
3. The training in mindfulness, meditative awareness, and compassion has within its heart the greatest grace when its impulse emanates from the true motivation to *change oneself for the benefit of others*.
4. In learning to become more mindfully compassionate, it's vital to use all of our interactions with our patients and clients as clarifiers of our motivation.
5. Tempering our motivation comes slowly and is sustained by an ongoing reaffirmation of that motivation.
6. By investigating our intentions and motivation at the bedside, catching ourselves in the act of checking out as well as finding ourselves showing up, we gain a deeper glimpse into our truer nature.
7. One major benefit that may result from our reestablishing our motivation continually throughout the day is that it can work as a powerful antidote to the fatigue and burnout that can settle in when we're working in a less-than-idyllic environment or when we're taxed due to work-related stress.
8. Throughout the day, whether at work or home, use brief motivational exercises to reaffirm what is inherently compassionate about your choice to help others.

Chapter 2

Riding the Breath to the Meditative Mind

One of the basic tenets of meditation is the notion that passive awareness is a natural, elementary, and direct form of experience that is ordinarily overwhelmed and obscured by the activity of the mind. The purpose of meditation, therefore, is to allow the mind to become quiet and thereby uncover the capacity for this experience.

—Marjorie Schuman, from *The Psychobiology of Consciousness*

Mindfulness and meditative awareness are about learning to know our minds well enough to be able to interrupt our preoccupation with the ongoing stream of thoughts and emotions that normally run our lives, releasing all of our cares into the undistracted and natural simplicity of the true nature of our own minds. In this case, the term *natural simplicity* refers to the ability to release ourselves from the preoccupation of thoughts that the mind normally engages in. We'll discuss this again later in the book.

It is within this natural simplicity—the undistracted mind—that we actually come to find or know parts of ourselves that we'd only had glimpses of in the past. And what we find is a self that is much more spacious, more compassionate, and more insightful than any self we have known. It is this self that, when presented at the bedside, has the greatest potential for healing our patients and clients. It is this genuine self that presents itself when one loses one's preoccupation with oneself in favor of a mindful and compassionate presence with one's patient.

I'm using two terms here—*mindfulness* and *meditative awareness*—which I'll elaborate on here along with *meditation*. For now, think of mindfulness as focus, as an aspect of attending to the present whereby we attend to some "thing"—the breath, the moment, the story of a patient. It is an open and spacious focus, not a focus where we furrow our brow and try to intensely do

“something,” whereby we anchor our attention and know that our focus is on some “thing”—the breath, our patient, etc. It is an aspect of a compassionate presence, one without which we cannot fully engage in a present attentiveness to our patient.

Meditative awareness is attention; it’s the awareness that he have when we know that we are focusing on or remaining mindful of something. It is the “watcher” or overseer that knows we’re being mindful and that brings us back to the present moment when we become distracted. It is being aware that we’re mindful, alert to the moment and to the fact that we’re focused yet relaxed without grasping onto the object of our focus. Also, awareness is *the most important factor* in preventing us from becoming distracted.

Finally, meditation—as we’ll discuss it here and later in the book—relates to a state where we simply *are* in the present, attending to the present, in an undistracted state of mind, of being. It is actually a state of nondoing, where there is not the slightest effort made to “be meditating,” where the present moment isn’t based on the thought that we should be meditating or doing anything. We “simply be.” While this way of being may sound far-fetched or may seem unrealistic for us at the present, varying levels of this way of being—mindful and aware—are accessible to us here, right now.

Again, from the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, Sogyal Rinpoche writes:

To meditate is to make a complete break with how we “normally” operate, for it is a state free of all cares and concerns, in which there is no competition, no desire to possess or grasp at anything, no intense and anxious struggle, and no hunger to achieve: an ambitionless state where there is neither acceptance nor rejection, neither hope nor fear, a state in which we slowly begin to release all those emotions and concepts that have imprisoned us, into the space of natural simplicity.

The state of simply being is a state free of any “thing”; a state free from all “cares and concerns” and from all opposites, or duality, where we don’t get caught up in the normal way of thinking “I don’t like this thought...I do like that thought.” It’s a way of being whereby we allow more spaciousness in who and how we are by allowing our mind to simply “be” without worrying about what thoughts or emotions are arising within it.

