



Close your eyes,
Take a breath,
Inhale calm,
Exhale stress.

*What is capable of seeing,
hearing, moving, acting
has to be your original
mind.*

Mindfulness@porthcawlu3a.org

Jaci & Jeff
YMCA, first and third
Tuesday, 1.30 – 3.30 pm

Discussion paper for October 7th, 2025 – exploring:
The Senses as Gateways to Mindfulness. Seeing and Being Seen.



Carl Jung observed that we should not pretend to understand the world only by the intellect; we apprehend it just as much through feeling”

Marcel Proust put it this way; The true journey of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having fresh eyes.

The Mystery of the Senses and Spell of the Sensuous. Part 1 of his book.

This is how Jon Kabat Zinn begins his book *Falling Awake*. He says that our senses and what they give rise to are, when contemplated, mind-boggling in every respect, he goes on to remind us, the senses are both ordinary and extraordinary. They are the gateways through which we meet life. Too often, we rush past them without noticing. Yet each moment of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, or smelling is a chance to wake up.

Helen Keller, who lived without sight and hearing, teaches us that the absence of senses does not mean the absence of perception. She discovered a vast, rich world through touch, through vibration, and through imagination. Her life reminds us how much depth is hidden in every sense we often take for granted.

David Wright, the blind poet, also spoke of vision beyond eyesight. He described “seeing” as an act of attention and imagination, reminding us that perception is not limited to the eyes. His work shows that all senses are ways of knowing and connecting.

Together, these voices encourage us to treat our own senses as precious. They invite us to lean in with curiosity and gratitude. When we notice, we step into what Kabat-Zinn calls the spell of the senses—the power of ordinary experience to bring us fully alive, and to prepare us for the deeper practice of seeing and being seen.

Seeing and being

In the opening chapters of *Falling Awake*, Jon Kabat-Zinn invites readers to reflect on what it means to truly see and to be seen. He suggests that although we spend our lives surrounded by sensory experience, much of the time we are not really present for it. We look but do not perceive. We encounter others but remain hidden behind our thoughts, agendas, and distractions. Mindfulness, he argues, begins with the radical simplicity of paying attention—of seeing clearly what is here before interpretation or judgment clouds it.

JKZ explains that seeing is not limited to the eyes. It is the capacity of awareness itself to take in experience—sounds, sensations, emotions, thoughts, and the world around us. To see fully means allowing reality to reveal itself as it is, without rushing to categorise or evaluate it. He stresses that the ordinary—light on a wall, the rhythm of breath, the presence of another human being—can appear extraordinary when we give it our full attention. In this

sense, mindfulness is not about adding something special to life but about recovering the immediacy that is already present.

Equally important is the notion of being seen. JKZ points out that to live mindfully is to show up authentically in the present moment, without hiding behind busyness, self-image, or constant mental chatter. To “be seen” is to allow ourselves to be fully available to life, to let the world and others encounter us without pretence. This requires a kind of vulnerability, since it asks us to step out of automatic pilot and meet experience directly. But it also brings freedom, because in being seen we begin to connect more deeply—with ourselves, with others, and with the unfolding of life itself.

Together, seeing and being seen illustrate mindfulness as a reciprocal process. The more clearly we attend to the world, the more the world meets us in return. Awareness is not passive; it is a dynamic presence in which perception and participation are inseparable. Kabat-Zinn emphasises that this is available in every moment, whether we are alone, with loved ones, or engaged in the flow of daily life. By cultivating this practice of seeing and being seen, we awaken to the richness, depth, and vitality of existence. *Discovering that life itself has been waiting for us to notice all along.*

To explain this better he begins the chapter by telling a story about the field by his house, here’s my abbreviated version of it.

Near my home there is a simple field. At first, it looks ordinary—just grass, sky, and space. Most days I could walk past without a second thought. But when I pause and really look, the field reveals itself. The grass shifts with the wind, shadows move across the ground, birds fly in and out, colours change with the light and the season. What seemed empty is actually alive, dynamic, and never the same twice.

This field reminds me that the world is always offering us richness, but we rarely notice because we are too busy, too distracted, or too lost in thought. With awareness, even the most ordinary scene can become extraordinary.

Everywhere we go, there are “fields” like this—waiting for us to stop, look, and truly see.

1 Seeing... this is how he opens the chapter - Page 10.

“Of all the senses, it is vision, the domain of the eyes, that dominates in language and metaphor. We speak of our “view” of the world, and of ourselves; of gaining “insight” and “perspective”. We exhort each other to “look” and then to “see”, which is as different from looking as hearing is from listening, or smelling is from sniffing.

