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‘Williams and Penman nail it when they describe how we can run from life (and ourselves) but we’ll never escape. *Deeper Mindfulness* holds true to its name: the authors expertly point out how to identify those critical driving forces in our lives – feelings, and how feelings feel – but importantly have provided a pragmatic path and clear steps that we can take to leverage our minds to live better lives. Based in deep wisdom and written with compassion’

Judson Brewer MD PhD, *New York Times* bestselling author
of *Unwinding Anxiety* and *The Craving Mind*

‘The science of mindfulness has come of age . . . Mark Williams and Danny Penman write with a voice that is authoritative, imbued with warmth and whispers inspiration. It is accessible and engaging, while drawing extensively on the foundations of Buddhist and contemporary psychology and the very best mindfulness research and practice. It is easy to understand why their first book, *Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World*, is the bestselling book on mindfulness. This is a much-needed extension for all those who wish to go deeper’

Willem Kuyken, Ritblat Professor of Mindfulness and
Psychological Science, University of Oxford

‘This book is a remarkable combination of engaging stories, grounded scholarship and powerful practices that conveys the power of mindfulness. The writing feels fresh and the meditations are spot on. As a clinician who teaches about trauma and meditation, I can also wholeheartedly recommend this work to anyone struggling with stress. It’s a book I’ve been waiting for, could hardly put down, and know will benefit countless people in the years to come’

David Treleaven, PhD, author of *Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing*

Deeper Mindfulness

The new way to
REDISCOVER CALM
IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

MARK WILLIAMS
AND **DANNY PENMAN**



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The personal stories shared in this book are based on the experiences of those who have followed the programme; however, the names of all participants and some details of their stories have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Dedication

DANNY

To Sasha and Luka

MARK

To Elliot and Sebastian

CHAPTER ONE

That Was My Life ... But I Must Have Missed It

Every morning, a man walked his four dogs in the park. Three of them always darted about, barking happily, tails wagging with delight. The fourth seemed happy enough but would only ever run around in tight little circles (albeit covering quite a distance), staying close to the man as he walked. Day after day, the park keeper watched the dog's strange behaviour. After a while, the keeper plucked up the courage to ask the man why his dog was behaving so oddly.¹

'Ah,' the man replied. 'She's a rescue dog. She was locked up for most of her life. That was the size of her cage.'

How often have you behaved like that dog? Free, but constantly running around in little mental circles. Free to be happy, yet caged by the same dark, repetitive thoughts. Free to be at peace with yourself and the world, while remaining

trapped and entangled by anxiety, stress, unhappiness and exhaustion.

Free as a dog in a cage.

So much of life is needlessly marred by little tragedies such as these. Deep down, we all know that we are capable of living happy and fulfilling lives, and yet something always stops us from doing so. Just as life seems to be within our grasp, it slips through our fingers. Although such periods of distress seem to appear from nowhere, they actually arise from deeply buried psychological forces. Neuroscientists have begun to understand how these processes guide our thoughts, feelings and emotions; but more importantly, they have discovered why they occasionally go wrong and leave our lives as shadows of their true potential. These new discoveries also show why mindfulness is so effective at relieving distress, but crucially, they also open the door to subtly different methods that can be even more effective. Mindfulness has not been superseded; rather, it can be expanded to include an extra dimension that transforms it.

This is a book that harnesses these new developments. It will help you to step aside from your worries and give you the tools necessary to deal with anxiety, stress, unhappiness, exhaustion and even depression. And when these unpleasant emotions evaporate, you will rediscover a calm space inside from which you can rebuild your life.

We can help you to do this because we – and our colleagues at Oxford University and other institutions around the world – have spent many years developing treatments for anxiety, stress, depression and exhaustion. We co-developed Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which has been clinically proven to be one of the most effective treatments for depression so far developed.² Out of this work arose our book *Mindfulness:*

Finding Peace in a Frantic World. That book, and the mindfulness programme within it, has been proven in clinical trials at Cambridge University and elsewhere to be a highly effective treatment for anxiety, stress and depression. So much so, that it is prescribed by doctors and psychiatrists around the world to help people cope with a wide range of mental-health conditions, as well as generalised unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life.

But the practices revealed in *Mindfulness*, and similar skills taught on courses such as Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR), are only the first steps on a longer and more fruitful road. Although they form the foundations for a happier and more fulfilling life, and have proven transformative for many, a lot of people have asked us whether there is anything more they could do to enhance their practice and resolve their remaining issues.

The answer is *yes*. There is a way of taking mindfulness to the next level, of going deeper and unleashing more of your potential, by exploring another frontier of mindfulness known as *vedana* or *feeling tone*. And, importantly, you don't need to have extensive meditation experience to benefit from these practices. Research is showing that novice meditators can gain just as much from them as those who have practised for many years.