When we think of this kind of meditation, especially as it relates to the art of caretaking, the essential quality of this kind of practice is being able to be completely present and undistracted, “meditative,” with our patients and

clients. It is the ability to remain free from the distractions of our own mind to attend instead to the mind of the “other.” It’s almost as if, when we are engaged to this depth with another, we cease to “be,” at least in terms of our distraction by the constant chatter that permeates our ordinary mind. Instead, there is a quality of selflessness that simply “exists,” almost unbidden, that we “drop into,” when we’re genuinely attending to another.

As health-care practitioners, at one time or another we’ve probably found ourselves in the state of “simply being,” perhaps even unintentionally. Maybe we’ve even stumbled into a mental state where we’ve lost the self-referential quality of conversation, not thinking about ourselves, and have become completely immersed, selfless, in the situation and story of our patient. Perhaps we’ve allowed ourselves, for the moment, to take a break from our routine and in the interest of a moment of sanity have fully immersed ourselves in really being present with the person in front of us. And if we’ve not been fortunate enough to have this happen in our professional lives, then perhaps in other parts of our lives—when tending to our children, making love with our partner, when experiencing the artistic arrest that comes with viewing great works of creativity or listening to great pieces of music. At some point we’ve all experienced what some would call the transcendent, the divine, deeper nature of our minds.

What we’ve experienced during these moments are gaps or spaces in the ways that we normally perceive and experience things. Space from our mundane, worried, preoccupied, judging, analyzing, frenzied, and exhausted mind! What meditative awareness and mindfulness are then—in simple terms—are skillful methods of prolonging these gaps or spaces in our normal way of thinking, allowing us to remain undistracted and slowing the return to the discursive or “chatty” mind.

The gaps that we experience during moments of presence are prolonged when we slow our habitual distraction of following the thoughts that arise within our minds, when we bring our minds home instead of allowing them to jump from one distracting thought to another. It’s not so much that we need to control the thoughts, emotions, and sensations that occur, because it isn’t these “mind dynamics” that are the problem any more than the clouds in the sky are problems to the sky. The challenge is our tendency to follow these mental phenomena rather than to rest in the gaps in between them or to enjoy the “space” that can open up when we aren’t preoccupied with thinking. What we’re more used to is the habitual pattern of missing the moment due to getting lost in thoughts about the past or thinking too much about the future instead of

resting in the present.

Imagine that we are sitting with a good friend, a family member, or a loved one outside on a glorious day. The sun is shining and there is not a cloud in sight. The breeze blows around our face, cooling us just enough to get a flavor, a taste, of the air. Completely in the moment, all cares ceased, not a single distraction remains in our minds. We are completely sharing the moment, aware of the other's presence, not sidetracked by thoughts of what has been or what we have to do later. All of a sudden, a cloud blocks the sun, the air darkens and cools, the breeze picks up, and our skin chills ever so slightly. The tranquility of the moment is broken, and we become distracted by the changes. Now, instead of focusing on the moment as it is, we become preoccupied with these changes. We look into the sky to find more clouds following the one that has obscured the sun, and we become totally distracted from the moment. We begin to imagine what will happen when more clouds come and what we've done in the past when clouds or even rain have come. After about 10 minutes of being distracted, we suddenly realize that the other person that we were with has gotten up and left some time ago. Where they were once sitting is a note saying, "Nice spending some time with you; let's do it again when you're not so distracted."

To a great extent, this is how we are with our own minds, getting lost in some momentary "cloudiness of thought" instead of remaining attentive to the present moment. At one moment we're enjoying the presence of the moment, while in the next moment, we're distracted by some cloud arising in our consciousness and have lost the immediacy of the moment. What we need, then, is a method for bringing our minds back, bringing our focus back to the present and, at the bedside, back to our patient.

Right now, without even trying, without even thinking about it, we're breathing. Yet we rarely think about our breath or even take time to notice that we are in fact breathing. It's just one of those natural things that we do that goes by completely unnoticed unless, of course, we're diagnosed with a respiratory illness, have a pulmonary pathology, are dying, or—as in the following example—are subjected to the loss of our breathing for any amount of time.

