

A QUICK TUTORIAL ON MINDFULNESS

Historically, mindfulness has been taught and practiced for thousands of years in Eastern meditative disciplines. Similar techniques are present in some Western meditative disciplines, such as contemplative prayer practiced in monasteries. In both approaches, meditative techniques were taught in the spiritual context of a particular religion.

If you strip mindfulness to its essentials, our minds are always paying attention to something, so your mind is always “full” of the awareness of that “something.” However, being “mind-full” of panic and a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness is not useful. Mindfulness techniques, therefore, teach you to fill your mind full of something that is useful, that is, life and health promoting.

Traditional mindfulness techniques teach you to make your mind full of things that are peaceful and calming. Most common is to make your mind full of an awareness of the breath. Practicing this technique of being aware of your breathing is very calming, slowing your body down physiologically and calming your mind psychologically.

A SIMPLE MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

Most of us spend all of our time doing. Mindfulness is about being, not doing. To experience the simplest form of this, stop for a minute and let yourself do nothing. While you are doing nothing, focus on what is happening while you are spending time being instead of doing.

(60 second or longer pause to do nothing)

Notice everything that goes on, both good and bad, while you are doing nothing. This is the foundation of mindfulness, and while it may not be obvious now, especially if there is something on your mind, spending more time doing something like this will teach you the art of being in life in a more peaceful, happy, and healthy way.

FOCUSES FOR MINDFULNESS

There are many other ways of practicing mindfulness. Anything that you pay attention to that calms and quiets your mind and improves your experience of life is a candidate for mindfulness.

Mindfulness techniques can focus on external activities such as watching a candle flame or listening to the sound of the air conditioning, or internal activities such as noticing how your body feels. If you combine mindfulness of both inner and outer activities at the same time, your experience of mindfulness can become quite rich and satisfying.

Examples of this combined focus would be spending time being more mindful of any and all life activities that are nurturing, such as a preparing and enjoying a delicious meal, a unifying family experience, a tender moment with your partner, a moment of peaceful solitude, or being in nature.

WHAT IF YOU'RE MINDFUL OF FEELING NEGATIVE

Many life experiences are not peaceful, so meditating on them does not bring peace. Recently, the news has been full of scary information, and after listening to a news broadcast, you could wonder how being mindful under the circumstances could possibly become nurturing and enjoyable.

That's because at the moment of feeling concern, you're still in fight-or-flight. What mindfulness does is draw you down out of that state into the relaxation response, and when that happens both your physiology and your mental state shift in profound ways. The technique in this package will help you do that.

LATELY THE NEWS HAS BEEN FEAR-INDUCING

Mindfulness starts right where you are. If you are feeling strongly negative, at first you will find your mind full of whatever negative experience is going on. For example, after watching the news, many people have found their minds full of fear and overwhelm. Mindfulness practice starts with being aware of where you are and what is going on, so it starts with noticing that you're feeling upset.

If you just stayed there, being mindful of feeling negative, that's not very useful. However, if you start where you are AND shift into a more positive, useful space within a short period of time, THAT becomes useful. When that happens, you once again feel resourceful and in touch with your wisest self, being prudent, cautious, and preventative of harm, while feeling in touch once again with the essential goodness of life.

CALMING THROUGH INCREMENTAL SHIFTS IN AWARENESS

The mindfulness technique described in this document gently guides you into such a resourceful state by shifting you out of the fight or flight state of fear using physiological/psychological means.

It accomplishes this by shifting your focus in small increments over a period of several minutes.

While you could just pick one thing like the breath and focus on it until you relax, when you use incremental shifts to focus your mind on several physiological/psychological perceptions in succession, the mind will often shift into peace more deeply and quickly. This is the technique that is used here.

YOU ARE THE OBSERVER

During these incremental shifts, the recording will ask you to notice that you are the observer. Shifting into the observer point of view is a traditional mindfulness technique which helps you “stand behind the waterfall” of life. Life is still happening, but you don’t feel overwhelmed.

In this case, by moving your focus in succession through the location where you are, the feeling of being in your physical body, noticing where you are in time, paying attention to where you are in space, then focusing on the breath, then opening your awareness up to the perception of all of life, then to the perception of Essential Life, then the goodness of Essential Life, and then the knowledge that you are part of Essential Life, you relax without even noticing it. It seems at the beginning like nothing is happening, but by the end of that time, you feel much more peaceful and calm. If you then focus your attention on your intention for the next period of time, and then become aware of your intuition as to the outcome if this intention is carried out, you are enabled to move into peaceful inspired action.

