Palouse Mindfulness MBSR course

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Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Palouse Mindfulness MBSR Course

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These materials and more can be found at
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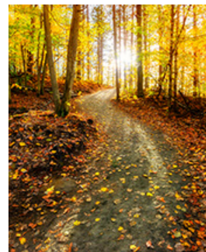


Mindfulness is about being fully awake in our lives. It is about perceiving the exquisite vividness of each moment. We also gain immediate access to our own powerful inner resources for insight, transformation, and healing.

- Jon Kabat-Zinn

Introduction
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

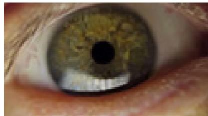
"Mindfulness is about being fully awake in our lives. It is about perceiving the exquisite vividness of each moment." - Jon Kabat-Zinn

For most of us, when this happens, it's unexpected, maybe while walking on a mountain trail on a crisp autumn day, or being so focused in work or play that you are not thinking about past or future, or connecting with someone in a way that makes it seem like time is standing still. This state of being alive and whole in the present moment is always available, but it typically eludes us, especially in times of difficulty and external pressures.

"Mindfulness" is used in many contexts nowadays and there are many different understandings of the term. Diana Winston of UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center gives my favorite definition: ***Paying attention to present moment experience with open curiosity and a willingness to be with what is****.*

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) *is a blend of meditation, body awareness, and yoga: learning through practice and study how your body handles (and can resolve) stress neurologically.*

Mindfulness: Being Fully Awake in Our Own Lives

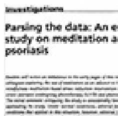


This **9-minute video** from the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School is a good introduction to what we mean by mindfulness in the context of this course. It is narrated by Saki Santorelli, the current director at UMass.

Introduction to the MBSR Course

This **7-minute video**, narrated by Jon Kabat-Zinn and others involved in the founding of MBSR, provides some interesting background about the MBSR course. Also see the two-page article, **MBSR: An Introduction**, a short but engaging piece about MBSR.

MBSR Research



This **3-min video** from the **UMass Medical School**, gives a very brief overview of ***30 years of research*** about the effects of MBSR. The 2-page document, **MBSR Research Summary**, is a concise, if dated, compilation of MBSR research. See the **Scientific Research page** for more recent research.

What will taking an MBSR course do for me?

Through this MBSR course, you will learn skills that can increase your ability to:

- Cope with stress, pain, and the challenges of everyday life
- Deal with disturbing events with grace and composure
- Be fully present and alive in this moment

While MBSR is not a "cure" for serious medical conditions and should not be used as a substitute for medical treatment, research indicates that mindfulness training can have a significant therapeutic effect for those experiencing stress, anxiety, high blood pressure, depression, chronic pain, migraines, heart conditions, diabetes and other ailments. In addition, participants typically report feeling more alive, more "in-tune" with themselves and others.

If you want to know even more...

You don't really need to know more about mindfulness to get started with the MBSR course, but if you are interested, there is an information-packed video of **Jon Kabat-Zinn speaking at Google** that goes into much more detail than the short videos above, including more about the research that validates the practice of mindfulness in terms of physical health and psychological well-being.

The importance of practice

This course is highly experiential and the daily practice is perhaps the most important component. You wouldn't expect to learn to surf by reading a book about surfboards and waves, and learning a mindfulness practice is no different than any other skill that involves both mind and body. You know from your own experience in learning to play an instrument, or a sport, or any complex skill whatsoever, that practice is important. ***Your body/mind is the most complex instrument in the universe. It takes time and practice to use it effectively and harmoniously.***

For this reason, we recommend that you set aside about **30 minutes a day** for practice. ***This may be the most difficult hurdle you face in getting started because one of the very issues you are facing may be not having enough time for all that needs to get done in a day - how are you going to find an extra 30 minutes?*** Previous participants have said that after a few weeks of practice, although their time to "do things" is technically 30 minutes less, there can be a feeling of having more space and time, even in the middle of a very busy day.

If you are ready to continue now, please go to Getting Started before going on to Week 1.

Getting Started

Before You Begin...

It's important to consider what it is that you hope will happen as a result of doing this program. For example, you may hope for some effective ways of dealing with stress or worry, ways to cope with illness or difficult life situations, better concentration, an increase in the ability to be present and fully engaged in life, or to accept yourself more fully and others just as they are. ***What is it that you hope will happen as a result of following this program?***

The ***Getting Started Worksheet*** will help you answer this question and will create the foundation for your practice over the next eight weeks. ***Please complete the worksheet now*** *(if you will be completing this by hand, print the* ***PDF version of the Worksheet****, but if you'd like to complete it on your computer, download the* ***WORD version****).*

Take your time in doing this. This is especially important because it is difficult to begin a meditation practice on your own and you will *greatly increase your odds of staying with this if you are clear about your goals and when and where you will do the practices.*

If you'd like some company on this journey - Online Student Community

You are invited to join an online group which will provide you with the opportunity to share with others and to get questions answered by previous graduates of the course (and occasionally, me, Dave Potter). ***Joining is optional****, and even if you do join, there's no requirement that you even make a single post to the group. If you like, you can just stay on the sidelines and see what others are saying about their experience with the course.* ***If you would like to join the group, go to Palouse Mindfulness Online Student Community for more information.***

Whether or not you choose to join the Online Student Community, be sure to look at the ***Frequently Asked Questions*** page, where the most common questions and concerns about the course and the practices are addressed.

Creating a Manual

We suggest that you keep a 3-ring binder with materials from the course for reference and review. By the time the course is over, if you print the instructions for each week as well each of the documents listed under "Reading" for that week, you will have created your own MBSR manual. If this is something you'd like to do, see **MBSR Manual** for suggestions about content and organization, as well as documents for the binder cover and table of contents.

Videos and Reading

For each week, under **Videos**, you will find offerings by master teachers of mindfulness, which will motivate and inform the week's topics. Under **Reading** are articles, formatted for easy reading and ready to be printed for your manual. If you are so inclined, you may also want to keep a "Mindfulness Journal" to write your impressions in a more free-form manner than just the worksheets and practice sheets allow.

Each week, the length of the video selections will vary, but the total will usually be about 45 minutes. It's a good idea to choose a given day of the week and time (for example, Sunday at 8pm) so that you can watch them in one sitting. This can be done in place of your 30-minute practice for that day, if you like. Also, at least skim the readings on that day, but plan to read them in their entirety by the end of the week. The readings and the videos in the **Supplementary materials** section are entirely optional.

Daily Practice

You will be doing about ***30 minutes of daily practice***, and each week introduces a new set of practices. You can find the audio for each of these "Guided Practices" in the menu just to the left of this text. Each week, you will print or download a **Formal Practice sheet** which is tailored for that week and will be your guide for that week's practice. *[**NOTE:** The main practices range between 32 and 37 minutes in length, and there are a few which are shorter than 30 minutes.]*

In addition, there is **Informal Practice**, which will help you integrate the learnings and practices into your daily life. Unlike the formal practice, you don't have to schedule this into your day, it's simply having an intention to bring a special awareness into some of the activities that you already do on a daily basis. At the end of each day, you will take just five minutes or so to reflect on the day, using that week's **Informal Practice sheet** as a guide. *Although this may look less important than the 30 minutes of scheduled formal practice, it is through the Informal Practice that you will see and realize the concrete and natural benefits of the learnings and practices of MBSR.*

Health Considerations

Many people come to the course with some physical limitations and it's important that ***you know that you are free to modify any of the practices, especially the yoga sequences, to make them best work for you****. Being aware of your own limits, and modifying the practices when necessary is, in itself, mindfulness in action.*

Also, during the course of this program, whether you have physical limitations or not, it is possible, even likely, that difficult feelings or unpleasant memories may arise. Since this program is done without interaction with an instructor, it is important that you take care of your own emotional and mental health. ***If things come up which are too difficult to handle, you should take a break from the course and/or seek the help of a good counselor or therapist. If you are under a counselor or doctor's care already, please let them know of your plan to go through this program, and keep them informed of your experience as you go along, so that they may monitor any unexpected reactions to the course or practices.***

Ready to start?

Once you've completed the **Getting Started Worksheet** you're ready to go! *When you're ready, just click on **Week 1** in the left-hand menu you see above (on a smartphone, touch the menu icon at the top left of the page).* In this menu are links to each of the eight weeks, and the **Guided Practices.**

Getting Started in MBSR

This worksheet begins your MBSR journey. Actually writing your responses to these questions and those on the practice logs will help ground your practice and learnings in a way that would not be possible if you simply answered these questions in your head. In a way, this is the first mindfulness practice: being mindful of your intentions and commitment to the process you are about to begin.

So, first, there is probably something that drew you to this program that made it seem like a good idea. For example, you may wake up in the middle of the night with worries and concerns that keep you from getting a good night's sleep, or you may be dealing with health issues and you've heard that mindfulness can help you deal with them, or you may have trouble concentrating, or you may simply want to increase your ability to be present and fully engaged in life, to accept more fully yourself/others, just as you/they are.

By the end of the course, I am hoping that:

While there are things you hope that will get better, it is important to recognize positive aspects of yourself, because it is these things that form the base for any self-improvement. We tend to take for granted our own core strengths, so give yourself a few minutes to reflect on this. For instance, what would a good friend or close family member say that they appreciate about you?

Some of my strengths are:

Finding a specific time and place for your half-hour of daily practice is likely to be one of the most difficult hurdles, and writing down now when and where you'll be doing your daily practice will help you to keep your promise to yourself to practice each day. People often choose to practice first thing in the morning, before roommates or family members are up and about, and others like the evening shortly before bedtime, or just after arriving home from work. Precisely when you practice is less important than having a set time and place, a time that you know you can practice without having to attend to the telephone or be responsive to others, and a place that is quiet and separate from others.

When will I practice? (Try to be concrete, e.g., 6:30am M-F, 7:30am Sat/Sun):

Where I am planning to practice (e.g., corner of the bedroom, basement, etc.):

In addition, you will want to allow time each week to prepare for the coming week's practice by watching that week's videos and/or starting the reading indicated for that week. Since we recommend practicing six days a week, you could choose to prepare for the coming week on the seventh day, starting at the same time you normally would practice. On this day, it's best to reserve a time period of 60-90 minutes.

The time & day of the week I will get ready for the coming week's practice is:

Facebook name (if you'd like to join the Online Student Community):

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
An Overview

by Roberta F. Lewis, M.S.W.

Does not a day go by that many of us don't wonder how we manage to juggle the pieces of our lives and honorably hold up our responsibilities to family, friends, work, our health, our financial well-being, as well as lead full and satisfying lives? It sometimes doesn't take much to unsettle the delicate balance of forces that constellate as our world, sending it off into a wobble, leaving us struggling to right the course. How do we find a way back?

One route is in practicing mindfulness-based stress reduction. Intensive training in mindfulness meditation can cultivate states of relaxation, improve physical symptoms of pain and chronic illness, open our minds to greater insight, and enhance our physical health and sense of well-being for fuller, more satisfying lives. The course originated twenty years ago with Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the Center for Mindfulness at UMassMemorial Medical Center in Worcester. This form of meditation practice stems primarily from the Buddhist tradition and was intended as a means of cultivating greater awareness and wisdom, helping people to live each moment of their lives as fully as possible. While some forms of meditation involve focusing on a sound or phrase in order to reduce distracting thoughts, mindfulness training does the opposite. In mindfulness meditation, you don't ignore distracting thoughts, sensations or physical discomfort, rather, you focus on them.

An integral part of mindfulness practice is to look at, accept and actually welcome the tensions, stress and pain, as well as disturbing emotions that surface such as fear, anger, disappointment and feelings of insecurity and unworthiness. This is done with the purpose of acknowledging present moment reality as it is found - whether it is pleasant or unpleasant - as the first step towards transforming that reality and one's relationship to it.

Mindfulness-based stress reduction, also includes the practice of yoga. Yoga encourages musculoskeletal strength, flexibility and balance, as well as inner stillness. It can both relax and energize. Applied in conjunction with mindfulness techniques, yoga is a gentle but powerful form of body-oriented meditation. With continued practice, one can begin to fully inhabit the body, pay closer attention to its fluctuating states and learn to cultivate an early warning system for the presence of stress, tension or pain. With an attitude of mindfulness to both body and mind states, one has more information to work with in potentially handling the day-to-day stressful events in life.

Can thoughts in the mind and tension in the body actually have the capacity to produce bodily symptoms? There is growing evidence that by implementing mind/body techniques, the mind and body are capable of relaxing, new perspectives can be gained, and new ways of coping with one's life can be achieved that can impact symptoms - like gastritis. Dean Ornish, M.D., author of Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease, provides scientific proof in his landmark research demonstrating, for the first time, that even severe heart disease often can be reversed by practicing meditation, yoga, changing one’s diet and participating in group support.

Research on the impact of mindfulness meditation on a variety of symptoms including anxiety disorder, chronic pain and psoriasis has been conducted over the past 20 years by Dr. Kabat-Zinn. He states that "participants report a sharp drop over the eight week course in the number of medical symptoms originally reported, as well as psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and hostility. These improvements occur reproducibly in the majority of participants in every class. They also occur regardless of diagnosis, suggesting that the program is relevant to people with a wide range of medical disorders and life situations."

He also notes, "In addition to having fewer symptoms, people experience improvements in how they view themselves and the world. They report feeling more self-confident, assertive and motivated to take better care of themselves and more confident in their ability to respond effectively in stressful circumstances. They also feel a greater sense of control over their lives, an increased willingness to look at stressful events as challenges rather than threats, and a greater sense of meaning in life."

One frustrated participant came to the clinic with this question: "Can a fish know it is in water? I don't think it is possible, because if you take the fish out of the water, it will die." He saw himself as someone immersed in a cloudy mindstew, unable to gain perspective on himself or his world. Was there the possibility that he could see himself and his thought patterns more clearly?

In the practice of mindfulness meditation, one can cultivate the sense of oneself as a present moment awareness that observes the thoughts that arise in the mind and views them as something to be noted, perhaps responded to, but not to be identified with as "me." As one begins to quiet the mind, this view of our thoughts in relation to ourselves can be cultivated more and more deeply, which can result in more clarity about who we really are. When we realize we are not our thoughts, we can explore them more deeply and begin to move into a greater stillness that offers us further information about who we may really be at our core. Just as the ocean has waves on the surface of the water as well as the silent depths below, we too can know the thought patterns on the surface, as well as the quiet depths within. And so, in answer to this patient's question, the fish does have the possibility of knowing something of the water it is in.

In addition to mindfulness meditation in the medical setting, the training has also been broadened in scope to include inmates in the prison system, inner city residents, Olympic rowing athletes, judges, the Chicago Bulls basketball team, corporate executives, as well as grammar school children. Over 240 mindfulness-based stress reduction programs are currently being offered around the country. Instructors vary with respect to their backgrounds, most being health care professionals with teaching and clinical experience in the health field, or having extensive meditation and yoga backgrounds.

Whether we are pressed by serious pain and stress, or simply by a mild sense that things are not as we would like them to be, mindfulness meditation is a tool that allows us to see our world as if standing and looking at the landscape of our own particular life and the world around us from a new vantage point. We can begin to recognize the ways in which we contribute to our own discontent and can decide to make a change. Mindfulness meditation offers that opportunity.

Roberta Lewis *is a certified yoga teacher since 1978, trained in Integral Yoga, with several years study in Iyengar Yoga, and training in gentle patient-oriented yoga as offered at the UMass-Memorial Medical Center's Stress Reduction Program founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn. She has been a meditator in the Yoga and Vipassana traditions since 1976. She is trained in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and was a part of the clinical staff of the UMass Stress Reduction Clinic as far back as 1996. At the time this article was written, she taught yoga and MBSR at Listening: The Barre Integrated Health Center in Barre, MA.*

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source: http://www.ofspirit.com/robertalewis1.htm

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
Research Summary

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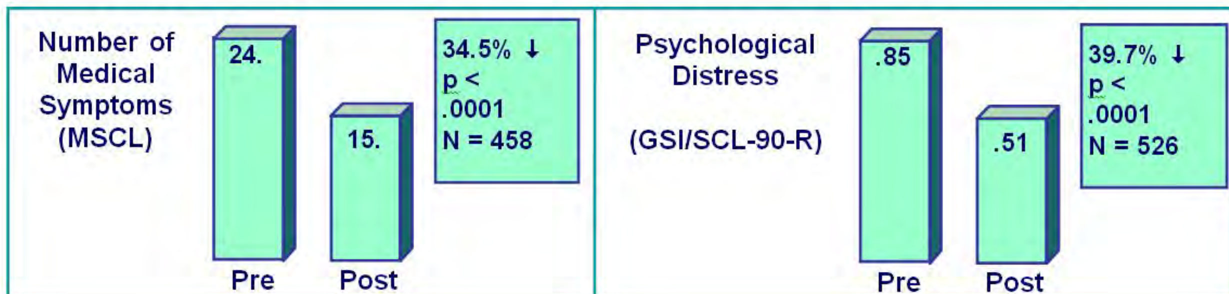
Published research has repeatedly shown that meditation and relaxation training can be powerful adjuncts to the conventional medical treatment of many disorders. The Stress Reduction Program incorporates the critical elements of all these relaxation and meditation programs and takes the healing process an important step further. A central feature of the program is the teaching of a gentle yet effective method that encourages the patient to develop a profound level of inquiry into the application of mindfulness (moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness) and mindfulness-based coping strategies in everyday life. Patients in the program are taught to become aware of, and develop, their own resources to support their health, thus becoming more stress hardy, a quality that is associated with better health across the life span.

The Stress Reduction Program has been on the cutting edge of mind/body and integrative medicine for twenty two years and represents participatory and integrative medicine at its best. Over 18,000 patients with all manner of diagnoses have successfully completed the eight-week course and 1,400 physicians have referred patients to this program. Published evaluations of the medical outcomes resulting from patient participation have shown a 35% reduction in the number of medical symptoms and a 40% reduction in psychological symptoms (stable over four years) (Kabat-Zinn 1982, 1985, 1986, 1992, 1998, Miller et al 1995, etc.).



Patients coming to the program are not separated by their referral diagnosis, so these outcome data apply across all the diagnostic categories that have been referred.

Stress and Patient Presentation

The American Academy of Family Physicians has estimated that up to two-thirds of all office visits to family doctors are for stress-related symptoms. Recent research has indicated that up to 60% of all HMO visits are made by people with no diagnosable disorder - the "worried well" (Sobel 1995) - and that many of these presenting symptoms are related to the patient's psychosocial functioning - such things as depression, anxiety, social isolation, overwork etc. (Kroenke & Mangelsdorff 1989). At least one third of chest pain cardiology patients with normal or near normal coronary arteries have been found to be suffering from panic disorder (Kushner 1989).

