

## Week 4: Appreciative Awareness

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- Review of the third week
- What progress have you made so far?
- Appreciative Awareness
  - Progress
  - Beauty
  - People
- Practice for the fourth week

## Review of the Third Workshop

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What did we cover last week?



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# What progress have you made so far?

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Ask your partner, “What progress have you made since you started this course?”

- If they seem to run out of things to say, help them to keep thinking. For example, you could just stay silent and wait, or you could ask them a question like , “what else have you made progress with?” etc.
- Progress is progress – don’t worry if it’s come from the mindfulness or not
- Remember – little signs of progress are just as important as big steps).



# Appreciative Awareness

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The theme for this week is taking time to appreciate – to appreciate our environment, other people and ourselves. When we cultivate appreciative awareness, it brings us into more positive relationship. It's another aspect of making the most of what we've already got, instead of rushing around looking for more. After all, if we never get to appreciate what we've got then what was the point of putting so much effort into getting it?

## Appreciating Progress

In the exercises above, we were focusing on the progress we've already made. When seeking to make progress in any discipline, it's easy to get self-critical and feel frustrated because we've fallen short of standards we've set for ourselves. But if we step back and appreciate the effort we've made and the progress we've made, we can feel encouraged and inspired by that, which helps us to take the next step. Mindfulness is rarely glamorous; it's a subtle quality of mind, so we need to cultivate our enthusiasm for it.

## Appreciating Beauty

Beauty has a wonderful effect on the mind, uplifting and purifying. It does take time to engage with, though – in the mad-rush of a busy day it's hard to take it in. So we need to stop:

- Listen to a poem. In the class I'll read one out – at home you could listen to a recording, or read a favourite poem out loud, and listen to the sounds as well as the meaning.
- Look at some flowers for 5 minutes. Treat it as a meditation – your mind will get interested in other things of course, and hopefully you'll notice and have some Magic Moments! 5 minutes seems like an incredibly long time to just sit in silence looking at a bunch of flowers – but once you get into it, there's more and more to see.

## Appreciating People

If flowers are amazing, what about people! Of course nobody's perfect, and when we get close to people or spend time interacting with them their faults can irritate us. But if we can step back from all that and just remember how every single human is the product of millions of years of evolution, we can start to appreciate the remarkable qualities people have. Of course everyone is unique – everyone has their own particular strengths and qualities. (Don't forget yourself in this – you are unique too, you have valuable strengths, qualities and values too!)

## Appreciating What Life Gives You

We benefit from our environment and from other people in so many ways, all the time. There's so much of it that we couldn't possibly keep track of it all – so we go into auto-pilot and take most if not all of it for granted. But there's a great deal to be gained from bringing conscious attention to the ways in which we're benefitting.....



# Appreciating Beauty

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A good way to cultivate appreciative awareness is to take in some beauty. Try starting with a Reconnect or a brief Body Scan, to centre yourself in your body and present moment experience. That will give you more sensitivity to subtleties in your response. Choose some beauty that you find appealing – not too lofty that you won't connect, but something that will lift you into a more refined state. Here are a couple of possibilities for you to try:

## Poetry

Try reading a favourite poem out loud – so you can take in the sounds of the words, and really savour them. What effect does that have on you?

### *Mindful, by Mary Oliver*

Every day  
I see or hear  
something  
that more or less

kills me  
with delight,  
that leaves me  
like a needle

in the haystack  
of light.  
It was what I was born for -  
to look, to listen,

to lose myself  
inside this soft world -  
to instruct myself  
over and over

in joy,  
and acclamation.

Nor am I talking  
about the exceptional,

the fearful, the dreadful,  
the very extravagant -  
but of the ordinary,  
the common, the very drab,

the daily presentations.  
Oh, good scholar,  
I say to myself,  
how can you help

but grow wise  
with such teachings  
as these -  
the untrimmable light

of the world,  
the ocean's shine,  
the prayers that are made  
out of grass?

## Visual Beauty

Find something beautiful – such as a bunch of flowers, a painting or a tree. Spend 5 minutes just looking at it. (Expect to have Magic Moments – and remember that it *is* magic when you remember your purpose and realise your attention has wandered).

How was that? What did you notice? What helped you to stay present with the experience?



# Appreciating People

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Here's an exercise in appreciating people. Pick someone you like and get on well with, such as a good friend. Spend 5 minutes talking (or writing) about their good qualities, their strengths, and what you like about them.

Notice your mood now – what was the effect of 5 minutes writing about someone's good qualities?

If you want to take this further, pick someone you love. Spend 20 minutes writing about why they mean so much to you – and repeat that 3 times over 5 weeks. An experiment at Arizona State University found that (compared to a control group) this resulted in a significant increase in happiness, reduction in stress and even reduction in cholesterol levels.