Although it is an often-overlooked aspect of meditation, feeling tone is, in fact, one of the four original foundations of mindfulness. These are: mindfulness of the body and breath; mindfulness of feelings and sensations (or *vedana*); mindfulness of the mind or consciousness; and mindfulness of the ever-changing nature of the world and what helps and hinders your journey through it. Each aspect is cultivated using a different set of practices that, together, bring about profoundly different effects on mind and body. Mindfulness courses generally focus on the first layer of each of these four foundations. This book

uses new meditations on feeling tone as a gateway into the deeper layers of the same four aspects of mindfulness. These take you closer to the source of your 'spirit'; closer to any difficulties you may be having; nearer still to their resolution.

There is no satisfactory translation of the ancient Sanskrit word *vedana*.³

It is a quality of awareness that can only be experienced, not pinned down with precision. It is the feeling, almost a background 'colour', that tinges our experience of the world – of mindfulness itself. For this reason, *vedana* is often translated as *feeling tone*. Although we will use both terms interchangeably, it will always pay to remember that we are referring to a flavour of awareness, and not a rigid concept that can be hedged in by words and definitions. Feeling tone is something that you feel in mind, body and 'spirit', but its true quality will always remain slightly ineffable. Sometimes annoyingly so.

A typical feeling-tone meditation consists of stilling the mind with a simple breath or body meditation and then paying attention to your experiences in a manner that is subtly different to what other meditations request. It asks you to focus in a very specific way on the feelings and sensations that arise in the moment when the unconscious mind crystallises into the conscious one. Such moments, though fleeting, are often the most important ones in your life. This is because *vedana* is the balance point in your mind that sets the tone for the sequence of thoughts, feelings and emotions that follow. It is often subtle, but if you pay attention to it, you can feel it in your mind, body and spirit – right through to your bones. The feeling tone is of profound importance because it guides the trajectory of your subsequent thoughts, feelings and emotions. If it is 'pleasant', you will tend

to feel positive, dynamic and in control of your life (at least for a while). If it is 'unpleasant', you will likely feel slightly gloomy, deflated and powerless. Feeling-tone meditations teach you to see, or more precisely, to *feel* the way that your life is pushed and pulled around by forces you are barely conscious of. Sometimes these forces act in your best interests, sometimes not – but the important thing is that they are not under your immediate control. Under their influence, your life is not your own.

To help these ideas settle into your mind, you might like to try this little practice to get a sense of your feeling tones: if it is convenient, take a few moments to look around you; the room, the window, the interior of your train or bus, or perhaps the street, field or forest before you. As your eyes alight on different things, or different sounds come to your ears, see if you can register the subtle sense of whether each one feels pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. If you are at home, your eye might alight on a card, gift or memento from a much-loved friend. You might feel the instant warm glow of a pleasant feeling tone in response. Or you might see a dirty dish that you've been meaning to tidy away, or something you've borrowed from someone and had intended to return, and then you might notice an unpleasant feeling tone. If you are outside, you may notice the sun streaming through the leaves of a tree, or a piece of dirty plastic rubbish flapping around. If you can catch the moment, you might sense ripples of pleasant or unpleasant feeling tones. But it is not just the external world that has such an impact. You may also become aware of sensations inside your body, such as aches and pains, or perhaps a sense of relaxed calm. These, too, register on the same dimension of pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. And sooner or later, you may notice thoughts or emotions arising and passing away soon after the feeling tones.

You don't need to know *how* you know these feeling tones – you just know. Somehow there is a 'read-out' in body and mind on the dimension of pleasant to unpleasant. It's like a gut feeling. It's not a matter of thinking hard about it, or hunting for it, it's more like the taste of something; you just know it when you taste it. Like tasting milk that's gone sour, you know it's unpleasant without having to think about it.

Feeling tones can be hugely significant. Cast your mind back to the last time you were sitting in a café and suddenly felt unhappy for no apparent reason. If you could rewind the clock and observe what was happening – frame by frame – as your unhappiness arose, you would have noticed that the emotion was preceded by a momentary pause. It was as if your mind was poised on a knife-edge, a moment when it was sensing whether the evolving situation was *pleasant, unpleasant* or *neutral*. A moment of vedana.

So vedana is often a tipping point in your mind that affects how you experience the world in the moments that follow. Good, bad, indifferent. But it is what happens next that is of paramount importance – we call it 'the reactivity pulse'. It works like this: if a pleasant feeling tone arises in the mind, then it is entirely natural to want to grasp it, keep hold of it and be a little fearful that it will fade away or slip through your fingers. If the tone is unpleasant, then it is natural to want to get rid of it, to push it away, fearing that it will stick around for ever and never leave. Neutral sensations often feel boring, so you feel like tuning out and finding something more interesting to do. These feeling tones are primal and can quickly trigger a cascade of reactions in the mind and body. These are felt as emotions and cravings that compel you to try to keep hold of pleasant feeling tones, push away unpleasant ones and distract yourself from neutral

ones. So, the reactivity pulse is the mind's knee-jerk reaction to feeling tone. If a feeling tone sets the scene, then the reactivity pulse casts the actors, selects the costumes and writes the script for what happens next. And it can write a script and direct a scene that can easily ruin your whole day and sometimes far, far, longer.