A meditation instructor and her student were sitting by the banks of a gently flowing river, with the student receiving instructions on how to mindfully watch the breath. After some time of watching her breath, the student interrupted her instructor, saying, "I don't know what you find particularly interesting about the breath," whereupon her instructor grabbed the student by

the scruff of the neck and held her head under the water for a period of 30 seconds. Gasping for breath when she was finally released, the student screamed at her instructor, “Why the hell did you do that?? I could have died!!” The instructor smiled and calmly answered, “And did you find your breath interesting then?”

Just for a moment, become aware of your breath. Simply notice your breathing. There’s no need to change how you’re breathing, just breath. Interesting, isn’t it? You go on breathing without ever having to try to breathe, without needing to be aware of it. The same is true with your mind; without “thinking” about it, your mind goes on thinking about thoughts, getting caught up in what it’s thinking about, and creating stories about the stories that come and go like the clouds in the sky.

We begin to learn mindfulness and meditation by observing our breath because it is always there, because we can do it anywhere—in the car at a red light, on a plane, as we’re going to sleep, when we’re stressed out at work... even when we’re dying. It’s an easily available anchor to which we can repeatedly return when we notice that our mind is distracted, something that we can become familiar with as we start to practice the art of mindfully watching the present. And, as we become more skilled in observing our own breath, we can help our patients with their challenges by helping them to do the same.

Without our necessarily being conscious of it, our breath changes all the time depending upon the state of our mind. On an obvious level, this occurs, for instance, when we’re anxious or excited; our breathing becomes faster. On a more subtle level we notice that when we’re tense, we may hold our breath without even knowing it; or when we’re depressed, our breath may become shallow. In this way, the mind rides on the breath, and it is through learning to observe the breath that we begin to learn to watch the mind.

In beginning to meditate, *all we’re doing is watching the breath, not altering or modifying it*. By learning to simply observe the breath, we can learn to use it as an *anchor for our attention*. By mindfully attending to our breath, we begin to become aware of the present breath, without changing it, without trying to alter it. In the same way, as we progress, we’ll learn to do this with our thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations, simply observing them without getting caught up in a story about them, without trying to change them. Eventually, we can arrive in the present moment with the same attentiveness—

watching, observing, not judging...simply being.

Next we're going to work with an exercise for watching the breath. After reading the following script or, if it applies, listening to the audio track, just put the book down and practice the exercise for a few minutes. Whatever happens, use your breath as the anchor of your attention. When you get distracted, bring it back to the breath. When you become dull, happy, anxious, bored, elated... wherever you find your mind, bring your attention back to the breath.

Set aside all cares about what you're going to do next, where you may need to be, or—if you're doing this at night—whether you're going to fall asleep before you finish this exercise. If you have something that you must get to now, then come back to this section when you have the time to be present with this material.

If you're at work and have the time and ability to set aside 15 minutes, you may find that doing this exercise during your shift can help strengthen your mindfulness at work and throughout the day. Read the following script normally, in an unhurried manner, taking time to read it slowly, pausing between lines, taking care to read each line as an exercise in presence of mind. The difference here is that you're using the words as a cue to watch your breath. Read. Breath. Read. Breath. Yeah, like that. If you'd like, you may download an audio copy of this exercise from my website at www.mindingthebedside.com. Or, if you need a CD of all of the tracks used in this book, please go to my website and request a free copy of the CD, I'd be happy to send one to you. This exercise is listed as "Track #1: Riding the Breath."

Sitting on a straight-backed chair or couch or on a cushion on the floor, allow your body to become still. The back is straight without being stiff; the posture is relaxed, awake, and dignified. The hands can rest gently on the knees or in the lap. The eyes are open, simply resting the gaze on whatever is in front of you, without thinking too much about what you're viewing. Settling into this moment, begin watching the breath.

Become aware of the fact that you're breathing. Become aware of the movement of the breath as it flows into and out of the body. Feel the breath as it comes into the body and as it leaves the body. Simply remain aware of the breath flowing in and flowing out, not manipulating the breathing in any way. Simply being aware of it and noticing how it

feels.

