



This document is an extract from the full chapter, which is available for download in the table via this link: <https://raft2freedom.org/raft-to-freedom-downloads/>

Recognise - Mindfulness of body

14 - Mindfulness of the Body's Impermanence

"All conditioned things are impermanent" - when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification.

- Gotama, Dhammapada (verse 277), translated by Acharya Buddharakkhita

We now arrive at the sixth and final lens of our first Anchor of Mindfulness - the body's ultimate impermanence, seen through ageing, illness, death and decay. This isn't about cultivating morbidity or dread. Approached skilfully, it is deeply liberating: it helps us meet our attachment to the body and to life itself, cultivates equanimity in the face of change and loss, and can awaken a healthy sense of urgency - the plain recognition that death is certain, its timing is not, and that the time to lessen suffering is now.

The tradition offers the charnel-ground contemplations: observing a body, after death, gradually returning to its elements, and reflecting that this body, too, is of the same nature. Gentler versions carry the same insight for those who need them - noticing ageing without aversion, reflecting on nature's cycles, or simply sitting with the two certainties themselves: that death will come, and that we cannot know when. Recognising the body's impermanence sits in stark contrast with the pull of fleeting, body-based pleasure, and can loosen our grip on whichever fixed story of ourselves we have been carrying, including any identity built entirely around our past struggles.

Placing our own difficulties within this universal context - shared by everyone who has ever lived - can ease their isolating sting. The self-reflections that follow invite us to sit honestly with our own ageing, our fears, and the story of self we carry, and to consider how this understanding might change the way we spend the time we have.

Self-reflections

Approach these gently, with self-compassion:

1. What feelings or thoughts arise when I honestly consider my own ageing? [\(view card\)](#)
2. What are my fears around illness and death, and how much of my attention do they quietly occupy? [\(view card\)](#)
3. How strongly do I identify with my physical body as 'me'? How does the thought of its eventual decay affect that sense of identity? [\(view card\)](#)
4. Can I recall a moment when reflecting on life's brevity motivated me to act more wisely or more kindly? [\(view card\)](#)
5. How does the reflection "this body, too, is of the same nature" feel when I apply it directly to myself? [\(view card\)](#)
6. Is there a story I carry about who I am that feels fixed or permanent? What happens when I remember that it, too, is conditioned and changing? [\(view card\)](#)
7. How does understanding the impermanence of this body change how I see the rest of my journey towards the safe shore? [\(view card\)](#)

Journaling prompts

Explore these gently in writing, remembering to be kind to yourself:

1. **Signs of impermanence:** spend some time noticing signs of change in your body - your energy, your skin, your hair - or in the world around you, such as the weather or a plant's seasons. Write about what it feels like to watch constant change directly.
2. **Living your values:** given that life is finite and the body impermanent, what actually matters most to you? What values do you want to live by with the time you have?
3. **A gentle recollection:** sit quietly for a few minutes with the simple fact that death is certain, though its timing is not. Notice whatever thoughts, feelings or sensations arise, and hold them with gentle awareness. Write about the experience.
4. **Choosing your own approach:** if direct contemplation of decay doesn't feel right for you, which of the gentler alternatives - ageing, certainty, nature's cycles, gratitude for the present - feels more supportive right now? Write about why.
5. **A story you carry:** is there an old identity or label you've carried about yourself that this chapter has loosened, even slightly? What would it be like to hold it more lightly?
6. **Someone you have loved:** if it feels right, reflect gently on someone you have loved and lost. What has their life, and its ending, taught you about how you want to live yours?

7. One thing that matters: given everything in this chapter, write about one thing you want to give more of your limited time and attention to, starting this week.

For a printable reminder to carry this stage's practice into daily life, see the Self-Compassion card: <https://raft2freedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/appropriate-response-self-compassion.png>

Remember to remember

From the breath of life to the dust of death, Mindfulness of the Body's Impermanence completes our exploration of the first Anchor of Mindfulness. It is a demanding practice, aimed squarely at loosening our deepest attachments and fears by facing, directly, the truth that everything conditioned - including this body - arises and passes away. Approached with wisdom, balance and self-compassion, this is not a practice about forcing ourselves into difficult states, but about gently and persistently cultivating a clearer, more grounded understanding of where we actually stand - one that can, paradoxically, bring real peace.

Across these six lenses, Mindfulness of the Body has invited us to know the body through breathing, posture and everyday activity; to see clearly its physical composition and elemental qualities; and finally to recognise its continual change, ageing and impermanence. Together, they help us experience the body more directly and realistically - with less grasping and resistance, and with greater awareness, care and perspective.

We are part of, not apart from, the rest of nature. And when the end of consciousness comes, there's nothing to be afraid of. Nothing at all.

- Anil Seth, TED talk, "How does your brain construct your conscious reality?" (2017)

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