Mindfulness training has been shown effective in addressing the malaise that often underlies these presentations (Kabat-Zinn 1982, 1985, 1986, 1992, Miller 1995, etc.), and further evidence of this can be seen in studies showing reduced need for clinical services following meditation training (Kabat-Zinn,1987b, Hellman 1990, Caudill 1991a, 1991b, Tate 1994, Orme-Johnson 1994).

Since its inception in 1979, more than 18,000 people have completed the eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR) and learned how to use their innate resources and abilities to respond more effectively to stress, pain, and illness. The central focus of the SR Program is intensive training in mindfulness mediation and its integration into the challenges/adventures of everyday life.

Coronary Artery Disease

The addition of meditation training to standard cardiac rehabilitation regimens has been shown to reduce mortality (41% decrease during the first two years following, and 46% reduction in recurrence rates) morbidity, psychological distress, and some biological risk factors (plasma lipids, weight, blood pressure, blood glucose) (Linden 1996, Zammara 1996). Meditation practice alone has been shown to reduce exercise-induced myocardial ischemia in patients with coronary artery disease (Zamarra 1996, Ornish 1983).

Hypertension

Meditation training has been shown to reduce blood pressure in amounts comparable to the changes that are produced by medication and other lifestyle modifications such as weight loss, sodium restriction, and increased aerobic exercise (Schneider 1995, Linden & Chambers 1994, Alexander 1994).

Cancer

A randomized trial with cancer outpatients showed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was effective in significantly decreasing mood disturbance (65%), including depression, anxiety, anger and confusion, and also in decreasing the symptoms of stress such as cardiopulmonary and gastrointestinal symptoms (Speca 2000). These changes were sustained at six month follow up (Carlson 2001). Survival rates of both melanoma and metastatic breast cancer patients have been significantly improved by relaxation and meditation training (Fawzy 1993, Speigal 1989) and psychological distress was lessened in women with early breast cancer (Bridge 1988).

Chronic Pain

Mindfulness meditation has been shown to reduce both the experience of pain and its inhibition of patients' everyday activities. Further, mood disturbance and psychological symptomatology (including anxiety and depression) are also reduced. Pain-related drug utilization was decreased and activity levels and self esteem increased. This was in marked contrast to a traditional pain clinic comparison group, which showed no change on these dimensions (Kabat-Zinn 1982, 85). These gains were nearly all maintained at four-year follow-up (Kabat-Zinn 1987).

Fibromyalgia

Mindfulness training resulted in clinically significant improvements in physical condition and both psychological and social spheres (Kaplan 1993, Goldenberg 1994, Weissbecker

Diabetes - Type I

Meditation training significantly lowered glucose levels in patients with poorly controlled type I diabetes (McGrady 1991).

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Meditation training has been shown to be effective in improving this condition (Blanchard 1992).

Anxiety

Mindfulness training has been shown to clinically reduce symptoms of anxiety, psychological distress and secondary depression (Kabat-Zinn 1992). These changes were maintained at 3-year follow-up (Miller 1995).

Asthma/Respiratory Disorders

Relaxation training has been shown to improve the psychological well-being, functional status and frequency of attacks of asthma patients as well as adherence to treatment (Devine 1996). It has also been shown to have a beneficial effect on dyspnea and psychological well-being among adults with obstructive pulmonary disease (Devine & Pearcy, in press).

Psoriasis

Recently published research has shown that mindfulness meditation increases skin clearing rates four-fold when used in conjunction with phototherapy and photochemotherapy (Kabat-Zinn 1998).

Headache

Meditation has been shown to decrease headache activity (Anastasio 1987).

Depression

The skills derived from mindfulness training and cognitive therapy have been shown effective in significantly reducing the recurrence of major depressive episodes in patients who have been treated for depression (Teasdale 2000).

Multiple Sclerosis

Training in mindfulness of movement resulted in MS patients reporting improvement over a broad range of symptoms, including balance (Mills 2000).

Health-Related Quality of Life

MBSR has been shown to significantly improve health-related quality of life. (functional status, well-being, reduced physical symptoms, psychological distress) (Reibel 2001).

Palouse Mindfulness
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Week 1 - Simple Awareness
Introduction to the Body Scan

Realize that this very body, with its aches and it pleasures…

is exactly what we need to be fully human, fully awake, fully alive.

- Pema Chodron

Now that you've experienced the **Introduction** and completed the **Getting Started Worksheet** (see **Getting Started**), you are ready to begin. ***Welcome!***

NOTE: The links to all the materials described below are given in the colored section at the bottom of the page. Although there are five videos to watch this week, once you start one, the others will automatically follow. Some of the videos have ads at the beginning. Revenue from these ads go to the original creators of the videos, not to Palouse Mindfulness.

Videos
The videos for this week begin with **The Power of Mindfulness**, in which Shauna Shapiro emphasizes the importance, not of just paying attention to our inner experience, but *paying attention with kindness*. In **Don't Try to be Mindful,** Daron Larson addresses a common misunderstanding about mindfulness practice, that if our meditation is not peaceful and free of thoughts, then we must be doing something wrong. In **Befriending Our Bodies**, Jon Kabat-Zinn talks about the importance of our relationship with our body in this course. The last video guides you through a **Raisin Meditation** using two ordinary raisins. ***To get the most benefit out of this video, have two raisins and a glass of water with you so you can experience on your own what is described in the video.***

Readings
Each week, there are readings which are an important part of the program. This week, the main reading is about the **Body Scan Meditation** you will be doing for your 30 minutes of daily practice this week. **7 Myths of Meditation**, and **Why We Find It So Hard to Meditate** address common misunderstandings, including the idea that one must have a quiet mind to meditate successfully. **What Would It Take for You to Be Still?** describes one person's personal experience with mindfulness and will give you a little bit more of an idea of what to expect from this course.

Daily Practices
This week begins your 30-minute daily **Formal Practice**, which is the **Body Scan Meditation**. The audio guidance is available through the menu just to the left of this text under "Guided Practices". Below, you can see the link to the **Formal Practice sheet**, where you will be making brief notes about your practice. *[NOTE: If you will be completing this by hand, print the* ***PDF file****, but if you'd like to complete it on your computer, download the* ***WORD file****.]*

For the **Informal Practice** this week, it is suggested that you bring mindful awareness to some otherwise routine activity such as washing the dishes and/or eating a meal. At the end of each day, using the **Informal Practice sheet** you will be printing or downloading for this week (see below), take just five minutes or so to see if you can recall a daily activity which you brought awareness to that day.

Supplementary reading
In addition, each week will indicate some supplementary reading or viewing materials. Listed there are suggestions for background reading or viewing if you'd like to know more about a given week's topic. Of special interest this week are two great resources having to do with eating mindfully: **Mouthfuls of Mindfulness,** written by Jan Chozen Bays and a video, **Introduction to Mindful Eating,** by Michelle DuVal. The video, **Managing Anxiety with Mindfulness** by Rachel Green, was originally made to address test anxiety.

OK, let's get started! *Below are your materials for this week:*

Videos *[with most browsers, once you start the first video, the others will follow automatically]*

- **The Power of Mindfulness** *- Shauna Shapiro [13 min]*
- **Don't Try to be Mindful** *- Daron Larson [12 min]*
- **Befriending Our Bodies** *- Jon Kabat-Zinn [4 min]*
- **Raisin Meditation** *- Dave Potter [12 min]*

Reading *[print these for your manual or read them online]*

- **The Body Scan Meditation** *- Jon Kabat-Zinn*
- **7 Myths of Meditation** *- Deepak Choprah*
- **Why We Find It So Hard to Meditate** *- Mindful Staff*
- **What Would It Take for You to Be Still?** *- Catherine Price*

Practice Sheets *[print PDF file or download WORD file to record your daily practices]*

Formal Practice ***[PDF]*** *[or* ***WORD format****]* - Body Scan

Informal Practice ***[PDF]*** *[or* ***WORD format****]* - Simple Awareness and/or Mindful Eating

Supplementary materials related to this week's topic *[optional materials]*

Mouthfuls of Mindfulness *article by Jan Chozen Bays*

Introduction to Mindful Eating *video by Michelle DuVal [10 min]*

The Mindfulness-Based Eating Solution *book by Lynn Rossy*

An Apple as Past, Present and Future *video by Susan Kaiser Greenland [2 min]*

Managing Anxiety with Mindfulness *- Rachel Green [15 min]*

NOTE: *If you are compiling a manual based on the suggestions in* ***MBSR Manual****, you would print a copy of this page as well as the Readings and Practice Sheets given above. For a version of this page which has been reformatted for your manual go to the* ***printer-ready version of this page****.*

The Body Scan Meditation

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*Excerpted from **Coming to Our Senses,** Hyperion Press, NY, NY*

[for audio guidance, go to Body Scan]

The body scan has proven to be an extremely powerful and healing form of meditation. It forms the core of the lying down practices that people train in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. It involves systematically sweeping through the body with the mind, bringing an affectionate, openhearted, interested attention to its various regions, customarily starting from the toes of the left foot and then moving through the entirety of the foot – to sole, the heel, the top of the foot – then up the left leg, including in turn the ankle, the shin and the calf, the knee and the kneecap, the thigh in its entirety, on the surface and deep, the groin and the left hip, then over to the toes of the right foot, the other regions of the foot, then up the right leg in the same manner as the left. From there, the focus moves into, successively, and slowly, the entirety of the pelvic region, including the hips again, the buttocks and the genitals, the lower back, the abdomen, and then the upper torso – the upper back, the chest and the ribs, the breasts, the heart and lungs and great vessels housed within the rib cage, the shoulder blades floating on the rib cage in back, all the way up to the collarbones and shoulders. From the shoulders, we move to the arms, often doing them together, starting from the tips of the fingers and thumbs and moving successively through the fingers, the palms, and backs of the hands, the wrists, forearms, elbows, upper arms, armpits, and shoulders again. Then we move in to the neck and throat, and finally, the face and head...

When we practice the body scan, we are systematically and intentionally moving our attention though the body, attending to the various sensations in the different regions. That we can attend to these body sensations at all is quite remarkable. That we can do it at will, either impulsively or in a more disciplined systematic way, is even more so. Without moving a muscle, we can put our mind anywhere in the body we choose and feel and be aware of whatever sensations are present in that moment.

Experientially, we might describe what we are doing during a body scan as *tuning in* or *opening* to those sensations, allowing ourselves to become aware of what is already unfolding, much of which we usually tune out because it is so obvious, so mundane, so familiar that we hardly know it is there, I mean here. And of course, by the same token we could say that most of the time in our lives we hardly know we are there, I mean here, experiencing the body, in the body, of the body . . . the words actually fail the essence of the experience. When we speak about it, as we've already observed, language itself forces us to speak of a separate I who "has" a body. We wind up sounding hopelessly dualistic.

And yet, in a way there certainly is a separate I who "has" a body, or at least, there is a very strong appearance of that being the case, and we have spoken of this as being the level of conventional reality, the relative, the level of appearances. In the domain of relative reality, there is the body and its sensations (object), and there is the perceiver of the sensations (subject). They appear separate and different.

Then there are moments of pure perceiving that arise sometimes in meditation practice, and sometimes at other very special moments in life. Yet such moments are potentially available to us at all times, since they are attributes of awareness itself. Perceiving unifies the apparent subject and apparent object in the experiencing itself. Subject and object dissolve into awareness. Awareness

is larger than sensation. It has a life of its own separate from the life of the body, yet intimately dependent on it.

Awareness is deeply bereft, however, when it does not have a full body to work with due to disease or injury to the nervous system itself. The intact nervous system provides us with all of our extraordinary gateways into the feeling, sensing world. Yet. Like most everything else, we take these capacities so much for granted that we hardly notice that every exquisite moment of our life in relationship, both inwardly and outwardly, depends on them. Not only might we come more to our senses, we might realize that we only know through our senses, if you include the mind, or awareness itself as a sense – you could say, the ultimate sense. . .

It is not uncommon while practicing the body scan for the sensations in the body to be felt more acutely, even for there to be more pain, a greater intensity of sensation in certain regions. At the same time, in the context of mindfulness practice, the sensations, whatever they are and however intense, are also being *met* more accurately too, with less overlay of interpretation, judgment and reaction, including aversion and the impulse to run, to escape.

In the body scan, we are developing a greater intimacy with bare sensation, opening to the give-and-take embedded in the reciprocity between the sensations themselves and our awareness of them. As a result, it is not uncommon to be less disturbed by them, or disturbed by them in a different, a wiser way, even when they are acute. Awareness learns to let them be as they are and to hold them without triggering so much emotional reactivity and also so much inflamed thinking about them. We sometimes speak of awareness and discernment differentiating and perhaps naturally "uncoupling" the sensory dimension of the experience of pain from the emotional and cognitive dimensions of pain. In the process, the intensity of the sensations themselves can sometimes subside. In any event, they may come to be seen as less onerous, less debilitating.

It seems as if awareness itself, holding the sensations without judging them or reacting to them, is healing our view of the body and allowing it to come to terms, at least to some degree, with conditions as they are in the present moment in ways that no longer overwhelmingly erode our quality of life, even in the fact of pain or disease. The awareness of pain really is a different realm from being caught up in pain and struggling with it, and setting foot in that realm, we discover some succor and respite. This is itself is an experience of liberation, a profound freedom in that moment, at least from a narrower way of holding the experience of pain when it is not seen as bare sensation. It is not a cure by any means, but it is a learning and an opening, and an accepting, and a navigating the ups and downs of what previously was impenetrable and unworkable. . .

Paraphrasing James Joyce in one of his short stories in *Dubliners*, "Mr. Duffy lived a short distance from his body." That may be an address too many of us share. Taking the miracle of embodiment for granted is a horrific loss. It would be a profound healing of our lives to get back in touch with it. All it takes is practice in coming to our senses, all of them.

And . . . a spirit of adventure. . .

. . . The body scan is not for everybody, and it is not always the meditation of choice even for those who love it. But it is extremely useful and good to know about and practice from time to time, whatever your circumstances or condition. If you think of your body as a musical instrument, the body scan is a way of tuning it. If you think of it as a universe, the body scan is a way to come to know it. If you think of your body as a house, the body scan is a way to throw open all the windows and doors and let the fresh air of awareness sweep it clean.

You can also scan your body much more quickly, depending on your time constraints and the situation you find yourself in. You can do a one in-breath or one out-breath body scan, or a one-, two-, five-, ten-, or twenty-minute body scan. The level of precision and detail will of course vary depending on how quickly you move through the body, but each speed has its virtues, and ultimately, it is about being in touch with the whole of your being and your body in any and every way you can, outside of time altogether.

You can practice body scans, long or short, lying in bed at night or in the morning. You can also practice them sitting or even standing. There are countless creative ways to bring the body scan or any other lying down meditation into your life. If you make use of any of them, it is highly likely that you will find that they will bring new life to you, and bring you to a new appreciation for your body and how much it can serve as a vehicle for embodying here and now what is deepest and best in yourself, including your dignity, your beauty, your vitality, and your mind when it is open and undisturbed.

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Physical sensations you might notice with the body scan

- tingly
- burning
- pounding
- throbbing
- trembling
- light/heavy
- tight/loose
- shooting
- stinging
- airy
- cutting
- tense/relaxed
- soft/rough
- prickly
- pulling
- burning
- vibrating
- cool/warm
- stiff/flexible
- numb
- numb
- achy
- sinking
- clammy/dry
- airy/dense
- shaky
- itchy
- pulsing
- achy
- dull/sharp

Emotional reactions you might notice

- impatience/wanting to stop
- boredom
- enjoyment/wanting to continue
- release
- joy
- sadness
- fear
- grief
- pride
- disgust
- surprise
- anger
- frustration
- anticipation
- shame

Thoughts that may occur

- Reviewing the past
- Imagining the future
- Thinking about others
- Planning
- Evaluating/analyzing
- Circular thinking
- Wishing/hoping/comparing
- Labeling/cataloguing
- Judging your experience

THE HUFFINGTON POST
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7 Myths of Meditation

by Deepak Chopra

In the past 40 years, meditation has entered the mainstream of modern Western culture, and been prescribed by physicians and practiced by everyone from business executives, artists, and scientists to students, teachers, military personnel, and -- on a promising note -- politicians. Ohio Congressman Tim Ryan meditates every morning and has become a major advocate of mindfulness and meditation, as he describes in his book, *A Mindful Nation: How a Simple Practice Can Help Us Reduce Stress, Improve Performance, and Recapture the American Spirit*.

Despite the growing popularity of meditation, prevailing misconceptions about the practice are a barrier that prevents many people from trying meditation and receiving its profound benefits for the body, mind, and spirit. Here are seven of the most common meditation myths, dispelled.

Myth #1: Meditation is difficult.

Truth: This myth is rooted in the image of meditation as an esoteric practice reserved only for saints, holy men, and spiritual adepts. In reality, when you receive instruction from an experienced, knowledgeable teacher, meditation is easy and fun to learn. The techniques can be as simple as focusing on the breath or silently repeating a mantra. One reason why meditation may seem difficult is that we try too hard to concentrate, we're overly attached to results, or we're not sure we are doing it right. In our experience at the Chopra Center, learning meditation from a qualified teacher is the best way to ensure that the process is enjoyable and you get the most from your practice. A teacher will help you understand what you're experiencing, move past common roadblocks, and create a nourishing daily practice.

Myth #2: You have to quiet your mind in order to have a successful meditation practice.

Truth: This may be the number one myth about meditation and is the cause of many people giving up in frustration. Meditation isn't about stopping our thoughts or trying to empty our mind -- both of these approaches only create stress and more noisy internal chatter. We can't stop or control our thoughts, but we *can* decide how much attention to give them. Although we can't impose quiet on our mind, through meditation we can find the quiet that already exists in the space between our thoughts. Sometimes referred to as "the gap," this space between thoughts is pure consciousness, pure silence, and pure peace.

When we meditate, we use an object of attention, such as our breath, an image, or a mantra, which allows our mind to relax into this silent stream of awareness. When thoughts arise, as they inevitably will, we don't need to judge them or try to push them away. Instead, we gently return our attention to our object of attention. In every meditation, there are moments, even if only microseconds, when the mind dips into the gap and experiences the refreshment of pure awareness. As you meditate on a regular basis, you will spend more and more time in this state of expanded awareness and silence.