When your mind becomes distracted—and it will become distracted—simply return to the breath. No commentary. No judgment.

Allow yourself to be with this flow of breath, coming in and going out. Notice the feeling of the breath as the lungs fill with air on the in-breath and deflate as you breathe out, the chest expanding and collapsing. Perhaps feeling the breath in the abdomen, rising as you breathe in and flattening and sinking as you breathe out. Allow your attention to gently ride on the sensation of each breath, not thinking about breathing, without the need to comment. Simply watching your breathing.

Allow the breath to naturally breathe itself, not needing to change it in any way, giving full attention to each breath. Observe the full cycle of each breath, locating the very beginning of the breath, as it enters the nose or mouth, and following it as it fills the lungs and expands the chest and the abdomen, then comes to the gap where there is neither in-breath nor out-breath, before it turns around and makes its journey out of the body. Simply remain present for the cycle of each breath, being there, letting your attention gently float on the awareness of your breath.

After a short time, you may notice that the mind wanders off to thoughts of the past, fantasies, memories, or regrets. Or it may move to anticipation of the future, planning, wishing, and judging. You may find yourself thinking about what you'll do after this exercise, what you have to do at work, things that you have to do.

As soon as you become aware that the attention has moved off the breath, guide it back to the next breath with a gentle and firm awareness.

There's no need to give yourself a hard time, saying, "How did I become so distracted?" Simply

come back to this breath. Watching the breath and the arising thoughts without judgment, simply observing. Once again, bringing the attention to this breath, in this moment. Breathing in with the in-breath, breathing out with the out-breath. Feeling the movement in your body. The breath anchoring the attention in this moment.

When the mind wanders, bring your attention back to the breath, knowing that you can always use the awareness of your breath to refocus your attention, to return to the present. Whenever you notice that you have drifted from the present—when you become distracted, preoccupied, or restless—the attention on the breath can be a powerful anchor to this moment and to this state of awake stillness.

And now, for the time remaining, let go of all particular objects of attention, allowing yourself to simply be here, simply present. Breath moving, sensations in the body, sounds, thoughts, all of it coming and going...allowing all of it...and dropping into being, into stillness, present with it all, as it unfolds, complete, as you are, whole.

And...relax.

What you may have noticed was that your attention was everywhere but on the breath; that you were able to keep your attention on the breath for a few breaths, if that, and then you were off again into daydreams, thoughts, and concerns. That's perfectly fine, because that's what is going on all the time in our minds. The purpose of this exercise is to introduce us to our minds, to our everyday minds, to the minds that we will be working with as we learn the practices of a mindful, aware, and compassionate presence, and part of getting to know our mind is getting to know how distracted—or not—it can be.

Remembering that mindfulness is the focus on the breath and that awareness in knowing when we've become distracted from this focus. Simply use this exercise as a method to train in mindfulness and awareness. At this point in time, it's not as important that we are able to watch our breath as it is that we are able to begin to recognize when we've become distracted. Because we tend to become easily distracted without even noticing that we've done so, it's

important for us to take as much time as we need to become acquainted with our minds and to become accustomed to an almost unacknowledged habit of being everywhere at once.

The purpose of mindfulness *is not to learn how to watch our breath*. We simply use watching the breath as a way to anchor our attention. An important note belongs here: What I've found in the mindfulness classes that I've taught is that many people use the breath *as a distraction rather than as an anchor*. Oftentimes, when I ask people how they're doing, they'll say, "Great!" When I begin to inquire more deeply, I find that what these people are doing is using the breath as the source for more inner dialogue. Instead of simply resting with the mind focused on the breath, people begin to make up stories and distractions about the breath. Instead of simply watching the breath, as an observer, people tend to watch the breath as if they were commenting on a tennis match, "Breath in, breath out, breath in, breath out."

Three weeks into a class that I was teaching, after bringing up this point, one perplexed woman said, "You mean that we're not supposed to be saying to ourselves, 'Now I'm breathing in, now I'm breathing out?'" Then what are we supposed to be doing, nothing?" Exactly! Well, kind of. We actively observe the breath, as it is, without commenting on it. We focus on the breath and become aware of the fact that we've become distracted from the breath, bringing our attention repeatedly back to the breath. So we aren't simply zoning out, spacing out, getting lost in space. We're keeping the attention focused on the breathing as an anchor, while the mind remains clear, using awareness to bring the focus back to the moment when we realize that we've become distracted.