We see what we want to see, not what is actually before our eyes. We look but we may not apprehend or comprehend. We all have our blind spots and our blindnesses. Yet we can, if motivated, tune our seeing just as we can tune an instrument, thereby increasing its sensitivity, its range, its clarity, its empathy. The goal would be to see things more as they actually are rather than how we would like them to be or registering what we are socially conditioned to see or feel. He tells us that if Jung was correct, we apprehend our feelings, yes, but then we had best be intimate with them and know them for what they are or they will provide only distorted lenses for any real seeing or real knowing”.

One way or the another, as it does with the other senses, our own mind often obscures our capacity to see clearly. For this reason, **if we wish to experience life, and take hold of it fully,** we will need to train ourselves to see through or behind the appearances of things. We will need to become more intimate with the stream of our own thinking, which colours everything in the sensory domain.

2. Being Seen... he opens this chapter with a story from one of his mindfulness parenting groups. Abbreviated from Page 17

In *Falling Awake*, when Jon Kabat-Zinn speaks about **being seen** in his parenting workshops, he explains that one of the greatest gifts we can give our children is to *truly see them*.

Often, parents look at their children through the lens of expectations, worries, or judgments. But JKZ encourages parents to pause and simply be present—to let their children feel recognised for who they already are, not who we want them to be.

In his workshops, he guides parents in exercises where they practice just *looking at their child with awareness and openness*, allowing the child to feel “seen.” He notes how powerful and moving this can be—sometimes even life-changing—because every person longs to be acknowledged in this way.

✨ **In short:** Being seen, in parenting, means giving a child the gift of full attention and unconditional presence—letting them know they are valued just as they are.

Being seen is about allowing others, and life itself, to meet us as we are. JKZ often said in his parenting workshops that one of the greatest gifts we can give is to truly see our children – not through expectations or worries, but as they are in the moment. The same is true in all relationships: to feel seen is to feel recognised and valued.

This practice also reaches beyond people. Many ancient traditions, and modern thinkers like David Abram, remind us that the wider world – animals, rivers, sky, trees – also “sees” us. When we bring awareness, we enter into a mutual exchange: we see, and we are seen.

What might this actually mean to us in our everyday lives?

Seeing

- Not just visual perception—represents awareness itself.
- Involves noticing reality as it is, before judgment, labelling, or interpretation.
- Ordinary things (breath, light, sound, sensations) become extraordinary when seen with full attention.
- Seeing is an act of waking up from autopilot, reconnecting with direct experience.

Being Seen

- Means showing up authentically in the present moment.
- Requires letting go of masks, self-image, and mental busyness.
- Involves allowing life and others to encounter us as we are.
- Brings both vulnerability and freedom—since we are no longer hiding.

The Relationship Between the Two

- Seeing and being seen are reciprocal processes: the more clearly, we attend to life, the more life “meets” us in return.
- Awareness is not passive but dynamic, involving both perceiving and participating.
- Mindfulness is not about achieving a special state—it’s about being fully present with what is already here.

Overall Message – or to be modern, my ‘take home’ message – do you agree?

Mindfulness reconnects us with the immediacy and richness of existence.

Every moment offers an opportunity to awaken by practicing seeing and being seen.

Jon Kabat-Zinn explains more fully in his book *Coming to Our Senses* that the **human senses** as the most immediate doorway into mindfulness and presence. He emphasises that our sensory experience—what we see, hear, smell, taste, and feel—is constantly available, yet most of the time we overlook it because we are lost in thought, planning, or reactivity.

In his approach, the senses are not just biological tools for survival—they are openings into being fully alive. By returning to them with attention and curiosity, we can step out of autopilot and experience the fullness of each moment, we'll cover the other over the next few meetings. Next time we'll be covering Hearing and Soundscape.

Mary Oliver's poem ends the first part of unravelling the sensory mysteries. Read it with your heart ❤️

Once you've read this paper, I like you consider how this fits in with your own life experiences.

- Do you empathise with it?
- Do you have personal awareness of these concepts?
- What do you agree or disagree with?
- What can you add or subtract from this paper?
- What criticisms can you bring with you?
- Anything else you can think of to add!

I won't ask you to voice your opinions if you really don't want to, but I'd remind you that I'm totally out of my comfort zone every time I speak, so you could come and join me, you know what 'they' say, "Feel the fear and face you it anyway" 😊

Next, we'll be moving onto Hearing and Soundscape. Thank you for attending 🙏

The Sensory World - a poem by Mary Oliver, "The Summer Day" from *Your Wild and Precious Life*. Shared from Best Poems Encyclopaedia.

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean--
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down--
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?