Be assured that even if it feels like you have been thinking throughout your entire meditation, you are still receiving the benefits of your practice. You haven't failed or wasted your time. When my friend and colleague David Simon taught meditation, he would often tell students, "The thought

I'm having thoughts may be the most important thought you have ever thought, because before you had that thought, you may not have even known you were having thoughts. You probably thought you *were* your thoughts." Simply noticing that you are having thoughts is a breakthrough because it begins to shift your internal reference point from ego mind to witnessing awareness. As you become less identified with your thoughts and stories, you experience greater peace and open to new possibilities.

Myth #3: **It takes years of dedicated practice to receive any benefits from meditation.**

Truth: The benefits of meditation are both immediate and long-term. You can begin to experience benefits the first time you sit down to meditate and in the first few days of daily practice. Many scientific studies provide evidence that meditation has profound effects on the mind-body physiology within just weeks of practice. For example, a landmark study led by Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital found that as little as eight weeks of meditation not only helped people experience decreased anxiety and greater feelings of calm; it also produced growth in the areas of the brain associated with memory, empathy, sense of self, and stress regulation.

At the Chopra Center, we commonly hear from new meditators who are able to sleep soundly for the first time in years after just a few days of daily meditation practice. Other common benefits of meditation include improved concentration, decreased blood pressure, reduced stress and anxiety, and enhanced immune function. You can learn more about the benefits of meditation in a recent post, "Why Meditate?" on the Chopra Center blog.

Myth #4: **Meditation is escapism.**

Truth: The real purpose of meditation isn't to tune out and get away from it all but to tune in and get in touch with your true self -- that eternal aspect of yourself that goes beyond all the ever-changing, external circumstances of your life. In meditation you dive below the mind's churning surface, which tends to be filled with repetitive thoughts about the past and worries about the future, into the still point of pure consciousness. In this state of transcendent awareness, you let go of all the stories you've been telling yourself about who you are, what is limiting you, and where you fall short -- and you experience the truth that your deepest self is infinite and unbounded.

As you practice on a regular basis, you cleanse the windows of perception and your clarity expands. While some people do try to use meditation as a form of escape -- as a way to bypass unresolved emotional issues -- this approach runs counter to all of the wisdom teachings about meditation and mindfulness. In fact, there are a variety of meditation techniques specifically developed to identify, mobilize and release stored emotional toxicity. If you are coping with emotional upset or trauma, I recommend that you work with a therapist who can help you safely explore and heal the pain of the past, allowing you to return to your natural state of wholeness and love.

Myth #5: **I don't have enough time to meditate.**

Truth: There are busy, productive executives who have not missed a meditation in 25 years, and if you make meditation a priority, you will do it. If you feel like your schedule is too full, remember that even just a few minutes of meditation is better than none. We encourage you not to talk yourself out of meditating just because it's a bit late or you feel too sleepy.

In life's paradoxical way, when we spend time meditating on a regular basis, we actually have more time. When we meditate, we dip in and out of the timeless, spaceless realm of consciousness... the state of pure awareness that is the source of everything that manifests in the universe. Our breathing and heart rate slow down, our blood pressure lowers, and our body decreases the production of stress hormones and other chemicals that speed up the aging process and give us the subjective feeling that we are "running out of time."

In meditation, we are in a state of restful alertness that is extremely refreshing for the body and mind. As people stick with their meditation ritual, they notice that they are able to accomplish more while doing less. Instead of struggling so hard to achieve goals, they spend more and more time "in the flow" -- aligned with universal intelligence that orchestrates everything.

Myth #6: Meditation requires spiritual or religious beliefs.

Truth: Meditation is a practice that takes us beyond the noisy chatter of the mind into stillness and silence. It doesn't require a specific spiritual belief, and many people of many different religions practice meditation without any conflict with their current religious beliefs. Some meditators have no particular religious beliefs, or are atheist or agnostic. They meditate in order to experience inner quiet and the numerous physical and mental health benefits of the practice -- including lowered blood pressure, stress reduction, and restful sleep. The original reason that I started meditating was to help myself stop smoking. Meditation helps us to enrich our lives. It enables us to enjoy whatever we do in our lives more fully and happily -- whether that is playing sports, taking care of our children, or advancing in our career.

Myth #7: I'm supposed to have transcendent experiences in meditation.

Truth: Some people are disappointed when they don't experience visions, see colors, levitate, hear a choir of angels, or glimpse enlightenment when they meditate. Although we can have a variety of wonderful experiences when we meditate, including feelings of bliss and oneness, these aren't the purpose of the practice. The real benefits of meditation are what happens in the other hours of the day when we're going about our daily lives. When we emerge from our meditation session, we carry some of the stillness and silence of our practice with us, allowing us to be more creative, compassionate, centered, and loving to ourselves and everyone we encounter.

As you begin or continue your meditation journey, here are some other guidelines that may help you on your way:

- Have no expectations. Sometimes the mind is too active to settle down. Sometimes it settles down immediately. Sometimes it goes quiet, but the person doesn't notice. Anything can happen.
- Be easy with yourself. Meditation isn't about getting it right or wrong. It's about letting your mind find its true nature.
- Don't stick with meditation techniques that aren't leading to inner silence. Find a technique that resonates with you. There are many kinds of mantra meditation, including the Primordial Sound Meditation practice taught at the Chopra Center. Or simply follow the in and out of your breathing, not paying attention to your thoughts at all. The mind wants to find its source in silence. Give it a chance by letting go.
- Make sure you are alone in a quiet place to meditate. Unplug the phone. Make sure no one is going to disturb you.
- Really be there. If your attention is somewhere else, thinking about your next appointment, errand or meal, of course you won't find silence. To meditate, your intention must be clear and free of other obligations.

***Deepak Chopra** is co-author of* Super Brain: Unleashing the Explosive Power of Your Mind to Maximize Health, Happiness, and Spiritual Well-Being *and founder of The Chopra Foundation*

source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deepak-chopra/meditation-myths_b_2823629.html

mindful
taking time for what matters
April 20, 2011

Why We Find It Hard to Meditate

Ed and Deb Shapiro explore common reasons and obstacles.

by Mindful Staff

What is it about something as simple as sitting still and watching our breath that evokes panic, fear, and even hostility? No matter how many reports there are proving the mental, emotional, and physical value of being quiet, there seems to be an even greater number who refuse to give it a try.

Meditation can certainly be challenging, and even more so if we are uncertain as to why we are doing it. It can seem very odd to sit there just listening to the incessant chatter in our head, and we easily get bored if we do nothing for too long, even if it's only 10 minutes.

After years of hearing a plethora of reasons why people find it hard to meditate, we have whittled it down to just a few:

1. I'm too busy, I don't have the time.

Which can certainly be true if you have young children and a full-time job, and all that these entail. However, we are only talking about maybe 10 minutes a day. Most of us spend more time than that reading the newspaper or idly surfing the web. It only appears like we don't have the time because we usually fill every moment with activity and never press the pause button.

2. I find it really uncomfortable to sit still for too long.

If you are trying to sit cross-legged on the floor then, yes, it will get uncomfortable. But you can sit upright in a firm and comfortable chair instead. Or, you can do walking meditation, or yoga, or tai chi. Moving meditation can be just as beneficial as sitting.

3. My mind won't stop thinking: *I can't relax. I can't meditate. I just can't! My mind will not get quiet; it flies all over the place! My thoughts are driving me mad! I'm trying to get away from myself, not look inside.* Sound familiar?

Surprisingly enough, trying to stop your mind from thinking is like trying to stop the wind – it's impossible. In the Eastern teaching the mind is described as being like a drunken monkey bitten by a scorpion because, just as a monkey leaps from branch to branch, so the mind leaps from one thing to another, constantly distracted and busy. So, when you come to sit still and try to quiet your mind, you find all this manic activity going on and it seems insanely noisy. It is actually nothing new, just that now you are becoming aware of it, whereas before you were immersed in it, unaware that such chatter was so constant.

This experience of the mind being so busy is very normal. Someone once estimated that in any one thirty-minute session of meditation we may have upward of three hundred thoughts. Years of busy mind, years of creating and maintaining dramas, years of stresses and confusion and self-centeredness, and the mind has no idea how to be still. Rather, it craves entertainment. It's not as if you can suddenly turn it off when you meditate, it just means you are like everyone else.

4. There are too many distractions, it's too noisy.

Gone are the days when we could disappear into a cave and be left undisturbed until we emerged some time later fully enlightened. Instead, we all have to deal with the sounds and impositions of the world around us. But – and it's a big but – we needn't let it impose. Cars going by outside? Fine. Let them go by, but just don't go with them. The quiet you are looking for is inside, not outside. The experience of stillness is accumulative: The more you sit, then slowly, slowly, the mind

becomes quieter, more joyful, despite whatever distraction there may be.

5. I don't see the benefit.

Unfortunately, this is where you have to take our word for it. Some people get how beneficial meditation is after just one session, but most of us take longer – you might notice a difference after a week, or maybe two of daily practice. Which means you have to trust the process enough to hang in there and keep going, even before you get the benefits.

Remember, music needs to be played for hours to get the notes right, while in Japan it can take 12 years to learn how to arrange flowers. Being still happens in a moment, but it may take some time before that moment comes—hence the need for patience.

6. I'm no good at this. I never get it right.

Actually, it's impossible to fail at meditation. Even if you sit for 20 minutes thinking non-stop meaningless thoughts, that's fine. There is no right or wrong, and there's no special technique. Deb's meditation teacher told her there are as many forms of meditation as there are people who practice it. So all you need do is find the way that works for you (even if you prefer to do it standing on your head) and keep at it.

The important point is that you make friends with meditation. It'll be of no help at all if you feel you have to meditate, for instance, and then feel guilty if you miss the allotted time or only do 10 minutes when you had promised to do 30. It is much better to practice for a just a sort time and to enjoy what you are doing than to sit there, teeth gritted, because you've been told that only 30 or even 40 minutes will have any affect. Meditation is a companion to have throughout life, like an old friend you turn to when in need of support, inspiration, and clarity. It is to be enjoyed!

7. It's all just weird New Age hype.

It's certainly easy to get lost in the array of New Age promises of eternal happiness but meditation itself is as old as the hills. More than 2,500 years ago the Buddha was a dedicated meditator who tried and tested numerous different ways of enabling the mind to be quiet. And that's just one example. Each religion has its own variation on the theme, and all stretch back over the centuries. So nothing new here, and nothing weird.

In other words, meditation is not about forcing the mind to be absolutely still. Rather, it's a letting go of resistance, of whatever may arise: doubt, worry, uncertainty and feeling inadequate, the endless dramas, fear and desire. Every time you find your mind is drifting, daydreaming, remembering the past or planning ahead, just come back to now, come back to this moment. All you need do is pay attention and be with what is. Nothing else.

Ed and Deb Shapiro are featured bloggers at Oprah.com and HuffingtonPost.com. See their award-winning book: *BE THE CHANGE, How Meditation Can Transform You and the World*, with forewords by the Dalai Lama and Robert Thurman, with contributors Jack Kornfield, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Jane Fonda, Ram Dass, Byron Katie, and many others. They also have 3 meditation CDs: *Metta—Loving kindness and Forgiveness; Samadhi–Breath Awareness and Insight;* and *Yoga Nidra–Inner Conscious Relaxation*; which are available at: EdandDebShapiro.com

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What Would It Take for You to Be Still?

by Catherine Price

How can you learn to slow down time, quiet the mental chatter, and savor life's breezes? With mindfulness, one snowcapped mountain meditation at a time.

When I decided to take up meditation, it seemed so easy - slip on a pair of yoga pants, force your legs into half lotus, and "om" your way to serenity and bliss. Forget that my hips are too tight for even a quarter of a lotus, or that the last time I felt truly serene, prescription drugs were involved. I had to try it - I needed to find a way to slow things down.

Lately it's felt like my life is on warp speed. Weekends blur into months; months blur into seasons. I eat fast, I talk fast, I walk fast - I swear I even sleep fast. And I find it almost impossible to sit still. All that research showing that fidgeting burns tons of calories is good news for me. I may get a lot done, but smell the roses? I'm not even getting a passing whiff.

We've all had the experience of sensing time decelerate naturally when we're not so thrilled about what we're doing (think torturous spinning class or hour-long "synergy workshop" at the office). As my dear grandmother would have said, it takes only one colonoscopy to prove that time is relative. But what about the more enjoyable times in life? I hoped that practicing the popular and proven type of meditation called mindfulness - which focuses on bringing awareness to the present moment - might help me slow those times down as well.

Ready to begin, I went straight to the source: Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, the founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Kabat-Zinn is the creator of an eight-week course called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which he began teaching in 1979 and which is now the largest and oldest meditation-based clinical program in the world. (Kabat-Zinn's program is taught at the University of Massachusetts, but you can find other MBSR courses around the country.)

There are many types of meditation, so why did I opt for MBSR? Two reasons. First, I liked that it's taught in a secular context; even though it's based on some core principles of Buddhism, I didn't need any background knowledge to begin. Second, as someone who wants to understand why I'm doing something - especially when that thing is challenging - I liked the idea that there was scientific proof of its effectiveness. (Because its curriculum is so consistent, it's one of the most studied forms of meditation in the world.)

Kabat-Zinn suggested I start at home by practicing one or two guided 20- to 45-minute exercises six days a week (yes, even meditators need a day off). After we talked about my reason for wanting to meditate - Kabat-Zinn says it's important to identify your motivation before you begin, or you'll be tempted to give up - he recommended that I kick off my practice with what he thought would be an easy starting point: a visualization called the mountain meditation. I loaded my iPod with the 20-minute exercise, which requires you to sit erect on the floor or a chair, close your eyes, and observe your breathing as you imagine a mountain. First, you notice small details - the trees that cover its slopes, perhaps a dollop of snow at the peak - and eventually you try to imagine becoming the mountain itself, feeling its strength and solidity and noticing that even when it's battered by the wind or drenched with rain,

its rock-hard interior remains stable and calm. (Meditation teachers love metaphors.)

The goal of the mountain meditation is the same as with every other mindfulness technique - whether you're focusing on an image, your breath, or sensations in your body, you're trying to coax your mind into what Kabat-Zinn calls a state of nondoing. That's not the same as doing nothing. Rather, it means you're not thinking about your grocery list or the conversation you had with a friend last night or the unfinished report sitting on your desk at work. Nor are you trying to force your mind to go blank or conjure up any special feelings. You're concentrating on just one thing, experiencing each moment as it happens, and trying to be - if I might quote Van Halen - right here, right now.

What does experiencing the moment have to do with imagining yourself as a mountain? Think of it as strength training. By learning to quiet your mind's chatter and concentrate solely on your mental Rockies, you're gaining the focus necessary to stay present when you're not actively meditating. The point is to avoid cruising through life on autopilot, so wrapped up in your daily routine that you don't notice the world around you. "Mindfulness is about living your life as if it really mattered," says Kabat-Zinn. "If you're not mentally present in the small moments, you could be missing half your life."

If this nondoing sounds easy, take 20 minutes and try the mountain exercise yourself. It won't be long before your mountain - which in my case was less Mount Everest and more like the label on an Evian bottle - drifts away and is replaced by a game of free association: A mountain reminds you of skiing, which reminds you of a family vacation, which reminds you of the weekend, which reminds you that a friend invited you to dinner on Saturday, which reminds you that you never got back to her and that maybe you should be writing her an e-mail instead of sitting on the floor pretending you're a mountain - which reminds you that you're supposed to be sitting on the floor pretending you're a mountain, which makes you mad at yourself for letting your mind wander. And then - bam. Not only are you no longer cultivating intimacy with the present moment, you're committing one of mindfulness's biggest faux pas: beating yourself up for getting distracted. (As soon as you start making judgments, you're out of the moment.) Kabat-Zinn didn't say this explicitly, but I'm pretty sure that mindfulness exercises should not include obscenities.

After a few days pretending to be a mountain (and, in a different exercise, a lake), it became clear that I am not a visual person. Unable to picture a mountain in the first place, let alone concentrate on it for 20 minutes, I compensated by imagining my breath flowing up my body and rushing out the top of my head - which worked better, until I realized I'd turned my calm snowy peak into a volcano. So with Kabat-Zinn's blessing, I moved on to a meditation that I hoped might come more naturally to me: the body scan. One of the key exercises in the MBSR course, it's 45 minutes of carefully guiding your attention up and down your body, trying to home in on the sensations in each isolated part. The exercise begins with your left big toe and, unfortunately in my case, it often ends there - as Kabat-Zinn likes to point out, while it's very difficult to learn to "fall awake" (become connected to the present moment), it's quite easy, when meditating, to fall asleep.

Still, I stuck with it. I liked the challenge of trying to harness my mind, and I was intrigued by studies showing that MBSR does even more than that. In 2003, for example, scientists from the University of Wisconsin-Madison examined a group that included alumni of Kabat-Zinn's eight-week course, and found that when they received flu shots, the meditators' immune systems produced more antibodies in response to the vaccine than did the non-meditators'. In a 1998 University of Massachusetts study, patients with psoriasis who meditated while receiving ultraviolet treatments for their skin healed four times faster than the control group - regardless of whether they had any previous meditation training. Researchers don't yet understand all the details of why changes like these occur, but one possible explanation is that this type of meditation reduces stress and helps people develop a more positive outlook, both of which have been shown to strengthen the body's immune system.

What's more, according to researcher Norman Farb, who studies meditation and experimental psychology at the University of Toronto, such mindfulness-based meditation can actually change the way you use your brain. As Farb explains it, most of the time, we (by which I mean your average nonmeditating American) respond to new stimuli and experiences automatically, based on how we think they'll affect us. A traffic jam isn't just cars; it's a problem that will make us late for dinner - so when we see a red wall of taillights in front of us, we become stressed-out. A pair of sneakers strewn in the doorway aren't just discarded shoes; they're an

annoying obstacle. So when we trip over them, we (by which I mean your average non-meditating Catherine) get irritated with our husbands. In other words, we don't just experience, we evaluate - and then respond without thinking (clogged highway = extra minutes stuck in the car = misery).

Typically this type of narrative processing takes place in the medial prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain behind the center of your forehead that coordinates complex behaviors and thoughts. (It's also the part of the brain that's being used when your mind starts to wander.) While it's possible to stifle this default way of thinking, trying to do so is like forcing yourself to go to the gym after years of inactivity - sure, you could fight your way through a step aerobics class if you had to, but wouldn't it be nicer to just eat Doritos on the couch?

Farb has found that people who have completed the eight-week MBSR training, on the other hand, are able to activate an entirely different part of the brain - the insula. Located deep inside your gray matter, the insula informs you of what's happening in the present moment without connecting the experience to a specific emotion. When you're thinking this way, a traffic jam doesn't seem like a problem; it's simply a bunch of cars on the road.