Virtually all of the emotional difficulties that many of us experience begin with the mind's reaction to our feeling tones – our reactivity pulse. But it's not even the pulse itself that is the problem, but our ignorance of its existence and underlying nature. We are often not aware that it has occurred, oblivious of the feeling tone that triggered it and unaware of its tendency to fade away, all by itself, if only we would allow it to do so. All we are aware of is the cascade of thoughts, feelings and emotions that follow in its wake.

Learning to sense the feeling tone – bringing it into the light – teaches you to recognise your underlying state of mind and helps you make allowances for your sensitivities and entirely natural biases and reactions. It gives you the space to respond rather than react. It helps you to compassionately accept that although you might be anxious, stressed, angry or depressed in *this* moment, this is not the totality of your life with only one depressing future ahead of you. You can change course. Alternative futures are available to you.

And tapping into an alternative future is as simple as sensing the underlying flow of feeling tones. Noticing the reactivity pulses. Realising that the craving for things to be different *is* the problem. Craving an end to unpleasantness. Craving for pleasantness to remain. Craving an end to boredom. This idea is common to many ancient traditions. And now, neuroscience agrees.

Why cultivate awareness of the feeling tone of your thoughts, memories and emotions?

Your thoughts, feelings, memories and emotions are not the problem, no matter how unpleasantly real and visceral they might feel. As an example, emotions are signals that something important needs our attention:

- We feel sad if we've lost something or someone important.
- We feel fear when a threat appears on the horizon.
- We feel angry when a goal is thwarted.
- We are preoccupied when a long-term project needs our problem-solving skills.

In many ways, the real problem is the reactivity pulse (see page 6), triggered by fluctuations in the underlying feeling tone. This creates a narrative so compelling that we can get stuck inside our thoughts, feelings, emotions and memories and can't escape.

Learning to sense the feeling tone that precedes this reactivity pulse gives you extra information. It signals to you the very moment when your thoughts, feelings, emotions or memories are likely to seize control, become entangled and spiral out of control. This programme teaches you how to recognise these moments so you can step in and dissolve your old, destructive habits. It will help you rediscover the calm, vigour and joy that lie at the core of your being.

HOW CAN THIS BOOK HELP YOU?

Our previous book, *Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World*, became the ‘go-to’ book for so many people because it helped them find freedom from their emotional and physical suffering. Throughout the book, we were honest about the benefits of mindfulness, and also warned readers that their journey would not be quick or particularly easy. We asked them to be certain that they were at the right moment in their life to begin, and highlighted that they would need to set aside the necessary time each day to actually do the practices. Despite these caveats, hundreds of thousands of people – perhaps millions – completed the programme in the book (or mindfulness courses based upon it). Many of these people became so intrigued by the effects of meditation on their lives that they wanted to broaden and deepen their practice. Perhaps you are one of them. If you, like them, would like to go beyond the eight-week programme taught in *Mindfulness*, or on your meditation, MBCT or MBSR course, and extend your practice to embed its benefits, this book is a good place for you to begin.

Alternatively, you may have found *Mindfulness*, or a course, helpful but it did not go far enough to completely dissolve your remaining negative or self-destructive habits. Perhaps you caught a glimpse of freedom but then lost it once again in your rush through life and now want to renew your acquaintance with it. Or, maybe, the mindfulness skills you learned on courses or through books didn’t quite ‘gel’ with you and you now want to try a different approach. If any of these is true for you, then this book will likely help you.

In *Deeper Mindfulness*, and the accompanying meditation

downloads, we reveal the Feeling Tone programme. This is not simply a sequel to our original book, or to other meditation courses and classes; rather, it is one that will take your practice in a new and even more fruitful direction. And if you don't have any meditation experience, there is no reason to be put off. The programme has been found to be equally helpful for both novice and experienced meditators, especially for those seeking a practice that combines scientific rigour with millennia-old wisdom.

If you are keen to start this new meditation programme straight away, we suggest that you turn to Chapter Four after reading this chapter. If you would first like to know more about the ideas underpinning the programme, start with Chapters Two and Three. The practice of becoming aware of feeling tone, like mindfulness in general, is enhanced if you understand how and why the different meditations work. It is also useful (and fascinating) to know at the deepest of levels how the mind works and how, occasionally, we can begin suffering from anxiety, stress, depression, exhaustion and a host of other problems. Whether you read these chapters first or as you work through the programme, you will find that they greatly enhance it. The final eight chapters of the book (five to twelve) contain the week-by-week programme.

We wish you well on your journey.

The links to the accompanying meditations can be found in the 'Practices for the week' boxes in Chapters five to twelve. We suggest that you read through the written meditation instructions as you come to them in the book before listening to the audio versions and following their guidance.