This will leave you in a far more resourceful place than the feeling of concern you felt when you first started out.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO DO THE TECHNIQUE MANUALLY?

While many meditators like to meditate by listening to a recording, once your mind has figured out what mindfulness feels like, you are going to want to be able

to access this feeling at times and places where it is not convenient to listen to a recording that is several minutes long.

In such cases, where you're out and about and want to increase your state of mindfulness, such as before you start your car to go somewhere, or when you are standing in line at the supermarket, you can keep the list of shifts with you and go through the list of shifts manually wherever you are, and as you do this it will calm and quiet your mind.

DOING THE TECHNIQUE MANUALLY

Once you've listened to the recording of the technique itself several times over several days, so that your mind knows what to do and what it feels like when you do it, you can then do the technique wherever you are, just by making your way through the list of shifts in consecutive order.

When you do this, don't rush, as if you go too fast, the shift towards relaxation won't happen. If you take your time, you may be amazed at how relaxed you can get yourself in just a few minutes of time.

IF YOU GET DISTRACTED WHILE DOING THE TECHNIQUE MANUALLY

In mindfulness trainings, we are taught that when we get distracted, we should just start over, that is, without judging ourselves for having failed, just bring our attention back to whatever we were just focusing on, and continuing.

If your mind forgets that you're supposed to be, for example, meditating on where you are in time, just bring it back to that focus again. Or if you're focusing on your breathing, just bring it back to your breath again.

And don't think of it as failure, of having forgotten what you were supposed to be doing, instead, think of it as success, as having remembered what you were supposed to be doing.

If you get totally distracted so that you feel like you've lost your focus entirely, just go back to step 1, the location where you are, and begin your way through the entire sequence again.

Continue to do this until you feel calmer.

WE ALL HAVE MONKEY MIND

Our “monkey minds” jump around like monkeys when we’re upset and stirred up about something, so the process of meditating is a process of learning how to “set the monkey down” by bringing your focus back to the object of meditation.

THE EASIEST WAY TO LEARN THE TECHNIQUE IS TO LISTEN TO THE MP3

The mp3 in this program, “GROUNDING IN ESSENTIAL LIFE,” will guide you through this technique. Listen to the mp3 on a daily basis until your mind has figured out how to do it, and then you can add to your experience by experimenting with doing the technique manually, as an adjunct to listening to the recorded experience.

BEGINNER’S MIND

“Beginner’s Mind” is a state of mind which experienced mindfulness practitioners find themselves shifting into during deep meditation. It feels wonderful, and in this state of mind, life feels beautiful just the way that it is. It is very different than the fear state in which many people have found themselves trapped in recent weeks.

GROUNDING IN ESSENTIAL LIFE – A MINDFULNESS EXPERIENCE

1 BECOMING PRESENT IN THE LOCATION WHERE YOU ARE – Just pay attention to where you are without effort, just noticing where you are, for a period of time.

2 BECOMING PRESENT IN YOUR PHYSICAL BODY – Just pay attention to what it feels like to be in your body, without effort, just noticing the various sensations and experience of being alive in your body, for a period of time. Then notice that you are not your body, you are the observer.

3 BECOMING PRESENT WHERE YOU ARE IN TIME – Now notice where you are in time, which is right now, not the future, or the past, where your monkey mind might be scampering around, but right now. Then notice that you are not time, you are the observer of time.

4 BECOMING PRESENT WHERE YOU ARE IN SPACE – Now notice where you are in space, that is, notice the space around you, and that it is peaceful to do so. Then notice that you are not the space around you, you are the observer.

5 BECOMING PRESENT WITH YOUR BREATH – As generations of meditators have done before you, spend some time just noticing your breath, as you breath in and you breath out. After synchronizing with the peacefulness of doing this, notice that you are not your breath, you are the observer.

6 BECOMING PRESENT IN THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE ITSELF – Now focus in on life itself, which is the entire experience of being in this world. If life is a movie, you're in the movie. Notice that it is pleasant to rest in the experience of life. Now notice that you are not life, you are the observer of life.

7 BECOMING PRESENT IN THE GOODNESS OF ESSENTIAL LIFE – When you meditate deep enough and long enough, you start to relax so much that you become conscious of the essence of life. When this happens, you undergo a change in perception, and somehow from this new point of view, life seems simpler, less complex. This is the beginning of beginner's mind.

8 BECOMING PRESENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE YOU ARE PART OF ESSENTIAL LIFE – As you go deeper into beginner's mind, concerns fade and now you just feel like resting in this deeper perception of life. Go deep enough into this state of mind, and phrases from scripture like “the peace that passeth understanding” begin to make sense.

9 BECOMING PRESENT WITH YOUR INTENTION FOR THE NEXT PERIOD OF TIME – When you are feeling peaceful and have started to shift into beginner's mind, what to do next somehow seems obvious, as a peaceful course of action comes effortlessly into mind.

10 BECOMING PRESENT WITH YOUR INTUITION AS TO THE OUTCOME – You not only know what to do, but when you access your intuition, you feel confidence that this action is going to work out ok, for the highest good of all concerned.

11 BECOMING PRESENT WHILE MOVING INTO PEACEFUL INSPIRED ACTION – From this peaceful place, it is natural to move into peaceful inspired action, during which you feel in touch with life itself in a natural way.

ADDITIONAL MINDFULNESS RESOURCES

- 1) Traditional Yoga training includes training in mindfulness meditation. Any good Yoga instructor can help you get better at meditation, and many Yoga instructors are offering online training at this time.
- 2) There are many phone apps that are focused on mindfulness and which can be a resource for you. Popular apps CALM and HEADSPACE are a good place to start, and there are many others. If you are interested in mindfulness for exercise, diet, and reduced stress, the author is a consultant for mindfulness content for the www.micoachee.com website and phone app.
- 3) If you have a medical problem, medical facilities and practitioners offer MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction), which is an 8-week program to train you to use mindfulness to increase your physical health. Many MBSR practitioners offer online resources. An inspiring book describing the original MBSR program is “Full Catastrophe Living” by Jon Kabat-Zinn.
- 4) If you have been feeling stressed psychologically, mental health practitioners offer MBCT (“Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy”) which combines the proven effects of cognitive therapy with the proven context of mindfulness. Many MBCT practitioners offer online sessions, including the author of this article. A down-to-earth workbook for home study of MBCT is “The Mindful Way Workbook: An 8-week program To Free Yourself From Depression and Emotional Stress.”
- 5) Videos – Youtube has many mindfulness videos. As always on YouTube, the quality varies, so pick videos and teachers you enjoy and feel comfortable with. You can’t go wrong with Jon Kabat-Zinn, and there are many others
- 6) Audios – Again, many to choose from. We recommend Sounds True, which has a large list of mindfulness audios to choose from. Jon Kabat-Zinn offers a number of mindfulness audios, including a multi-week training on Sounds True.
- 7) Books – There are thousands to choose from. For starters, we recommend anything by Jon Kabat-Zinn, especially “Full Catastrophe Living,” a description of the original MBSR program, “Wherever You Go There You Are,” a book on living in the present moment, and “Coming To Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness,” a book on how the

world view of mindfulness teaches us to live as good stewards and citizens of our planet. Thich Nhat Hanh is a beloved Buddhist monk who learned how to make peace with a war-torn world and has been teaching the rest of us ever since how to do that. He has authored many books, and they're all good. Time Magazine has published several special editions over the last few years that are excellent sources of information on the power and scope of mindfulness. We really like Mindful Magazine and its daily newsletter and website mindful.org. In fact, there is so much good information out there, that if you haven't been meditating, when you start exploring the literature, you may find yourself wondering what took you so long to get involved, as you've been missing out on this wonderful experience.

- 8) Scientific Research – There have literally been thousands of studies done on the beneficial effects of mindfulness. An internet search will reveal much interesting information. “Handbook of Mindfulness: Theory, Research, and Practice” edited by Brown, Cresswell, and Ryan, is an in-depth scholarly review of recent research.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES BESIDES MINDFULNESS

- 1) Journaling (expressive writing) has been shown scientifically to reduce anxiousness and, in the process, increase health. Enter “Charlie Curtis Mindful Journaling” into the YouTube search box to access a 4-track CD on this process. Track 1 is theory, Track 2 is preparation, Track 3 is the journaling itself, and Track 4 helps you feel better about life.
- 2) If you're experiencing strong anxiety, we highly recommend EFT (meridian tapping) which has been shown scientifically to reduce anxiousness and, in the process, increase health. It is so powerful I do it with every client in every session. I recommend the www.eftuniverse.com web site by Dawson Church, which will show you the research and teach you what you need to know. It also increases immunoglobulin, which is our body's natural virus-fighting agent. Another resource is www.thetappingsolution.com, which will connect you to Nick, Alex, and Jessica Ortner, who are doing a fabulous job with their TheTappingSolution website and phone app. If you like EFT, there are hundreds of clips of people doing EFT on YouTube.

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