The point of meditation is not to stop you from having an emotional response to what's happening in your life - it's to avoid responding purely out of habit. Every situation, if you think about it, is an invitation for you to react in a certain way, but being mindful gives you the chance to decide how to RSVP. Does the sight of bumper-to-bumper traffic mean you have to get stressed-out? Or could you think of those extra 20 minutes as a chance to listen to a favorite CD? (Judging from the increase in my heart rate just from typing "bumper-to-bumper," I've got work to do.) Is it really worth getting angry at my husband over those misplaced sneakers? Or would I rather be thankful for the fact that he folded the laundry? On the flip side, if it turns out you do want to say yes to the invitation - by feeling happy about a new promotion, for example - you can use mindfulness to savor the moment more fully. It doesn't matter whether the experience is good or bad; mindfulness reminds you that when it comes to your reactions, you're the one in charge.

Still, Kabat-Zinn had warned me not to expect that anything magical would happen while I was meditating, or even that it would always feel enjoyable - a caveat that I appreciated whenever I grew irritable or uncomfortable, or found myself counting down the seconds during my daily practice. He also pointed out that meditation is not a quick fix; becoming - and staying - mindful is a lifelong process.

But as I continued experimenting each day with the guided exercises, I was happy to find that they did become easier. I developed some tricks for everyday life, too - like taking a few slow, conscious breaths to bring my attention back to the present moment, or choosing a particular sense to focus on. And I tried not to get annoyed when my mind wandered. As Kabat-Zinn says, stopping your brain from thinking would be like stopping the ocean's waves. It's more productive to simply observe the thoughts without getting carried away by them - and try to tap into the calm that exists beneath the surface.

By training myself to stay focused during the exercises, I've also gotten better at staying present when I'm not actively meditating. As a result, I've discovered that each day is dense with experiences - the breeze against my skin, the play of light on the grass, the sound of my husband's laugh - and if I want to stretch out time, all I need to do is notice them. When I find my mind racing ahead or am tempted to skip my daily practice, I remember another of Kabat-Zinn's sayings that affirms why this is an experiment I want to continue: Both figuratively and literally, we only have moments to live.

For a guide on how to cultivate mindfulness and suggestions for daily practice, download these meditation exercises. To buy Jon Kabat-Zinn's series of practice CDs, go to JonKabat-Zinn.com. To find a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program near you, go to the UMass Center for Mindfulness.

Catherine Price is a freelance journalist and author of *101 Places Not to See Before You Die* (Harper Paperbacks).

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source: http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Learn-to-Relax-With-Mindfulness-Meditatation

Practice Log - Week 1

FORMAL PRACTICE: Read The Body Scan Meditation. Do the Body Scan at least six times this week. Don't expect to feel anything in particular from this practice. In fact, give up all expectations about it. Just let your experience be your experience. *The link for the Body Scan, and for all the Guided Practices, can be found in the left-hand menu of the online course (palousemindfulness.com).*

Record on this form each time you do the Body Scan. In the comment field, put just a few words to remind you of your impressions of that particular body scan: what came up, how it felt, what you noticed in terms of physical sensations, emotions, thoughts, etc. ***It's important to write the comments immediately after the practice because it will be hard to reconstruct later.***

INFORMAL PRACTICE: Each day this week, see if you can bring mindful awareness to some otherwise routine activity. Before you go to bed each night, see if you can recall at least one example of "simple awareness" and record it on the Informal Practice Log (Simple Awareness).

…Date…	Formal Practice Comments (Body Scan)

Informal Practice Log (Simple Awareness) – Week 1

Each day this week, see if you can bring mindful awareness to some otherwise routine activity. For instance, washing the dishes, waiting in line, sitting in a boring meeting, walking from the car to your office. Remembering the raisin exercise, you could also use this as an opportunity to bring mindful awareness to eating, noting textures, smell, taste, touch, etc. Before you go to bed each night, see if you can recall at least one example of "simple awareness".

What was the situation? Where were you, who were you with, what were you doing?	What feelings, thoughts, sensations did you notice before you decided to experience this mindfully?	What feelings, thoughts and sensations did you notice WHILE doing this mindfully?	What did you learn from doing this?	What feelings, thoughts and sensations are you noticing NOW as you write this?
EXAMPLE *Washing dishes after dinner.*	*I was feeling hurried, shoulders and stomach tense, thinking "I wish Chris hadn't used so many dishes!"*	*I actually felt the warm water on my hands, enjoyed seeing the dishes sparkle, time seemed to stop for a moment.*	*Paying attention to physical sensations brings me into the here and now and a boring task becomes more interesting.*	*Feeling the support of the chair I'm sitting on, the feel of the pen, and feeling thankful that a long day is over.*

Week 2 - Attention and The Brain
Introduction to Sitting Meditation

The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice.

And because we fail to notice there is little we can do to change.

Until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds.

- R.D. Laing

In a Washington, DC Metro Station, Joshua Bell, one of the world's greatest violinists, played a beautiful, intricate, moving piece on a violin worth over 3 million dollars. During the 43 minutes he played, ***1,097 people walk by. Only seven stopped to listen***, and even those seven paused for only a few minutes. Two days before, Joshua Bell had played the same music to a sold-out audience in Boston where the seats averaged $100 each. His minimum fee for playing a public concert was $75,000. *How could so many people have walked by?*

That so few people stopped was not a demonstration of the cluelessness of these commuters, but how the busyness of our daily life can sometimes prevent us from noticing the beautiful and miraculous world all around us. ***How many amazingly beautiful things do we miss in a day, simply because of the pace of our lives and the intense focus on getting to the next thing?***

Videos
This week's videos include **The Monkey Business Illusion** by Daniel Simons, a cognitive scientist at University of Illinois, who illustrates both the incredible power of attention and the limitations inherent in our ability to perceive fully what is going on around us. Shauna Shapiro gives a compelling account of how meditation creates physical changes in the brain in **Mindful Meditation and the Brain**, and in **Measuring Mindfulness**, Judson Brewer correlates brain scan data with subjective experience during meditation. Finally, there are two short pieces by Jon Kabat-Zinn, **Life is RIght Now** and **Coming to Our Senses**, followed by an entertaining **All it takes is 10 Mindful Minutes** that includes juggling and a provocative challenge to do "nothing" for 10 minutes.

Readings
Sitting Meditation describes the practice we are introducing this week. **Joshua Bell Plays a $3,000,000 Violin (and almost nobody notices)** is a more detailed account of the "concert" described above. The next two readings, **How the Brain Rewires Itself** and **How Meditation Affects the Gray Matter of the Brain** discuss the growing body of research that demonstrates how meditative practice, even when done for a relatively short period of time (weeks not years), can physically alter the brain in positive and adaptive ways.

Daily Practices
This week, for the **formal practice**, we introduce the **Sitting Meditation**, using breath as the primary object of awareness, alternating this with the Body Scan (Sitting one day, Body Scan the next, etc.). It can seem that the goal of the Body Scan or a Sitting Meditation is to stay focused on exactly one thing at a time (ankle, wrist, breath) and that when you notice your awareness has moved (to a memory, internal narrative, sound and wonderings about the sound), that you are somehow failing. These practices will increase your ability to focus and concentrate, but they will also expand your ability to be with whatever comes into your field of experience, non-judgmentally. Your **NOTICING that your attention has moved to another object is, in itself, mindfulness in action**. Mindfulness includes both a concentrative attention (think laser beam) AND a capacity to perceive a larger picture (think floodlight). Both are important. Focusing on only one thing leaves the larger picture unseen, and maintaining only a broad focus does not allow exploration of the parts.

The **informal practice** this week is about becoming aware of how we experience and process pleasant events. They don't need to be major events, they can be something as simple as noticing the sun on your face or someone smiling at you. Just as we did last week, allow a few minutes before going to sleep to complete the informal practice log. ***Below are your materials for this week:***

Videos *[with most browsers, once you start the first video, the others will follow automatically]*

- **The Monkey Business Illusion** *- Daniel Simons [2 min]*
- **Mindful Meditation and the Brain** *- Shauna Shapiro [6 min]*
- **Measuring Mindfulness** *- Judson Brewer [7 min]*
- **Life is Right Now** *and* **Coming to Our Senses** *- Jon Kabat-Zinn [16 min total]*
- **All it takes is 10 Mindful Minutes** *- Andy Puddicombe [10 min]*

Reading *[print these for your manual or read them online]*

- **Sitting Meditation** *- Jon Kabat-Zinn [excerpted from Full Catastrophe Living]*
- **Joshua Bell plays a $3,000,000 violin** ***(and almost nobody notices)***
- **How the Brain Rewires Itself** *- Sharon Begley*
- **How Meditation Affects the Gray Matter of the Brain** *- David R. Hamilton, Ph.D.*

Practice sheets *[print PDF file or download WORD file to record your daily practices]*

Formal Practice ***[PDF]*** *[or* ***WORD format****]* - Body Scan, Sitting Meditation

Informal Practice ***[PDF]*** *[or* ***WORD format****]* - Pleasant Events Calendar

Supplementary materials related to this week's topic *[optional materials]*

Altered Traits *book by Daniel Goldman and Richard Davidson*

Why a Neuroscientist Would Study Meditation *video by Willoughby Britton [10 min]*

Neuroscientist Richard Davidson's Wake-Up Call *article/video by Huffington Post [5 min]*

How Meditation Can Reshape Our Brains *video by Sara Lazar [8 min]*

Mastering Your Own Mind *article by Katherine Ellison*

Positive Emotions and Mindfulness *video by Rachel Green [10 min]*

Sitting Meditation

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*Excerpted from **Full Catastrophe Living**, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.*

[for audio guidance, go to Sitting Meditation]

We call the heart of the formal meditation practice "sitting meditation" or simply "sitting." As with breathing, sitting is not foreign to anyone. We all sit, nothing special about that. But mindful sitting is different from ordinary sitting in the same way that mindful breathing is different from ordinary breathing. The difference, of course, is your awareness.

To practice sitting, we make a special time and place for non-doing. We consciously adopt an alert and relaxed body posture so that we can feel relatively comfortable without moving, and then we reside with calm acceptance in the present without trying to fill it with anything. You have already tried this in the various exercises in which you have watched your breathing.

It helps a lot to adopt an erect and dignified posture, with your head, neck, and back aligned vertically. This allows the breath to flow most easily. It is also the physical counterpart of the inner attitudes of self-reliance, self-acceptance, and alert attention that we are cultivating.

We usually practice the sitting meditation either on a chair or on the floor. If you choose a chair, the ideal is to use one that has a straight back and that allows your feet to be flat on the floor. We often recommend that if possible you sit away from the back of the chair so that you spine is self-supporting (see Figure A). But if you have to, leaning against the back of the chair is also fine. If you choose to sit on the floor, do so on firm, thick cushion which raises your buttocks off the floor three to six inches (a pillow folded over once or twice does nicely; or you can purchase a meditation cushion, or zafu, specifically for sitting).

There are a number of cross-legged sitting postures and kneeling postures that some people use when they sit on the floor. The one I use most is the so-called "Burmese" posture (see Figure B), which involves drawing one heel in close to the body and draping the other leg in front of it. Depending on how flexible your hips and knees and ankles are, your knees may or may not be touching the floor. It is somewhat more comfortable when they are. Others use a kneeling posture, placing the cushion between the feet (see Figure C)...

Whether you choose the floor or a chair, posture is very important in meditation practice. It can be an outward support in cultivating an inner attitude of dignity, patience, and self-acceptance. The main points to keep in mind about your posture are to try to keep the back, neck, and head aligned in the vertical, to relax the shoulders, and to do something comfortable with your hands. Usually we place them on the knees, as in Figure 2, or we rest them in the lap with the fingers of the left hand above the fingers of the right and the tips of the thumbs just touching each other.

When we have assumed the posture we have selected, we bring our attention to our breathing. We *feel* it come in, we *feel* it go out. We dwell in the present, moment by moment, breath by breath. It sounds simple, and it is. Full awareness on the inbreath, full awareness on the outbreath. Letting the breath just happen, observing it, feeling all the sensations, gross and subtle, associated with it.

It is simple but it is not easy. You can probably sit in front of a TV set or in a car on a trip for hours without giving it a thought. But when you try sitting in your house with nothing to watch

but your breath, your body and your mind, with nothing to entertain you and no place to go, the first thing you will probably notice is that at least part of you doesn't want to stay at this for very long. After perhaps a minute or two or three or four, either the body or the mind will have had enough and will demand something else, either to shift to some other posture or to do something else entirely. This is inevitable.

It is at this point that the work of self-observation gets particularly interesting and fruitful. Normally every time the mind moves, the body follows. If the mind is restless, the body is restless. If the mind wants a drink, the body goes to the kitchen sink or the refrigerator. If the mind says, "This is boring," then before you know it, the body is up and looking around for the next thing to do to keep the mind happy. It also works the other way around. If the body feels the slightest discomfort, it will shift to be more comfortable or it will call on the mind to find something else for it to do, and again, you will be standing up literally before you know it.

If you are genuinely committed to being more peaceful and relaxed, you might wonder why it is that your mind is so quick to be bored with being with itself and why your body is so restless and uncomfortable. You might wonder what is behind your impulses to fill each moment with something; what is behind your need to be entertained whenever you have an "empty" moment, to jump up and get going, to get back to doing and being busy? What drives the body and mind to reject being still?

In practicing meditation we don't try to answer such questions. Rather we just observe the impulse to get up or the thoughts that come into the mind. And instead of jumping up and doing whatever the mind decides is next on the agenda, we gently but firmly bring our attention back to the belly and to the breathing and just continue to watch the breath, moment by moment. We may ponder why the mind is like this for a moment or two, but basically we are practicing accepting each moment as it is without reacting to *how* it is...

By doing so you are training your mind to be less reactive and more stable. You are making each moment count. You are taking each moment as it comes, not valuing any one above any other. In this way you are cultivating your natural ability to concentrate your mind. By repeatedly bringing your attention back to the breath each time it wanders off, concentration builds and deepens, much as muscles develop by repetitively lifting weights. Working regularly with (not struggling against) the resistance of your own mind builds inner strength. At the same time you are also developing patience and practicing being non-judgmental. You are not giving yourself a hard time because your mind left the breath. You simply and matter-of-factly return it to the breath, gently but firmly...

Mindfulness does not involve pushing thoughts away or walling yourself off from them to quiet your mind. We are not trying to stop our thoughts as they cascade through the mind. We are simply making room for them, observing them as thoughts, and letting them be, using the breath as our anchor or "home base" for observing, for reminding us to stay focused and calm.

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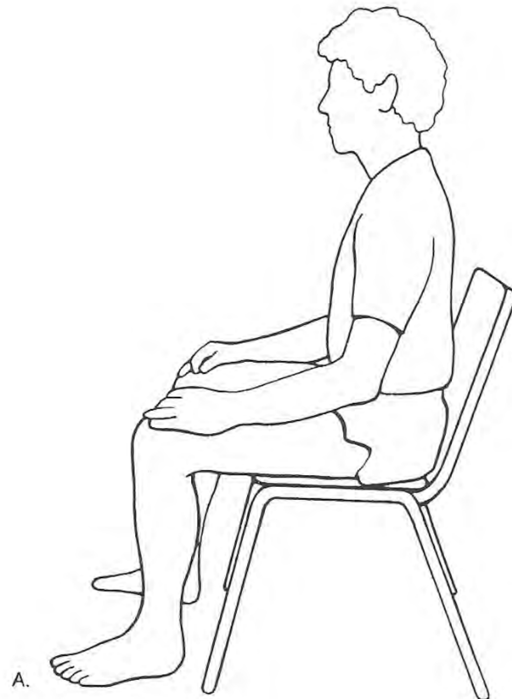

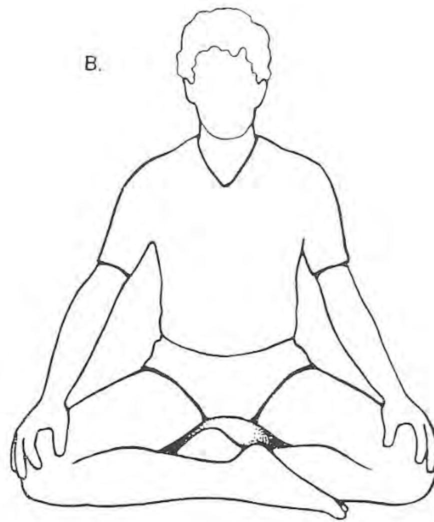

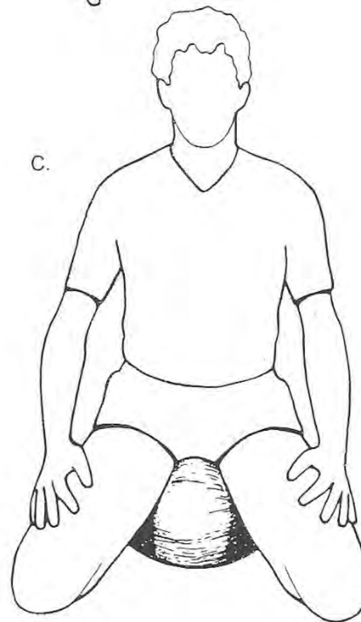

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NOTE: *If you choose to sit on the floor, one of the most common problems is not having your hips high enough, causing strain on the back and decreased blood flow in feet and legs. Try using more cushions than you think you need, or even a meditation bench, so that your hips are 6-12" higher than your knees.*

Joshua Bell Plays a $3,000,000 Violin

…and almost nobody notices

In a Washington, DC Metro Station, Joshua Bell, one of the world's greatest violinists, played a beautiful, intricate, moving piece on a violin worth over 3 million dollars. During the 43 minutes he played, ***1,097 people walked by. Only seven stopped to listen***, and even those seven paused for only a few minutes. Three days before, Joshua Bell had played the same music to a sold-out audience in Boston where the seats averaged $100 each. His minimum fee for playing a public concert was $75,000.

This is a true story, a social experiment organized by journalist Gene Weingarten in 2007. For more about this, see his Washington Post article, Pearls Before Breakfast, and Judy Woodruff's newscast, both of which have video clips of the performance that day. Here is a summary of Bell's 43-minute "concert":

> ***After about 3 minutes***, a middle-aged man noticed that there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds, and then he hurried on to meet his schedule. ***At 4 minutes***, the violinist received his first dollar. A woman threw money in the hat and, without stopping, continued to walk. ***At 6 minutes***, a young man leaned against the wall to listen to him, then looked at his watch and started to walk again. ***At 10 minutes***, a 3-year old boy stopped, but his mother tugged him along hurriedly. The kid stopped to look at the violinist again, but the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head the whole time. This action was repeated by several other children, but every parent - without exception - forced their children to move on quickly. ***After 43 minutes, he finished playing and silence took over. No one noticed and no one applauded.***

To be fair, the "concert" was conducted during rush hour in of one of the busiest metros in the world. That so few people stopped was not a demonstration of the cluelessness of these commuters, but how ***the busyness of our daily life can sometimes prevent us from noticing the beautiful and miraculous world all around us***.

Every moment of every day, if we truly look, there is something extraordinary to pay attention to: the stunning earrings worn by the grocery clerk, a child's unself-conscious laugh, the color of the sky, or the miracle of our own breath.

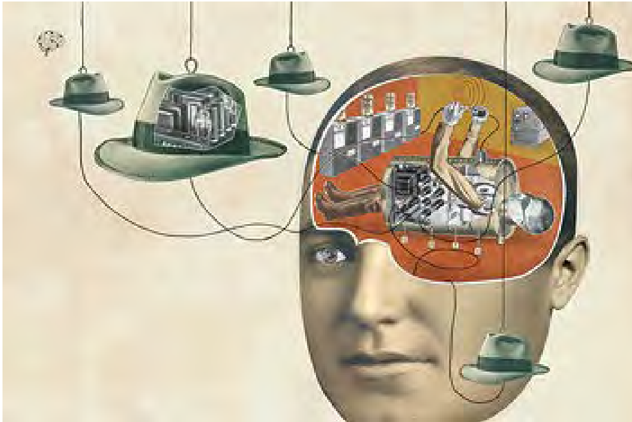
This is not to say that we should stand in place, slack-jawed, in such awe of the beauty around us that we make ourselves late to work or forget to pick up our kids after school. It does suggest that IF we stop to pay attention, even for a moment, there is always something amazing happening. We don't have to wait for Joshua Bell to play a concert in the metro.

"There are only two ways to live your life.
One is as though nothing is a miracle.
The other is as though everything is a miracle."
- Einstein

TIME Magazine
Friday, Jan 19, 2007

The Brain: How The Brain Rewires Itself

by Sharon Begley



It was a fairly modest experiment, as these things go, with volunteers trooping into the lab at Harvard Medical School to learn and practice a little five-finger piano exercise. Neuroscientist Alvaro Pascual-Leone instructed the members of one group to play as fluidly as they could, trying to keep to the metronome's 60 beats per minute. Every day for five days, the volunteers practiced for two hours. Then they took a test.

At the end of each day's practice session, they sat beneath a coil of wire that sent a brief magnetic pulse into the motor cortex of their brain, located in a strip running from the crown of the head toward each ear. The so-called transcranial-magnetic-stimulation (TMS) test allows scientists to infer the function of neurons just beneath the coil. In the piano players, the TMS mapped how much of the motor cortex controlled the finger movements needed for the piano exercise. What the scientists found was that after a week of practice, the stretch of motor cortex devoted to these finger movements took over surrounding areas like dandelions on a suburban lawn.

The finding was in line with a growing number of discoveries at the time showing that greater use of a particular muscle causes the brain to devote more cortical real estate to it. But Pascual-Leone did not stop there. He extended the experiment by having another group of volunteers merely think about practicing the piano exercise. They played the simple piece of music in their head, holding their hands still while imagining how they would move their fingers. Then they too sat beneath the TMS coil.

When the scientists compared the TMS data on the two groups--those who actually tickled the ivories and those who only imagined doing so--they glimpsed a revolutionary idea about the brain: the ability of mere thought to alter the physical structure and function of our gray matter. For what the TMS revealed was that the region of motor cortex that controls the piano-playing fingers also expanded in the brains of volunteers who imagined playing the music--just as it had in those who actually played it.

"Mental practice resulted in a similar reorganization" of the brain, Pascual-Leone later wrote. If his results hold for other forms of movement (and there is no reason to think they don't), then mentally practicing a golf swing or a forward pass or a swimming turn could lead to mastery with less physical practice. Even more profound, the discovery showed that mental training had the power to change the physical structure of the brain.

OVERTHROWING THE DOGMA

For decades, the prevailing dogma in neuroscience was that the adult human brain is essentially immutable, hardwired, fixed in form and function, so that by the time we reach adulthood we are pretty much stuck with what we have. Yes, it can create (and lose) synapses, the connections between neurons that encode memories and learning. And it can suffer injury and degeneration. But this view held that if genes and development dictate that one cluster of neurons will process signals from the eye and another cluster will move the fingers of the right hand, then they'll do that and nothing else until the day you

die. There was good reason for lavishly illustrated brain books to show the function, size and location of the brain's structures in permanent ink.

The doctrine of the unchanging human brain has had profound ramifications. For one thing, it lowered expectations about the value of rehabilitation for adults who had suffered brain damage from a stroke or about the possibility of fixing the pathological wiring that underlies psychiatric diseases. And it implied that other brain-based fixities, such as the happiness set point that, according to a growing body of research, a person returns to after the deepest tragedy or the greatest joy, are nearly unalterable.

But research in the past few years has overthrown the dogma. In its place has come the realization that the adult brain retains impressive powers of "neuroplasticity"--the ability to change its structure and function in response to experience. These aren't minor tweaks either. Something as basic as the function of the visual or auditory cortex can change as a result of a person's experience of becoming deaf or blind at a young age. Even when the brain suffers a trauma late in life, it can rezone itself like a city in a frenzy of urban renewal. If a stroke knocks out, say, the neighborhood of motor cortex that moves the right arm, a new technique called constraint-induced movement therapy can coax next-door regions to take over the function of the damaged area. The brain can be rewired.

The first discoveries of neuroplasticity came from studies of how changes in the messages the brain receives through the senses can alter its structure and function. When no transmissions arrive from the eyes in someone who has been blind from a young age, for instance, the visual cortex can learn to hear or feel or even support verbal memory. When signals from the skin or muscles bombard the motor cortex or the somatosensory cortex (which processes touch), the brain expands the area that is wired to move, say, the fingers. In this sense, the very structure of our brain--the relative size of different regions, the strength of connections between them, even their functions--reflects the lives we have led. Like sand on a beach, the brain bears the footprints of the decisions we have made, the skills we have learned, the actions we have taken.

SCRATCHING A PHANTOM LIMB

An extreme example of how changes in the input reaching the brain can alter its structure is the silence that falls over the somatosensory cortex after its owner has lost a limb. Soon after a car crash took Victor Quintero's left arm from just above the elbow, he told neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran of the University of California at San Diego that he could still feel the missing arm. Ramachandran decided to investigate. He had Victor sit still with his eyes closed and lightly brushed the teenager's left cheek with a cotton swab.

Where do you feel that? Ramachandran asked. On his left cheek, Victor answered--and the back of his missing hand. Ramachandran stroked another spot on the cheek. Where do you feel that? On his absent thumb, Victor replied. Ramachandran touched the skin between Victor's nose and mouth. His missing index finger was being brushed, Victor said. A spot just below Victor's left nostril caused the boy to feel a tingling on his left pinkie. And when Victor felt an itch in his phantom hand, scratching his lower face relieved the itch. In people who have lost a limb, Ramachandran concluded, the brain reorganizes: the strip of cortex that processes input from the face takes over the area that originally received input from a now missing hand. That's why touching Victor's face caused brain to "feel" his missing hand.

Similarly, because the regions of cortex that handle sensations from the feet abut those that process sensations from the surface of the genitals, some people who have lost a leg report feeling phantom sensations during sex. Ramachandran's was the first report of a living being knowingly experiencing the results of his brain rewiring.

THINKING ABOUT THINKING

As scientists probe the limits of neuroplasticity, they are finding that mind sculpting can occur even without input from the outside world. The brain can change as a result of the thoughts we think, as with Pascual-Leone's virtual piano players. This has important implications for health: something as seemingly insubstantial as a thought can affect the very stuff of the brain, altering neuronal connections in a way that can treat mental illness

or, perhaps, lead to a greater capacity for empathy and compassion. It may even dial up the supposedly immovable happiness set point.

In a series of experiments, for instance, Jeffrey Schwartz and colleagues at the University of California, Los Angeles, found that cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) can quiet activity in the circuit that underlies obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), just as drugs do. Schwartz had become intrigued with the therapeutic potential of mindfulness meditation, the Buddhist practice of observing one's inner experiences as if they were happening to someone else.

When OCD patients were plagued by an obsessive thought, Schwartz instructed them to think, "My brain is generating another obsessive thought. Don't I know it is just some garbage thrown up by a faulty circuit?" After 10 weeks of mindfulness-based therapy, 12 out of 18 patients improved significantly. Before-and-after brain scans showed that activity in the orbital frontal cortex, the core of the OCD circuit, had fallen dramatically and in exactly the way that drugs effective against OCD affect the brain. Schwartz called it "self-directed neuroplasticity," concluding that "the mind can change the brain."

The same is true when cognitive techniques are used to treat depression. Scientists at the University of Toronto had 14 depressed adults undergo CBT, which teaches patients to view their own thoughts differently--to see a failed date, for instance, not as proof that "I will never be loved" but as a minor thing that didn't work out. Thirteen other patients received paroxetine (the generic form of the antidepressant Paxil). All experienced comparable improvement after treatment. Then the scientists scanned the patients' brains. "Our hypothesis was, if you do well with treatment, your brain will have changed in the same way no matter which treatment you received," said Toronto's Zindel Segal.

But no. Depressed brains responded differently to the two kinds of treatment--and in a very interesting way. CBT muted overactivity in the frontal cortex, the seat of reasoning, logic and higher thought as well as of endless rumination about that disastrous date. Paroxetine, by contrast, raised activity there. On the other hand, CBT raised activity in the hippocampus of the limbic system, the brain's emotion center. Paroxetine lowered activity there. As Toronto's Helen Mayberg explains, "Cognitive therapy targets the cortex, the thinking brain, reshaping how you process information and changing your thinking pattern. It decreases rumination, and trains the brain to adopt different thinking circuits." As with Schwartz's OCD patients, thinking had changed a pattern of activity--in this case, a pattern associated with depression--in the brain.

HAPPINESS AND MEDITATION

Could thinking about thoughts in a new way affect not only such pathological brain states as OCD and depression but also normal activity? To find out, neuroscientist Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin at Madison turned to Buddhist monks, the Olympic athletes of mental training. Some monks have spent more than 10,000 hours of their lives in meditation. Earlier in Davidson's career, he had found that activity greater in the left prefrontal cortex than in the right correlates with a higher baseline level of contentment. The relative left/right activity came to be seen as a marker for the happiness set point, since people tend to return to this level no matter whether they win the lottery or lose their spouse. If mental training can alter activity characteristic of OCD and depression, might meditation or other forms of mental training, Davidson wondered, produce changes that underlie enduring happiness and other positive emotions? "That's the hypothesis," he says, "that we can think of emotions, moods and states such as compassion as trainable mental skills."

With the help and encouragement of the Dalai Lama, Davidson recruited Buddhist monks to go to Madison and meditate inside his functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) tube while he measured their brain activity during various mental states. For comparison, he used undergraduates who had had no experience with meditation but got a crash course in the basic techniques. During the generation of pure compassion, a standard Buddhist meditation technique, brain regions that keep track of what is self and what is other became quieter, the fMRI showed, as if the subjects--experienced meditators as well as novices--opened their minds and hearts to others.

More interesting were the differences between the so-called adepts and the novices. In the former, there was significantly greater activation in a brain network linked to empathy and maternal love. Connections from the frontal regions, so active during compassion meditation, to the brain's emotional regions seemed to become stronger with more years of meditation practice, as if the brain had forged more robust connections between thinking and feeling.

But perhaps the most striking difference was in an area in the left prefrontal cortex--the site of activity that marks happiness. While the monks were generating feelings of compassion, activity in the left prefrontal swamped activity in the right prefrontal (associated with negative moods) to a degree never before seen from purely mental activity. By contrast, the undergraduate controls showed no such differences between the left and right prefrontal cortex. This suggests, says Davidson, that the positive state is a skill that can be trained.

For the monks as well as the patients with depression or OCD, the conscious act of thinking about their thoughts in a particular way rearranged the brain. The discovery of neuroplasticity, in particular the power of the mind to change the brain, is still too new for scientists, let alone the rest of us, to grasp its full meaning. But even as it offers new therapies for illnesses of the mind, it promises something more fundamental: a new understanding of what it means to be human.

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THE HUFFINGTON POST
October 7, 2010

How Meditation Affects the Gray Matter of the Brain

by David R. Hamilton, Ph. D.

I like to meditate. It makes me feel at ease and I am convinced that the sense of calm it produces helps me to handle the daily challenges of my life. There are, of course, times when I don't keep up my daily practice of sitting quietly for 10 or 15 minutes, but these are the times in my life when I experience more stress.

Stress affects everyone. I don't know a single person who doesn't get stressed. But unfortunately, it plays a major role in illness. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in fact, up to 90 percent of doctor visits in the U.S. may be stress related. Meditation is an antidote to stress, just as an aspirin can counter a headache. A regular practice can be a major boost to health.

It calms the nervous system. It's good for the immune system. It's also good for the heart; it helps produce nitric oxide (not nitrous oxide -- that's laughing gas!) in the arteries, dilating them and reducing blood pressure. It also smooths heart rhythms.

But thanks to an explosion of brain research we now know that it also physically impacts our gray matter.

One study to show this was led by scientists at the Center for Functionally Integrative Neuroscience at Aarhus University in Denmark. Comparing MRI scans of the brains of meditators with the brains of non-meditators, they showed that meditation causes actual physical changes in the gray matter of the lower brain stem. Meditation makes the gray matter grow.

In another study, scientists Giuseppe Pagoni and Milos Cekic, from the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Emory University in Atlanta, compared the volume of gray matter in the brains of people performing Zen meditations with another group who were not meditators.

The volume of our gray matter normally reduces as we get older and this is what the scientists found in the group of non-meditators. But for the meditators, their gray matter hadn't reduced at all with age. According to the scientists, meditation had a 'neuroprotective' effect on the meditators: It protected the brain from some of the effects of aging.

This mirrors some 2008 Harvard research that analyzed the genes of meditators against non-meditators. It was the first study of its kind to measure the genetic impact of meditation and found that 2,209 genes were differently activated in long-term meditation practitioners compared with non-meditators. And even looking at novice meditators, they found that 1,561 genes were affected after only eight weeks of meditation practice. They concluded that the genetic effects of meditation may have long-term physiological consequences, one of which was a slowing down of the rate of aging.

We have all heard the stories of people under extreme stress whose hair turns white in a matter of weeks. We know that stress can speed up aging. So why should it be a surprise to us that a technique to combat stress should be able to slow aging?

There are many different forms of meditation. A study at Massachusetts General Hospital examined the impact of the Buddhist 'Insight' meditation on the brain. Insight meditation is a technique of moving our attention over the body or focusing on our breathing. The study found that it caused an increase in thickness of the prefrontal cortex in the brain, the part just above the eyes and associated with attention.

Several areas of the brain are active when we meditate, but most pronounced is the prefrontal cortex because when we meditate we are focusing our attention on something -- whether that be the

body, our breathing, a word, a candle or even a spiritual ideal. When this area is active, just like a muscle being exercised, it grows.

Neuroscientists use this analogy to describe the way the brain changes. When we exercise a muscle it becomes larger and denser with muscle mass. In a similar way, when we exercise any part of the brain, which we do when we meditate, it becomes larger and denser with neural mass -- gray matter. The phenomenon is known as neuroplasticity and describes how the brain actually changes throughout life.

When I attended university I learned that the brain is hardwired once we reach young adulthood. The analogy used is that when we are young, the brain is a bit like dough, which can be kneaded into various forms, but when we reach young adulthood we put the dough in the oven and it comes out with a bread crust on it. The brain is then 'hardwired,' we were taught.

But this analogy has since been abandoned. We now know that we never put the dough in the oven. Our gray matter is ever-changing as we experience life; as we learn, walk, run, dance, and when we concentrate, as we do when we meditate.

Our gray matter is changing until the last seconds of our life. It grows even with our last breath.

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source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-r-hamilton-phd/how-meditation-affects-th_b_751233.html

Practice Log - Week 2

FORMAL PRACTICE: Read the description of the Sitting Meditation. Between now and next week, practice at least six times, alternating the Sitting Meditation with the Body Scan. As before, don't expect anything in particular from either of these exercises. See if you can give up all expectations about it and just let your experience be your experience. *The link for the Sitting Meditation, the Body Scan, and for all the Guided Practices, can be found in the left-hand menu of the online course (palousemindfulness.com).*

Record on this form each time you practice. In the comment field, put just a few words to remind you of your impressions: what came up, how it felt, what you noticed in terms of physical sensations, emotions, thoughts, etc. ***It's important to write the comments immediately because it will be hard to reconstruct later.***

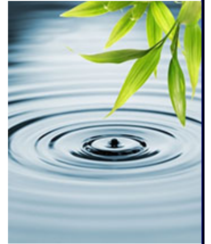
INFORMAL PRACTICE: At the end of the day before you go to bed, recall one specific pleasant event and record it on the Pleasant Events Calendar.

...Date...	Formal Practice Comments (include whether Body Scan or Sitting)

Informal Practice Log (Pleasant Events Calendar) – Week 2

What was the experience?	Were you aware of the pleasant feelings *while* the event was happening?	How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?	What moods, feelings, and thoughts accompanied this event?	What thoughts, sensations, emotions do you notice now as you write this down?
EXAMPLE *Heading home after work – stopping, hearing a bird sing.*	*Yes.*	*Lightness across the face, aware of shoulders dropping, uplift of corners of mouth.*	*Relief, pleasure, "That's good", "Pretty song", "it's so nice to be outside".*	*It's such a small thing but I'm glad I noticed it. I get a warm feeling and a tingling in my body..*

Week 3 - Dealing with Thoughts
Introduction to Yoga



The practice of meditation is not really about establishing inner stillness...

The moments of stillness are one of meditation's byproducts, not the practice itself.

- Erik Wikstrom

At this point in your practice, you may be noticing just how busy the mind is, with replays of past events, expectations/fears about the future, or evaluations of present experience (I like this, don't like that, when will this be over, etc.). It can seem that the object of meditation is to get rid of all thoughts and distractions, and when that isn't happening, you may feel like you are failing at meditation and/or the meditation can turn into a struggle, wanting your experience to be different than it is. In fact, the kind of meditation you are learning is more about working skillfully with ***any*** internal or external experience, and isn't really about "getting rid" of thoughts and distractions. In fact, it can be said that wandering thoughts are the weights that train the muscles of the mind.

Videos

It's common for there to be a sense of pushing oneself in meditation, and the first video, **Non-Striving**, addresses the possibility of taking the striving out of meditation (and life!). The second video, **Attention, Intention, Attitude**, explores the attitude we take toward ourselves in meditation, which is often harsh, and the possibility of being gentler with ourselves. In the last two videos, **Your Thoughts are Bubbles** and **Dealing with Thoughts (in life and meditation)**, Jon Kabat-Zinn and Tara Brach each talk about the idea that meditation is not about getting rid of thoughts, but about changing our relationship with them.

Reading

The reading list this week begins with **Mindful Yoga** by Jon Kabat-Zinn. *Even if you are an experienced yoga practitioner, it's important to read this before beginning the Yoga practice that begins this week.* In **Meditation: It's Not What You Think**, Jon Kabat-Zinn points out that while meditation can often be accompanied by peace and relaxation, "*meditation is not relaxation spelled differently*", and as Erik Wikstrom says in the quote above, *"The moments of stillness are one of meditation's byproducts, not the practice itself."* The last three brief articles, by Wes Nisker and Jack Kornfield, explore more deeply the relationship between meditation and thoughts.

Daily Practices

For the **formal practice** this week, we introduce **Mindful Yoga** (Yoga 1) into your 30 minute practice, alternating with the Sitting Meditation and choosing one day to do a Body Scan. This is all outlined in your Week 3 Practice Log, below. ***Even if you are an experienced yoga practitioner, be sure to read "Mindful Yoga" in the reading below, before beginning the yoga practice. Mindful Yoga is different than many traditional yoga practices in that there is less of a focus on the exact posture achieved and more focus on body/mind awareness.***

The **informal practice** is about becoming aware of how we experience and process unpleasant events. Just as in previous weeks, allow a few minutes before going to sleep to complete the informal practices log. *Below are your materials for this week:*

Videos

- **Non-Striving** *- Jon Kabat-Zinn (3 min)*
- **Attention, Intention, Attitude** *- Shauna Shapiro (16 min)*
- **Your Thoughts are Bubbles** *- Jon Kabat-Zinn (5 min)*
- **Dealing with Thoughts (in life and in meditation)** *- Tara Brach (20 min)*

Reading

- **Mindful Yoga** *- Jon Kabat-Zinn*
- **Meditation - It's Not What You Think** *- Jon Kabat-Zinn*
- **I Hadn't Thought of That** *- Wes Nisker*
- **Your Mind: Friend or Foe?** *- Jack Kornfield*
- **The Reality Below Thoughts** *- Jack Kornfield*

Practice sheets

- **Formal Practice** ***[PDF]*** *[or **WORD format**]* - Mindful Yoga (Yoga 1), Body Scan, Sitting
- **Informal Practice** ***[PDF]*** *[or **WORD format**]* - Unpleasant Events Calendar

Supplementary materials related to this week's topic

- **"Letting Go" in Meditation** *video by Peter Russell and Shauna Shapiro (15 min)*
- **Thoughts: "Real, but not True"** *video by Tara Brach (26 min)*
- **Transform Your Mind, Change Your Brain** *video by Richard Davidson [65 min]*
- **Mindfulness, the Mind, and Addictive Behavior** *video by Judson Brewer [20 min]*
- **Autobiography in Five Short Chapters** *one-page "autobiography" by Portia Nelson*

Mindful Yoga

© 1990 Jon Kabat-Zinn

*Excerpted from **Full Catastrophe Living**, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.*

[for video guidance, go to Yoga 1 or Yoga 2]

As you have probably gathered by now, bringing mindfulness to any activity transforms it into a kind of meditation. Mindfulness dramatically amplifies the probability that any activity in which you are engaged will result in an expansion of your perspective and of your understanding of who you are. Much of the practice is simply a remembering, a reminding yourself to be fully awake, not lost in waking sleep or enshrouded in the veils of your thinking mind...

Mindful hatha yoga is the third major formal meditation technique that we practice in the stress clinic, along with the body scan and sitting meditation... *Yoga* is a Sanskrit word that literally means "yoke." The practice of yoga is the practice of yoking together or unifying body and mind, which really means penetrating into the experience of them not being separate in the first place. You can also think of it as experiencing the unity or connectedness between the individual and the universe as a whole...

We have already seen that *posture* is very important in the sitting meditation and that positioning your body in certain ways can have immediate effects on your mental and emotional state. Being aware of your body language and what it reveals about your attitudes and feelings can help you to change your attitudes and feelings just by changing your physical posture...

When you practice the yoga, you should be on the lookout for the many ways, some quite subtle, in which your perspective on your body, your thoughts, and your whole sense of self can change when you adopt different postures on purpose and stay in them for a time, paying full attention from moment to moment. Practicing in this way enriches the inner work enormously and takes it far beyond the physical benefits that come naturally with the stretching and strengthening...

This is a far cry from most exercise and aerobic classes and even many yoga classes, which only focus on what the body is doing. These approaches tend to emphasize progress. They like to push, push, push. Not much attention is paid to the art of non-doing and non-striving in exercise classes, nor to the present moment for that matter, nor to the mind...

Work at or within your body's limits at all times, with the intention of observing and exploring the boundary between what your body can do and where it says, "Stop for now." ***Never stretch beyond this limit to the point of pain***. Some discomfort is inevitable when you are working at your limits, but you will need to learn how to enter this healthy "stretching zone" slowly and mindfully so that you are nourishing your body, not damaging it as you explore your limits. In the stress clinic, the ground rule is that every individual has to consciously take responsibility for reading his or her own body's signals while doing the yoga. This means listening carefully to what your body is telling you and honoring its messages, erring on the side of being conservative. No one can listen to your body for you.

© 1990 Jon Kabat-Zinn, **Full Catastrophe Living**, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

NOTE: If you have physical limitations that are so serious that it would be difficult or damaging for you to even begin one or more of the practices, it is sufficient to simply vividly imagine doing the movements and/or postures. *Neurologists tell us that vividly imagining physical movement involves the same motor neurons that come into play as when we actually physically move.*

Meditation: It's Not What You Think

© 2005 Jon Kabat-Zinn

*Excerpted from **Coming to Our Senses,** Hyperion Press, NY, NY*

It might be good to clarify a few common misunderstandings about meditation right off the bat. First, meditation is best thought of as a way of being, rather than a technique or a collection of techniques.

I'll say it again.

Meditation is a way of being, not a technique.

This doesn't mean that there aren't methods and techniques associated with meditation practice.

There are. In fact, there are hundreds of them, and we will be making good use of some of them. But without understanding that all techniques are orienting vehicles pointing at ways of being, ways of being in relationship to the present moment and to one's own mind and one's own experience, we can easily get lost in techniques and in our misguided but entirely understandable attempts to use them to get somewhere else and experience some special result or state that we think is the goal of it all...

Second, meditation is not relaxation spelled differently. Perhaps I should say that again as well: Meditation is not relaxation spelled differently.

That doesn't mean that meditation is not frequently accompanied by profound states of relaxation and by deep feelings of wellbeing. Of course it is, or can be, sometimes. But mindfulness meditation is the embrace of any and all mind states in awareness, without preferring one to another. From the point of view of mindfulness practice, pain or anguish, or for that matter boredom or impatience or frustration or anxiety or tension in the body are all equally valid objects of our attention if we find them arising in the present moment, each a rich opportunity for insight and learning, and potentially, for liberation, rather than signs that our meditation practice is not "succeeding" because we are not feeling relaxed or experiencing bliss in some moment.

We might say that meditation is really a way of being appropriate to the circumstances one finds oneself in, in any and every moment. If we are caught up in the preoccupations of our own mind, in that moment we cannot be present in an appropriate way or perhaps at all. We will bring an agenda of some kind to whatever we say or do or think, even if we don't know it...

For meditation, and especially mindfulness meditation, is not the throwing of a switch and catapulting yourself anywhere, nor is it entertaining certain thoughts and getting rid of others. Nor is it making your mind blank or willing yourself to be peaceful or relaxed. It is really an inward gesture that inclines the heart and mind (seen as one seamless whole) toward a full-spectrum awareness of the present moment just as it is, accepting whatever is happening simply because it is already happening...

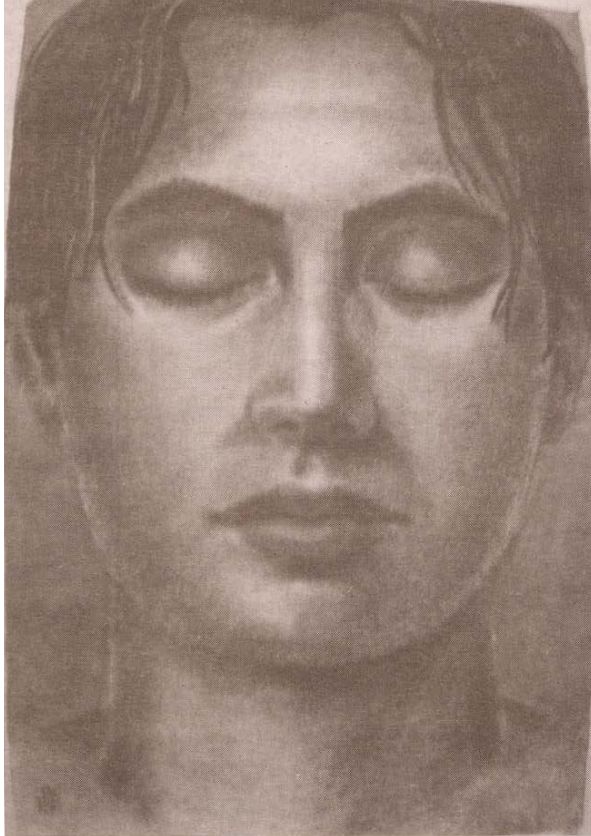
Meditation is not about trying to get anywhere else. It is about allowing yourself to be exactly where you are and as you are, and for the world to be exactly as it is in this moment as well. This is not so easy, since there is always something that we can rightly find fault with if we stay inside our thinking. And so there tends to be great resistance on the part of the mind and body to settle into things just as they are, even for a moment. That resistance to what is may be even more compounded if we are meditating because we hope that by doing so, we can effect change, make things different, improve our own lives, and contribute to improving the lot of the world...

So, from the point of view of awareness, any state of mind is a meditative state. Anger or sadness is just as interesting and useful and valid to look into as enthusiasm or delight, and far more valuable than a blank mind, a mind that is insensate, out of touch. Anger, fear, terror, sadness, resentment, impatience, enthusiasm, delight, confusion, disgust, contempt, envy, rage, lust, even dullness, doubt, and torpor, in fact all mind states and body states are occasions to know ourselves better if we can stop, look, and listen, in other words, if we can come to our senses and be intimate with what presents itself in awareness in any and every moment. The astonishing thing, so counterintuitive, is that nothing else needs to happen. We can give up trying to make something special occur. In letting go of wanting something special to occur, maybe we can realize that something very special is already occurring, and is always occurring, namely life emerging in each moment *as awareness itself*.

INQUIRING MIND
Spring 2007

I Hadn't Thought of That

by Wes Nisker


Meditation (c) 2007 Jan Rae www.janraepaintings.com

After years of meditation practice, one of the most significant changes in my life has been my relationship to my mind. We're still living together, of course, and we remain friends. But my mind and I are no longer codependent. I am taking back control of myself.

The change in our relationship started when I finally admitted that my mind had a thinking problem. I was a heavy thinker, often starting with two or three thoughts the minute I got up in the morning and then continuing to think throughout the day until bedtime. My mind produced thought after thought, about love and work, of course, along with existential thoughts and trashy ones, thoughts about clothing, food, music, politics. One subject after another, on and on, and all of it centered around me, which became embarrassing as well as oppressive. The thinking would not let me "be" – either at ease, without worry or in the moment. I began to see my mind as an insecure, selfish, nagging inner bitch who was stealing my happiness and destroying my life. For our mutual survival, I decided to seek an intervention.

At first I tried analysis, with hopes of uncovering the psychological origin of my mind's need to think; later I got into some Gestalt screaming, flailing and crying, which only temporarily stopped the flow of thinking; and intermittently I used drugs, trying to "blow my mind" by short-circuiting the neural wiring. Finally, I tried meditation.

It turned out that the goal of meditation was not to stop thinking, as I had assumed, but rather to expose my mind to itself. Before meditation I was completely focused on the content of thoughts, how to manipulate them and extract meaning from them. That is what I was graded on in school and what our culture considers important. But nobody had taught me how to look at the process of thinking itself or at the intrinsic nature of thought. As the Tibetan sage Tulku Urgen said:

The stream of thoughts surges through the mind of an ordinary person, who will have no knowledge whatsoever about who is thinking, where the thought comes from, and where the thought disappears. The person will be totally and mindlessly carried away by one thought after another!

Let's be clear: thinking is not bad, or some kind of roadblock to enlightenment. In fact, thinking is an essential tool of our well-being and even our survival. (Perhaps a warning sign should be put up at meditation centers advising all who enter on the path: "Give up thinking at your own risk.")

Indeed, thinking is fabulous. Our genius as a species is the ability to create complex symbols, agree on their meaning, and use them to encode our knowledge and describe our plans. The thinking function allows us to compute, reason and imagine, and perhaps most important of all, to share our understanding with each other in the form of speech or writing. We can even record our

thinking and pass it on to future generations. ("Hold that thought!")

Unfortunately, as a species we have grown to value thinking to the exclusion of other aspects of our being. The more we become identified with our thoughts, the more we are lost in our individual narrative, disconnected from what we have in common with other humans and other forms of life. We have turned our sense of self over to our thinking mind, leaving us lost in thought, disembodied. Especially in Western culture, heads are us.

Although we remain convinced that our ability to think somehow makes us "the chosen species," existentially superior to the rest of creation, in the modern era this belief is being challenged. In his secret notebooks, Charles Darwin wondered, "Why is thought – which is a secretion of the brain – deemed to be so much more wonderful than, say, gravity, which is a property of matter? It is only our arrogance, our admiration of ourselves." Making the same point, Stephen Jay Gould wondered if an intelligent octopus would go around being so proud of its eight arms.

Meanwhile, the new cognitive sciences are putting thought in its proper place in the scheme of things. Research into our brain and nervous system reveals that most of our interpretation of the world as well as our decision making takes place on what Daniel Dennett calls the "sub-personal" level, without a rational, conscious, thinking self directing or guiding the process. In fact, brain science reveals that thinking comes about quite late in the cognitive sequence, apparently in order to weave our experience into the ongoing story we tell about ourselves. As one neuroscientist put it, "We don't have a rational mind so much as we have a rationalizing mind." Our thinking is, for the most part, an afterthought.

Do we overvalue our thinking? The scientists seem to "think" so. Those who study cognition say it is a way of organizing experience, while the evolutionary scientists see it as an adaptation, something that evolved like the eye or the opposable thumb. Great tool, folks, but not the be-all and end-all of creation.

The Buddha would appear to agree with Darwin and the scientists. He regarded the mind as a sixth sense, and did not seem to give thinking any more or less importance than sight or hearing. Like the other five senses, our thinking is simply another way of reading and interpreting the world. And as is true with other senses, the main job of the thinking mind is survival.

Just try to imagine what humans were thinking 20,000 years ago. I would guess it was something along the lines of "I wonder who is going on the hunt tomorrow" or "The gods want me to put red clay on my face to make the enemy run away" or "Honey, who is watching the fire tonight?" Now our thoughts are about our medical insurance, or the news from around the world, or our love like (aka, passing on our genes), and as the song says, "It's still the same old story." On most of our interior human screens, in any given era, is another episode of Survivor.

When I regard thinking as a survival tool, it helps to demystify and depersonalize the process. I see my thoughts as somewhat generic, as endemic to my species, not as "I," "me" or "mine."

So after years of meditation, and with the help of modern science, I now have some understanding of both the source and nature of thought – and have gained a degree of freedom. I no longer have to believe in or get carried away by every thought that comes along…

Wes Nisker is coeditor of Inquiring Mind and an author and meditation teacher. This piece first appeared in Inquiring Mind, but also appears as a chapter in his book, *Crazy Wisdom Saves the World Again*. His website is www.wesnisker.com.

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Your Mind: Friend or Foe?

by Jack Kornfield

Who is your enemy? Mind is your enemy. No one can harm you more than your own mind untamed. And who is your friend? Mind is your friend. No one can help you more than your own mind, wisely trained—not even your own mother and father. — Buddha

How can we be mindful of the mind in the mind? Just as there's a river of bodily sensations passing through consciousness, just as there's a river of 500 emotions passing through us, there's also a river of thoughts. If you try to sit silently for a minute, what happens? Does your mind become quiet and stay quiet? The mind will not become quiet upon command. Instead, what most people experience is the inner waterfall, a cascading stream of thoughts. It's like a cartoon I saw once of a car crossing a vast desert landscape, where a roadside sign says, "Your own tedious thoughts the next 200 miles."

One scientist declared that we have an average of about 67,000 thoughts a day. I think it's probably closer to 37,000, but whatever the number is, the river of thoughts is not under your control. And these thoughts have very little honesty. They will tell you any kind of story, and be dedicated to many beliefs that are absurd. Much of the river is composed of reruns. It's like not being able to sleep in a hotel room and you pick up the remote control and turn on the TV but all you can get are the cable shopping stations selling cheap jewelry and gimmicky kitchen gadgets with a breathless sense of urgency that just goes on and on. But in your case, it's reruns of your last love affair or of a conversation you had at work, or anxiety and shame about some problem, or anger at being treated poorly by someone in your distant past. And no matter what you wish, you have trouble changing the channel. The whole parade just keeps repeating and repeating without resolution. It can be really crazy in there—have you noticed?

What can you do with your thoughts, especially the stories of anxiety and fear? With mindfulness of the mind, you come to realize that much of what you believe is the product of your imagination. Thoughts can be misleading in many ways. Your thoughts are filled with praise and blame, hope and fear. You will hear the voices of your parents, internalized like monologues, sometimes appearing as the inner judge and the inner tyrant. Then are the voices of the unloved child or the ambitious achiever, voices who are always trying to fix or deceive us. There are healthy voices, wise voices, and loving voices, too. But most of the time your thoughts are like a bureaucracy that continues to perpetuate itself even when the need for it has been outgrown, even when it's actually become unpleasant and restrictive and possibly dangerous to you. Marcus Aurelius wrote, "The soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts." So what can you do?