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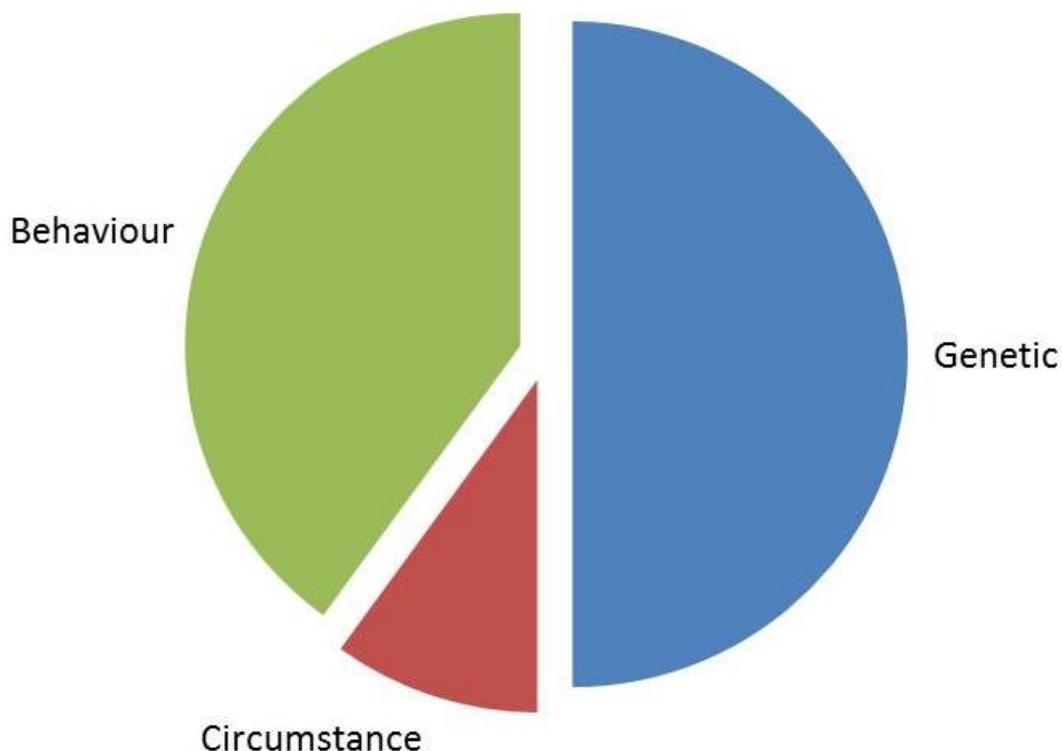
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# Happiness and Gratitude

We all want to be happy, but it's surprisingly elusive: if you try and grasp hold of happiness, it tends to just evaporate. Happiness is a by-product of acting well, rather than something you can aim for directly.

There's some very interesting science around happiness. We each have a "happiness set-point." Like a thermostat controlling your heating and keeping rooms at a pre-determined temperature, there's a mechanism in your brain that takes your happiness back to your particular set-point. Your happiness levels go up or down according to events, but over time will naturally revert to the set-point.

This is dramatically illustrated by surveys amongst two groups: lottery winners and people who'd been paralysed in accidents and become quadriplegic. Of course the lottery winners became happier at first, and the quadriplegic people became less happy. But within a year, there was no difference between the two groups: they were both back to their set-points.



The set-point is determined by 3 factors: 50% of it is genetic and 10% is due to external circumstance (education level, income, marital status etc.). But 40% is derived from your day-to-day behaviour and the way in which you think about yourself and others.

Fortunately, the set-point isn't fixed – with sustained practice you can adjust the dial on the thermostat. Cultivating gratitude is a good way of doing this – see the exercise below.



## Cultivating Gratitude

One of the best-researched and well-proven ways to increase happiness is incredibly simple:

- Write down 3 ways you've benefitted from others

One experiment found that when people did this every day for three weeks, they became happier people – and stayed that way.

A few tips to make the most of this:

1. To help you remember, it works really well to share this exercise with someone else. I know couples who make this part of their ritual in the evening. Other people do it by exchanging daily emails.
2. Don't write the same things day after day – it needs to be 3 new things
3. It's fine to just notice little things – in fact, that's what makes the biggest difference
4. Don't worry if you don't *feel* grateful. If you just keep noticing things you *could* feel grateful for, ways in which you've benefitted, then the emotions will come.
5. You can get extra benefit from this by expressing your appreciation, especially to the people to whom you're grateful. They'll be pleased and it'll improve your relationship with them too.



# This Week's Brief Mindfulness Activities

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## Gratitude: Journal or Email

3 gratitudes every day.

In a journal or sharing by email?

When is the best time? (e.g. after dinner? just before bed?)

## Mindful Activity

What's your mindful activity? Is the reminder working?

## Mindful Walk – focus on beauty

What is your daily mindful walk? What beauty can you look out for?

## Reconnect

When are you Reconnecting? Are you noticing the early signs of stress, or do you need to either choose different signs, or remind yourself to look out for them?

## Body Scan – 20 minutes per day

Have you found a good time for you? (How about weekends as well as weekdays?) Do you need to allow yourself a day off?

**Remember to savour your MAGIC MOMENTS!**



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# Week 4 Diary

How did it go? What did you learn?								
Gratitude Diary								
Early Signs of Stress - Reconnect								
Mindful Walk								
Mindful Activity								
20 minute Body Scan	✓							
	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon

