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Body Scan Practice 7.3: Directing Attention Within the Body

A body scan is a relaxing way to work with directing attention within the body. You can do it sitting or, preferably, lying down on your back on a comfortable surface.

Move your attention out of the observer and into your sensation. Begin with your breath, as in the sitting practice. Observe the various sensations, from the coolness of the air entering your nostrils to the rising and falling of your chest and abdomen as the breath moves in and out. Then allow your attention to slowly and systematically move through your entire body, beginning with your toes. Scan for sensation in your toes. Notice what there is to notice. If your attention wanders, gently bring it back to the sensations in your toes. Simply observe, without judgment, and without seeking to change or alter the experience.

Then slowly move up through your feet, ankles, lower legs, knees, thighs, and pelvic area, looking for sensation in each part of your body and experiencing it fully. Pause at each body part, simply noting any sensation, tension, or feeling of energy. Note which parts you can easily feel and which parts feel numb or unavailable. Then move to your belly, chest, back, shoulders, and arms. Finish with your neck, face, and head.

Notice any emotions or moods that are present. Sometimes these reside in a particular place. Other times they will be pervasive. Notice these elements of your experience.

This practice too is scalable. You can do a quick scan in a few seconds to identify where you are holding tension and bring your attention into your body. Or you can take thirty minutes or more for a detailed body scan—really a somatic meditation—that is deeply relaxing and builds the competency of inner focus and somatic attention.