With mindfulness, you can stop taking them so seriously. You can come to know that your thoughts make a good servant but not a good master. You can step back and listen to your thoughts mindfully and then decide whether they're useful or not. It's true that you still need some thoughts to plan for the future and to problem-solve, but you could eliminate 90 percent of your thoughts and still have plenty to do the job.

So the first thing you can do is to listen to your thoughts with mindful awareness. You will see the evanescent nature of thoughts, that they are fleeting ideas, all impermanent. And then you can begin to realize that just because you have a thought doesn't mean you have to believe it—much less act on it—and certainly not get caught up in the whole stream of them. You can release the mind of some of its more dangerous patterns. Observing the mind with mindfulness brings liberation.

After you learn to see what's in your mind and learn to release or dis-identify with the unhealthy patterns, you discover a deeper level of liberation. My teacher Sri Nisargadatta explained it like this: "The mind creates the abyss and the heart crosses it." When you rest in the present moment with mindfulness, you open to a presence which is timeless and beyond the understanding of thought. It's by returning to the awareness beyond thoughts

that you experience real healing. When your mind and heart open, you realize who you are, the timeless, limitless awareness behind all thought.

Remembering who you really are, you see with the heart. You see the face of someone you love, you see the plum tree that's blooming in front of you. You may be sitting with someone who's grieving or angry, or maybe you're just walking back to your car, but now you're doing it while being fully awake. It's so beautiful to come back to this Earth. Even in great difficulty you can become aware that you are in the presence of mystery, and this experience alone is breathtaking in its power.

For Nisargadatta, the mind creates the abyss of right and wrong, of worries and fears that lead us away from this timeless presence. The only power that can cross this abyss is the awakened heart. Even in difficulty, the awakened heart rests in love.

Jack Kornfield has taught meditation internationally since 1974 and is one of the key teachers to introduce Buddhist mindfulness practice to the West. He holds a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and is a father, husband and activist. His books have been translated into 20 languages and sold more than a million copies.
(see jackkornfield.com)

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source: https://jackkornfield.com/your-mind-friend-or-foe

The Reality Below Thoughts

by Jack Kornfield (excerpted from The Wise Heart)

As we observe our thoughts and question our beliefs, we come to understand that while thinking, planning and remembering are vital to our lives, they are more tentative than we believe. Our thoughts are always more provisional and one sided than we admit. Ordinarily we believe them. But questioning our thoughts is at the heart of Buddhist practice. Is what we believe real, solid, certain? As writer Richard Haight observed, "Chief Roman Nose of the Cheyenne and his people believed he was immortal and he, and they, were right every day of his life except one."

When we believe our own thoughts and opinions we become fundamentalists. There can be fundamentalist Buddhists, fundamentalist scientists, fundamentalist psychologists. But no matter how strongly we believe our perspective, there are always other points of view. In our personal relationships this is really obvious. A relationship matures when each partner grants the possibility that the other may be right (though we may not always believe it).

Most of our mental suffering comes from how tightly we hold our beliefs, thoughts and perspectives. In the monastery Ajahn Chah used to smile and ask "Is it true?" He wanted us to learn to hold our thoughts lightly. In Buddhist training, our thoughts are deconstructed, the entire structure dismantled plank by plant.

The Sufis illustrate the one sidedness of our thought with a story from the holy fool, Mullah Nasrudin. A king, disenchanted with his subjects' dishonesty, decided to force them to tell the truth. When the city gates were opened one morning, gallows had been erected in front of them. A royal guard announced, "Whoever will enter the city must first answer a question which will be put to them by the captain of the guard." Mullah Nasrudin stepped forward first. The captain spoke, "Where are you going? Tell the truth…the alternative is death by hanging." "I am going," said Nasrudin, "to be hanged on those gallows." "I don't believe you!" replied the guard. Nasrudin calmly replied, "Very well then. If I have told a lie, hang me!" "But that would make it the truth!" said the confused guard. "Exactly," said Nasrudin, "your truth."

When we are bothered by our thinking, Buddhist psychology tells us to ask, is it really true? If we listen from the heart, we will see how much trouble comes from believing stories that may not even be true. Ajahn Chah said, "You have so many view and opinions, what's good and bad, right and wrong, about how things should be. You cling to your views and suffer so much. They are only views, you know."

Within the stillness of meditation we see the unreality of thought. We learn to observe how words and images arise and then vanish, leaving no trace. The succession of images and associations – often called mental proliferations – builds thought castles. But these castles, ideas, and plans float for a time and then they disappear, like bubbles in a glass of soda. We can become so silent that we actually feel the subtle thought energy appear and vanish again.

But, if thoughts are empty, what can we rely upon? Where is our refuge? Here is how the Indian sage Nisargadatta answered this question: "The mind creates the abyss, the heart crosses it." The thinking mind constructs views of right and wrong, good and bad, self and other. These are the abyss. When we let thoughts come and go without clinging, we can use thought, but we rest in the heart. We become more trusting and courageous. There is an innocence to the heart. We are the child of the spirit. And there is an innate wisdom. We are the ancient one. Resting in the heart we live in harmony with our breath, our body. Resting in the heart our patience grows. We do not have to think it all through. Life is unfolding around us. As the Indian Master Charon Singh put it, "In time, even grass becomes milk."

Of course, stories have value. As a teacher and storyteller, I have come to respect their evocative power. But even these stories are like fingers pointing to the moon. At best, they replace a deluded cultural narrative or a misleading tale with a tale of compassion. They touch us and lead us back to the mystery here and now.

In my individual meditation interviews, I try to help people drop below the level of their story and see the beauty that shines all around them. Psychologist Len Bergantino writes about frustrating therapy sessions with a patient who was disconnected, detached and aiming to please. “The feeling I had on one particular day was, I just didn’t want to say one more word to him about anything. So, to his surprise, I took out my mandolin and in the most loving, mellow, beautiful way I could, I played, “Come Back to Sorrento.” He broke down in tears and cried for the last forty minutes of the session, saying only, “Dr. Bergantino, you sure earned your money today!” I thought, “And to think, I wasted all these years talking to people.” When we drop below the stories, our heart shines.

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source: https://jackkornfield.com/the-reality-below-thoughts

Practice Log – Week 3

FORMAL PRACTICE: Read the description of Mindful Yoga ***(this is very important, even for experienced yoga practitioners)***. Practice at least six times this week, alternating Mindful Yoga 1 with the Sitting Meditation (e.g., three of each). At least one of the days, do a Body Scan. As before, don't expect anything in particular from the practice. In fact, give up all expectations about it. Just let your experience be your experience. Record on this form each time you practice.

In the comment field, put just a few words to remind you of your impressions of that particular session: what came up, how it felt, etc.

INFORMAL PRACTICE: At the end of the day before you go to bed, recall one specific unpleasant event and record it on the Unpleasant Events Calendar. The unpleasant event doesn't have to be major. It could be, for instance, impatience waiting in line or being mildly annoyed by some minor event. ***NOTE: If, at the end of the day, you honestly can't find an even minor annoyance or discomfort, you can take this time to celebrate that fact.*** *We often don't take time to experience gratitude, so this could be an opportunity to do that. On the informal practice, sheet answer the questions with your current feeling in mind.*

…Date…	Comments (include whether Body Scan, Yoga or Sitting)

Informal Practice Log (Unpleasant Events Calendar) – Week 3

What was the experience?	Were you aware of the unpleasant feelings *while* the event was happening?	How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?	What moods, feelings, and thoughts accompanied this event?	What thoughts, sensations, emotions do you notice now as you write this down?
EXAMPLE *Waiting for the cable company to come fix our line. Realize that I am missing an important meeting.*	*Yes.*	*Temples throbbing, tightness in my neck and shoulders, pacing back and forth.*	*Angry, helpless, frustrated. "Is this what they mean by service?" "Those #$!@$#!! – I can't afford to miss this meeting!"*	*I hope I don't have to go through that again soon. Mild anxiousness, tightness in stomach.*

Week 4 - Stress: Responding vs. Reacting
STOP: The One-minute Breathing Space

Between stimulus and response there is a space.

In that space is our power to choose our response.

In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

- Victor Frankl

This week's videos

We begin with **Stress - Portrait of a Killer**, featuring Robert Sapolsky, a neuroscientist at Stanford University and possibly the world's greatest authority on the causes and effects of stress. This video describes the physiology of stress and how, in modern life, our stress response, designed evolutionarily to protect us from danger, can actually put our lives in danger when it is activated continually and without resolution. This is the bad news.

The good news, **How To Make Stress Your Friend**, comes from Kelly McGonigal, a psychologist specializing in health medicine, who puts stress in perspective, re-framing stress, not as an enemy to health and well-being, but as a response which is protective and even life-giving. She perhaps goes a little too far in saying that health-endangering stress simply comes from a "belief that stress is bad", but her video provides a good counter-balance to the idea that stress is always bad. In the last video, Susan Bauer-Wu describes how mindfulness can counteract a disproportionate stress reaction and introduces you to **STOP,** a mindfulness practice you can use literally anywhere anytime to ground you and help you to be more resilient and effective in the face of difficult situations.

Reading

What Is Stress? and Harvard Health's **Understanding the Stress Response**, describe the physiological and neurological effects of stress, distinguishing between acute stress, which is short-term and adaptive, and chronic stress, which is the primary cause of stress-related health problems. **Anatomy of Fear** is a graphic depiction of the stress response. **STOP: One-minute Breathing Space** is a one-page description of the process you will be using for this week's informal practice, and **The Magic Quarter Second** is a short article by Tara Brach that weaves in some science to validate "STOP".

Daily Practices

"Yoga 2" is introduced this week. For the **formal practice**, we alternate "Yoga 2" with the Sitting Meditation, doing either yoga or a sitting meditation for each of the six days of practice.

For the **informal practice**, you will look for opportunities to practice **STOP** during the course of the day. Don't expect to remember the precise steps of "STOP" during the most trying parts of the day - it's enough just to remember to stop and take a breath. The best way to make it second nature is to practice it when you aren't stressed, such as during the "in between" times, like waiting in line, walking from one office to another, getting in/out of your car, etc.

Below are your materials for this week:

Videos

- **Stress - Portrait of a Killer** *National Geographic Special with Robert Sapolsky [27 min]*
- **How To Make Stress Your Friend** *by Kelly McGonigal [14 min]*
- **STOP: A Short Mindfulness Practice** *by Susan Bauer-Wu [4 min]*

Reading

- **What Is Stress?** *article from commit2bfit.me*
- **The Anatomy of Fear** *Discovery Magazine graphic*
- **Understanding the Stress Response** *article from Harvard Health Publications*
- **STOP: One-Minute Breathing Space** *one page description*
- **The Magic Quarter Second** *article by Tara Brach*

Practice sheets

- **Formal Practice** ***[PDF]*** *[or **WORD format**]* - Mindful Yoga (Yoga 2) and Sitting
- **Informal Practice** ***[PDF]*** *[or **WORD format**]* - STOP: The One Minute Breathing Space

Supplementary materials related to this week's topic

- **The Science of Anxiety** *Time Magazine article*
- **The Anatomy of Anxiety** *Time Magazine graphic*
- **When Is Stress Good for You** *article by Bruce McEwen*
- **The Psychology of Stress** *short video "teaser" by Robert Sapolsky [3 min]*
- **Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers** *book by Robert Sapolsky*
- **Leaves Falling Gently** *book by Susan Bauer-Wu*
- **The Other Brain Also Deals with Many Woes** *article by Harriet Brown*
- **How Does the Vagus Nerve Convey Gut Instincts to the Brain?** *Psychology Today*

What Is Stress?

There Are Reasons We Experience Stress

Stress is a physical expression of our "Fight or Flight" survival mechanism. A threatening situation will trigger a stress response, which prepares us to confront or flee a possible danger. This helps for immediate danger but unfortunately the stress response is also triggered by tense situations where physical action is not an option, such as unreasonable boss, heavy traffic, or financial problems.

Two types of stress

1. Acute - Acute stress prepares us for fight or flight, and is generally short-term.
2. Chronic – Chronic stress is long term and is the main cause of stress-related health problems.

Stress causes chemical changes in the body that, left unchecked, can have negative effects on both mental and physical health. High levels of stress contribute to health issues as diverse as depression, insomnia, heart disease, skin disorders and headaches.

Acute Stress in Detail

Acute stress is a short-term response by the body's sympathetic nervous system. How long acute stress lasts may vary—the response can last for a few minutes or a few weeks. During an acute stress response, the adrenal medulla (part of the adrenal glands, two small glands located on top of each kidney) begins to release catecholamine hormones (including adrenaline and noradrenaline). In all, over seventeen different hormones are released during an acute stress response.

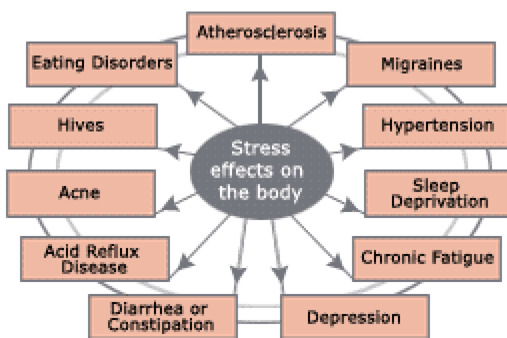
Physical responses

- blood sugar levels rise
- additional red blood cells are released (to carry extra oxygen)
- peripheral blood vessels constrict
- pulse quickens
- blood pressure rises
- digestion stops

Chronic Stress in Detail

Chronic stress occurs when continuous acute stress responses keep the body on alert continuously, negatively affecting health. The ongoing stress response causes the hypothalamus and pituitary gland (portions of the brain) to release a chemical known as ACTH (adrenocorticotropic hormone). ACTH, known as the "stress hormone" stimulates the adrenal gland to produce and release cortisol.

Cortisol is one of the hormones associated with waking and sleeping. Levels of cortisol naturally fluctuate during the day. Cortisol levels are highest in the morning and lowest at night. Higher levels of cortisol in the morning help us wake up. When chronic stress stimulates cortisol production, the daily cycle of cortisol levels is disrupted. High levels of cortisol may occur at night. This can result in insomnia.



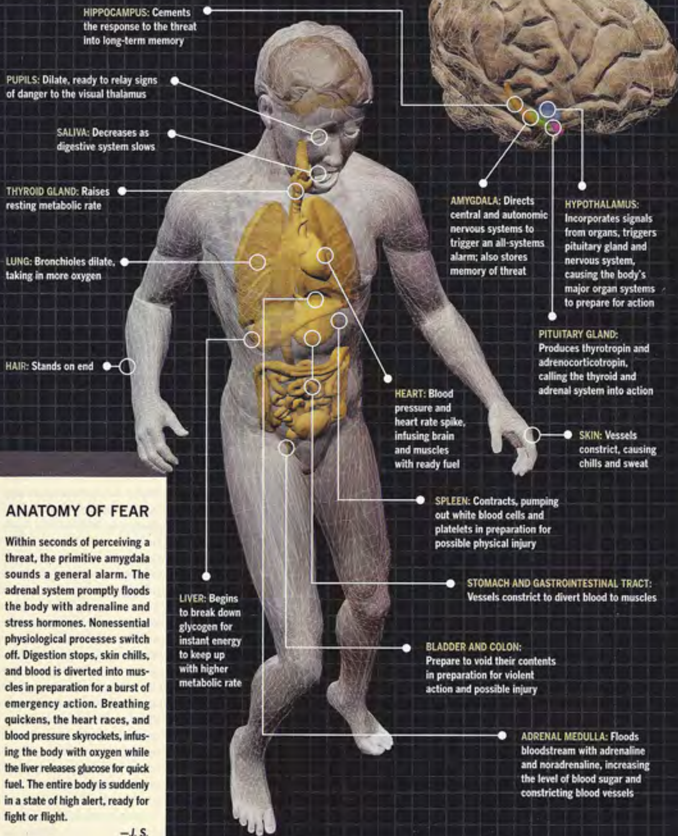
Stress Affects Your Health

Imbalances of cortisol and other stress-related hormones weaken health over time and the effects are not immediately seen. Practicing stress management techniques can help minimize the effects of stress on your health.

High Levels of Stress (Cortisol) Contributes to Weight Gain

Cortisol promotes the synthesis of glucose from proteins in order to make more glucose available as fuel in response to stressful situations. This reduces lean muscle mass and increases blood sugar levels. Research has shown that cortisol also increases the depostion of abdominal fat and increases cravings for food, especially carbohydrates (sugars). This helps to set up the vicious cycle of stress and overeating (especially of unhealthy foods), which created more stress and more overeating, etc. By supporting a person's adrenal glands and lowering cortisol output, this vicious cycle can be broken.

Source: http://commit2bfit.me/what-we-do/stress-less/what-is-stress-what-can-i-do-about-it/



ANATOMY OF FEAR

Within seconds of perceiving a threat, the primitive amygdala sounds a general alarm. The adrenal system promptly floods the body with adrenaline and stress hormones. Nonessential physiological processes switch off. Digestion stops, skin chills, and blood is diverted into muscles in preparation for a burst of emergency action. Breathing quickens, the heart races, and blood pressure skyrockets, infusing the body with oxygen while the liver releases glucose for quick fuel. The entire body is suddenly in a state of high alert, ready for fight or flight.

—J. S.

(c) 2003 Discovery Magazine (March 2003 issue)

Harvard Health Publications
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
Trusted advice for a healthier life

Understanding the stress response

Chronic activation of this survival mechanism impairs health.

For two years in a row, the annual stress survey commissioned by the American Psychological Association has found that about 25% of Americans are experiencing high levels of stress (rating their stress level as 8 or more on a 10-point scale), while another 50% report moderate levels of stress (a score of 4 to 7). Perhaps not surprising, given continuing economic instability in this country and abroad, concerns about money, work, and the economy rank as the top sources of stress for Americans.

Stress is unpleasant, even when it is transient. A stressful situation — whether something environmental, such as a looming work deadline, or psychological, such as persistent worry about losing a job — can trigger a cascade of stress hormones that produce well-orchestrated physiological changes. A stressful incident can make the heart pound and breathing quicken. Muscles tense and beads of sweat appear.