Doing *just this and no more*, being this way, takes time. It takes practice. It takes patience. It takes a meditative awareness. And *it takes being very forgiving and compassionate with ourselves*. The lessons in patience with ourselves and the awareness, compassion, and resulting stability of the mind that we gain as we practice will naturally flow out to others as we learn to embody it within ourselves. When we become less distracted, then our attention to the world is more present.

Meditation starts out as the formal practice that we begin with to become more present at the bedside, and it includes not only the components of mindfulness and awareness but spaciousness as well. From our last exercise, we can begin to understand what these components entail: *mindfully* remaining in the present, *aware* when we've been distracted, and *spaciously* returning, again and again, to our moment to moment awareness, not squeezing our attention too much in an attempt to observe the breath. We'll come back to these

three dynamics of attending to the present in Chapter 6; for now, we'll focus on mindfulness.

What we find when we begin to meditate is that it's much more difficult than we might've imagined. Meditation requires practice, patience, and persistence. Sogyal Rinpoche writes:

Just as a writer learns the spontaneous freedom of expression only after years of often grueling study, and just as the simple grace of a dancer is achieved only with enormous, patient effort, so when you begin to understand where meditation will lead you, you will approach it as the greatest endeavor of your life, one that demands of you the deepest perseverance, enthusiasm, intelligence, and discipline.

How do we maintain the “deepest perseverance, enthusiasm, intelligence, and discipline” necessary to develop a deep and abiding mindfulness? First, we check our motivation and realize, over and over again, that our ability to be of the most benefit to everyone we work or deal with demands of us a focused, attentive, and compassionate presence based on the motivation to be present for their benefit. Without really understanding the absolute imperative that demands of us a clear and undistracted mind, we are liable to fall back into a mindless way of doing things. Hence, we strengthen the skills of mindfulness, meditative awareness, and compassion through the practice of consistent meditation—on a day-to-day basis, if possible—to establish an unshakable stability of mind. Additionally, in terms of long-term benefits, by practicing these techniques, we ultimately benefit ourselves in every part of our lives, not just at work. Finally, after consistently attending to our minds and becoming adept at bringing our minds home and bringing our attention to the present, we'll begin to experience a certain dysphoria if we neglect our practice. We'll actually look forward to our “timeouts,” and we'll become hopelessly addicted to becoming more clear—what an addiction!!

So, once again, just...simply...watch your breath. Perhaps put this book down, sit in an alert and relaxed position, and simply train your focus on the breath...allow the attention to ride the breath. And, if you become distracted, come back to the breath. Again. And again.

After a few minutes, just relax. Drop all methods. And just be.

Summary and Reminders:

1. Mindfulness and meditative awareness are about learning to know our minds well enough to be able to interrupt our grasping at the ongoing stream of thoughts and emotions that normally run our lives.

2. It is within this natural simplicity of the mind that we actually come to find or know parts of ourselves that we've only had glimpses of in the past.

3. Think of mindfulness as an aspect of attending to the present whereby we attend to some thing—the breath, the moment, the story of a patient, etc.

4. Meditative awareness is the process whereby we know that we are remaining mindful of something or of some process.

5. Meditative awareness and mindfulness are skillful methods of prolonging the gaps in our normal stream of thoughts, of learning to remain undistracted and slow the return to the discursive mind.

6. We begin to learn mindfulness by observing our breath because it is always there, because we can do it anywhere.

7. The purpose of mindfulness *is not to learn how to watch our breath*. We simply use watching the breath as a way to anchor our attention.

8. Refer to Appendix A, *How to Practice*, for an explanation of the important elements of formal practice.

9. Refer to Appendix B, *Schedule for Practice*, and begin with Week 1 (unless you wish to increase the amount of time that you spend).

10. You may wish to go to my website at www.mindingthebedside.com to download guided meditation tracks, MP3s, and other tools that will help facilitate your practice. Again, if you need to, you may also go to my website to order a free copy of a CD with all of the tracks used in this book.