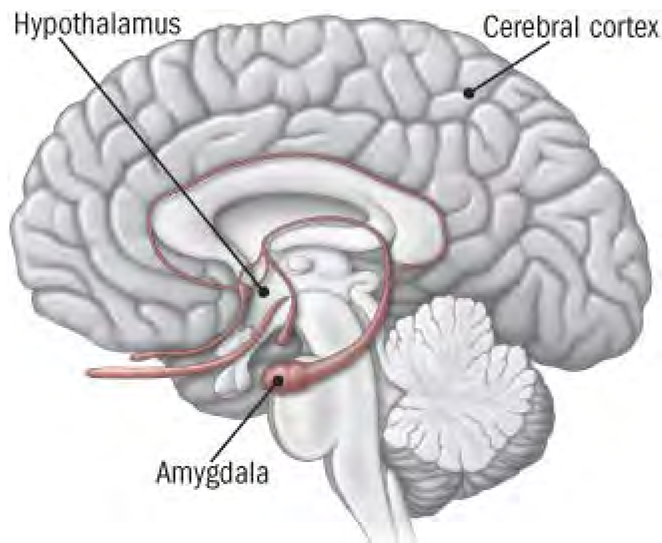
This combination of reactions to stress is also known as the "fight-or-flight" response because it evolved as a survival mechanism, enabling people and other mammals to react quickly to life-threatening situations. The carefully orchestrated yet near-instantaneous sequence of hormonal changes and physiological responses helps someone to fight the threat off or flee to safety. Unfortunately, the body can also overreact to stressors that are not life-threatening, such as traffic jams, work pressure, and family difficulties.

Over the years, researchers have learned not only how and why these reactions occur, but have also gained insight into the long-term effects stress has on physical and psychological health. Over time, repeated activation of the stress response takes a toll on the body. Research suggests that prolonged stress contributes to high blood pressure, promotes the formation of artery-clogging deposits, and causes brain changes that may contribute to anxiety, depression, and addiction. More preliminary research suggests that chronic stress may also contribute to obesity, both through direct mechanisms (causing people to eat more) or indirectly (decreasing sleep and exercise).

Sounding the alarm

The stress response begins in the brain (see illustration). When someone confronts an oncoming car or other danger, the eyes or ears (or both) send the information to the amygdala, an area of the brain that contributes to emotional processing. The amygdala interprets the images and sounds. When it perceives danger, it instantly sends a distress signal to the hypothalamus.

Command center



When someone experiences a stressful event, the amygdala, an area of the brain that contributes to emotional processing, sends a distress signal to the hypothalamus. This area of the brain functions like a command center, communicating with the rest of the body through the nervous system so that the person has the energy to fight or flee.

The hypothalamus is a bit like a command center. This area of the brain communicates with the rest of the body through the autonomic nervous system, which controls such involuntary body functions as breathing, blood pressure, heartbeat, and the dilation or constriction of key blood vessels and small airways in the lungs called bronchioles. The autonomic nervous system has two components, the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system functions like a gas pedal in a car. It triggers the fight-or-flight response, providing the body with a burst of energy so that it can respond to perceived dangers. The parasympathetic nervous system acts like a brake. It promotes the "rest and digest" response that calms the body down after the danger has passed.

After the amygdala sends a distress signal, the hypothalamus activates the sympathetic nervous system by sending signals through the autonomic nerves to the adrenal glands. These glands respond by pumping the hormone epinephrine (also known as adrenaline) into the bloodstream. As epinephrine circulates through the body, it brings on a number of physiological changes. The heart beats faster than normal, pushing blood to the muscles, heart, and other vital organs. Pulse rate and blood pressure go up. The person undergoing these changes also starts to breathe more rapidly. Small airways in the lungs open wide. This way, the lungs can take in as much oxygen as possible with each breath. Extra oxygen is sent to the brain, increasing alertness. Sight, hearing, and other senses become sharper. Meanwhile, epinephrine triggers the release of blood sugar (glucose) and fats from temporary storage sites in the body. These nutrients flood into the bloodstream, supplying energy to all parts of the body.

All of these changes happen so quickly that people aren't aware of them. In fact, the wiring is so efficient that the amygdala and hypothalamus start this cascade even before the brain's visual centers have had a chance to fully process what is happening. That's why people are able to jump out of the path of an oncoming car even before they think about what they are doing.

As the initial surge of epinephrine subsides, the hypothalamus activates the second component of the stress response system — known as the HPA axis. This network consists of the hypothalamus, the pituitary gland, and the adrenal glands.

The HPA axis relies on a series of hormonal signals to keep the sympathetic nervous system — the "gas pedal" — pressed down. If the brain continues to perceive something as dangerous, the hypothalamus releases corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH), which travels to the pituitary gland, triggering the release of adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH). This hormone travels to the adrenal glands, prompting them to release cortisol. The body thus stays revved up and on high alert. When the threat passes, cortisol levels fall. The parasympathetic nervous system — the "brake" — then dampens the stress response.

Techniques to counter stress

The findings of the national survey mentioned earlier support what mental health clinicians experience in their own practices — many people are unable to find a way to put the brakes on stress. Chronic low-level stress keeps the HPA axis activated, much like a motor that is idling too high for too long. After a while, this has an effect on the body that contributes to the health problems associated with chronic stress.

Persistent epinephrine surges can damage blood vessels and arteries, increasing blood pressure and raising risk of heart attacks or strokes. Elevated cortisol levels create physiological changes that help to replenish the body's energy stores that are depleted during the stress response. But they inadvertently contribute to the buildup of fat tissue and to weight gain. For example, cortisol increases appetite, so that people will want to eat more to obtain extra energy. It also increases storage of unused nutrients as fat.

Fortunately, people can learn techniques to counter the stress response.

Relaxation response. Dr. Herbert Benson, director emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, has devoted much of his career to learning how people can counter the stress response by using a combination of approaches that elicit the relaxation response. These include deep abdominal breathing, focus on a soothing word (such as peace or calm), visualization of tranquil scenes, repetitive prayer, yoga, and tai chi.

Most of the research using objective measures to evaluate how effective the relaxation response is at countering stress have been conducted in people with hypertension and other forms of heart disease. Those results suggest the technique may be worth trying — although for most people it is not a cure-all. For example, researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital conducted a double-blind, randomized controlled trial of 122 patients with hypertension, ages 55 and older, in which half were assigned to relaxation response training and the other half to a control group that received information about blood pressure control. After eight weeks, 34 of the people who practiced the relaxation response — a little more than half — had achieved a systolic blood pressure reduction of more than 5 mm Hg, and were therefore eligible for the next phase of the study, in which they could reduce levels of blood pressure medication they were taking. During that second phase, 50% were able to eliminate at least one blood pressure medication — significantly more than in the control group, where only 19% eliminated their medication.

Physical activity. People can use exercise to stifle the buildup of stress in several ways. Exercise, such as taking a brisk walk shortly after feeling stressed, not only deepens breathing but also helps relieve muscle tension. Movement therapies such as yoga, tai chi, and qi gong combine fluid movements with deep breathing and mental focus, all of which can induce calm.

Social support. Confidants, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, relatives, spouses, and companions all provide a life-enhancing social net — and may increase longevity. It's not clear why, but the buffering theory holds that people who enjoy close relationships with family and friends receive emotional support that indirectly helps to sustain them at times of stress and crisis.

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For more references, please see www.health.harvard.edu/mentalextra.

© 2000-2013 Harvard University.
Source: https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Mental_Health_Letter/2011/March/understanding-the-stress-response

One-Minute Breathing Space

Haven't there been times when you just needed some "breathing space"?
This practice provides a way to step out of automatic pilot mode and into the present moment.

What we are doing is creating a space to reconnect with your natural resilience and wisdom.
You are simply tuning in to what is happening right now, without expectation of any particular result.

If you remember nothing else, just remember the word "STOP".

S – Stop and take Stock — *Checking in to Head/Heart/Body*

Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately asking:

What is my experience right now?

Thoughts… (what are you saying to yourself, what images are coming to mind.)
Feelings… (enjoying, neutral, upset, excited, sad, mad, etc.)
Sensations… (physical sensations, tightness, holding, lightness, etc.)

Acknowledge and register your experience, even if it is uncomfortable.

T – "Take" a Breath — *Directing awareness to Breathing*

Gently direct full attention to breathing, to each inbreath and to each outbreath as they follow, one after the other.

Your breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness.

O – Open and Observe — *Expanding awareness outward*

Expand the field of your awareness around and beyond your breathing, so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expression, then further outward to what is happening around you: sights, sounds, smells, etc. As best you can, bring this expanded awareness to the next moments…

P – Proceed / new Possibilities — *Continuing without expectation*

Let your attention now move into the world around you, sensing how things are ***right now***. Rather than react habitually/mechanically, you can be curious/open, responding naturally. You may even be surprised by what happens next after having created this pause…

The Opportunity of "The Magic Quarter Second"

Pausing...making use of the magic quarter second, choosing to be present

© 2015 Tara Brach (excerpt from *Finding True Refuge*)

In the book *My Stroke of Insight*, brain scientist Jill Bolte Taylor explains that the natural life span of an emotion—the average time it takes for it to move through the nervous system and body—is only a minute and a half, a mere ninety seconds. After that, we need thoughts to keep the emotion rolling. So, if we wonder why we lock into painful emotional states like anxiety, depression, or rage, we need look no further than our own endless stream of inner dialogue.

Modern neuroscience has discovered a fundamental truth: Neurons that fire together, wire together. When we rehearse a looping set of thoughts and emotions, we create deeply grooved patterns of emotional reactivity. This means that the more you think and rethink about certain experiences, the stronger the memory and the more easily activated the related feelings become.

For example, if a young girl asks her father for help and he either ignores her or reacts with irritation, the emotional pain of rejection may become linked with any number of thoughts or beliefs: "I'm not loved," "I'm not worth helping," "I'm weak for wanting help," "It's dangerous to ask for help," "He's bad. I hate him."

The more the child gets this response from either parent—or even imagines getting this response—the more the impulse to ask for help becomes paired with the belief that she will be refused and the accompanying feelings (fear or hurt, anger or shame). Years later, she may hesitate to ask for help at all. Or, if she does ask, and the other person so much as pauses or looks distracted, the old feelings instantly take over: She downplays her needs, apologizes, or becomes enraged.

Unless we learn to recognize and interrupt our compulsive thinking, these ingrained emotional and behavioral patterns continue to strengthen over time. Fortunately, it's possible to break out of this patterning.

Researcher Benjamin Libet discovered that the part of the brain responsible for movement activates a quarter-second before we become aware of our intention to move. There is then another quarter-second before the movement begins. What does this mean? First, it casts an interesting light on what we call "free will"—before we make a conscious decision, our brain has already set the gears in motion! But secondly, it offers us an opportunity.

Say you've been obsessing about having a cigarette. During the space between impulse ("I need to smoke a cigarette") and action (reaching for the pack), there is room for choice. Author Tara Bennett-Goleman named this space "the magic quarter-second." Mindfulness enables us to take advantage of it.

By catching our thoughts in the magic quarter-second, we're able to act from a wiser place, interrupting the circling of compulsive thinking that fuels anxiety and other painful emotions. For instance, if our child asks us to play a game and we automatically think "I'm too busy," we might pause and choose to spend some time with her. If we've been caught up in composing an angry e-mail, we might pause and decide not to press the send button.

The Buddha taught that to be free—not identified with or possessed by thoughts or feelings—we need to investigate each and every part of our experience with an intimate and mindful attention. The first step is pausing, making use of the magic quarter second, and the second, choosing to be present with our moment-to-moment experience. We need to recognize the fear-based thoughts and the tension in our bodies with an accepting, curious and kind attention. The fruit of this presence is a capacity to release habitual reactivity, respond to our life circumstances with a wise heart and step out of the grip of oppressive emotions.

Tara Brach is the senior teacher and founder of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington. Tara is the author of *Radical Acceptance and True Refuge.*

Practice Log - Week 4

FORMAL PRACTICE: Practice at least six times this week, alternating Mindful Yoga 2 with the Sitting Meditation. As before, don't expect anything in particular from doing these. In fact, give up all expectations about it. Just let your experience be your experience.

Record on this form each time you practice. In the comment field, put just a few words to remind you of your impressions of that particular session: what came up, how it felt, what you noticed in terms of physical sensations, emotions, thoughts, etc. It's important to write the comments immediately because it will be hard to reconstruct later.

INFORMAL PRACTICE: Read the description of STOP: One-Minute Breathing Space. Carry the Informal Practice Log with you during the day, and at least once during the day (waiting in line, just before getting in or out of your car…), practice using "STOP", and record it on the Informal Practice Log when you can.

…Date…	Formal Practice Comments (Yoga or Sitting)

Informal Practice Log (STOP: One-Minute Breathing Space) – Week 4

What was the situation?	What was going on with you when you thought to take a Breathing Space? (body, mind, emotion)	What did you notice WHILE you were doing the Breathing Space? (body, mind, emotion)	What did you notice AFTER you did the Breathing Space? (body, mind, emotion, action)	What did you learn?
EXAMPLE *I was in a meeting where someone was saying something I knew to be untrue.*	*My heart was pounding, my stomach was tight, I felt angry and I thought "He KNOWS that's not true!"*	*Noticed my shoulders were tight, too, but when I paid attention to breath, I felt things start to loosen a bit.*	*My stomach and shoulders were a little looser. I did say something, but it came from a much calmer place.*	*Without the break, I would have reacted automatically and said something I'd regret. I can use getting aroused as a signal to use a Breathing Space.*

Week 5 - Dealing with Difficult Emotions/Sensations
Soften, Soothe, Allow

Mid-way assessment
We are now at the halfway point, and this is a good time to reflect on what's been happening so far for you in doing the practices and in your daily life. So far, you have experienced the three main formal practices (body scan, sitting meditation, yoga) and a number of informal practices (simple awareness, mindful eating, awareness of pleasant/unpleasant experiences, STOP/one minute breathing space).

Taking the time now for reflection will help you to notice and appreciate any positive changes that may have resulted from the practices. A likely outcome of this awareness and active appreciation will be a strengthening and reinforcement that can naturally carry forward to the end of this course and beyond. Also, now would be the time to reflect on those areas where you may still be struggling, and allow the possibility of appropriate mid-course corrections. ***It can be helpful to actually write down your thoughts at this point, reflecting on your personal learnings as well as the things you may still be struggling with****. As you do this, you may recall a specific incident in your life that stands out, that somehow relates to the work you have done so far in this course.*

Dealing with physical and emotional discomfort
This week's topic has to do with dealing with discomfort, both physical and emotional. We normally react to pain or discomfort in one of two ways:

> **Blocking:** We try to block or deny the discomfort by pushing through it through force of will, by distracting ourselves, or by self-medicating with food, alcohol or drugs. This is ultimately unsatisfactory since as soon as you stop "pushing through" or your distraction or self-medication wears off, it can come back even stronger. In cases where the discomfort is a signal indicating corrective action needs to take place, missing the signal can result in injury or disease. And, of course, self-medicating can create many problems, including complex side-effects or even addiction.
>
> **Drowning:** We become overwhelmed by it, drowning in the discomfort and its associated fears or judgments ("I can't stand this!", "What if this continues or gets worse?", "How could they/I have been so stupid?!?", etc.). This leads to incapacitation and a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness.

It's bad enough that neither of these strategies are very effective or satisfying, but a continuing reliance on them usually makes things even worse than they already are. There is a middle ground, a place where you are neither pushing away difficult feelings/situations, nor being subsumed by them. This "middle way" involves learning to feel the sensations or emotions, but not being swept away by them. A surprising and counter-intuitive result of staying with something in this way is that the "I've got to get out of here" component of the discomfort often lessens, or sometimes can even disappear.

> ***NOTE:*** *If a primary reason for you taking the MBSR course is dealing with physical pain (e.g., chronic pain, fibromyalgia, serious injury or physical disability, etc.), you can find alternative videos, readings and practice assignments by going to* ***Week 5b (Special Instructions for Physical Pain)****. Otherwise, continue on here...*

Videos
In **Turning Toward Difficulty**, Vidyamala Burch of **Breathworks** describes this counter-intuitive "middle way". Her mindfulness teaching is primarily concerned with chronic physical pain, but this presentation applies just as well to emotional pain. In **Surrender to the Monkeys**, Tara Brach addresses our wanting for things to be different than they are and the wisdom of taking things just as they are. In **The Three Components of Self-Compassion**, Kristin Neff talks about the importance of dealing with difficult emotional and physical issues with self-kindness and gentleness. Finally, in **Awakening Self-Compassion**, Tara Brach describes RAIN, a particular way of tapping into this "middle way", again emphasizing the importance of self-compassion.

For further exploration: *The most sophisticated and transformative method I know of for tapping into this "middle way", well worth exploring, but beyond the scope of this course, is* ***Focusing****, a process created by Gene Gendlin and refined by Ann Weiser Cornell. See* ***"Inner Listening" - An Introduction to Focusing*** *in the supplementary materials.*

Readings
The readings for this week include **Thinking with the Heart**, by Chris Germer, which describes the origination of the *Soften-Soothe-Allow* process. **The Soften, Soothe, Allow process** is a one-page description of the process that will be used for the informal practice this week. **Buddhism's Pain Relief** describes this "middle way" of dealing with pain, relating recent advances in neuroscience with ancient Buddhist teachings. If you or a loved one is dealing with back pain, **The Strange Case of Chronic Back Pain** is a must-read. If so, see also Ron Siegel's book, **Back Sense** and **Lower Back Ache? Be Active and Wait It Out**, in the supplementary materials.

You can have compassion for yourself - which is not self-pity. You're simply recognizing that 'this is tough, this hurts,' and bringing the same warmhearted wish for suffering to lessen or end that you would bring to any dear friend grappling with the same pain, upset, or challenges as you.
- Rick Hanson

The most intimate relationship we will have in our entire lifetime is with ourselves. No one hears our hearts the way we do. No one knows our hurts the way we do. We are the sages of our soft spots and our edges. Self-compassion is showing up to that relationship with honesty and with love.
- Jamie Ridler

Daily Practices

For the **formal practice**, we focus a little more on the sitting meditation, alternating it with your choice of one of the other practices. On the first day, though, if you have something that happened that is mildly difficult, try the **Soften, Soothe, Allow Meditation** (see it on the menu to the left). The situation doesn't have to be a major issue, in fact, it's best if it's mild or moderate. For instance, it could be impatience while waiting in line or being mildly annoyed by some minor event.

The **informal practice** will be to try the **Soften, Soothe, Allow process** at times when you are experiencing an unwanted emotion. As mentioned above, it's best not to start with the most pressing issue in your life. *If, at the end of the day, no unwanted emotion comes to mind, take the time to feel gratitude for something that happened that day.*

Below are your materials for this week:

Videos

Turning Toward Difficulty *- Vidyamala Burch [10 min]*
Surrender to the Monkeys *- Tara Brach (4 min)*
The Three Components of Self-Compassion *- Kristin Neff [6 min]*
Awakening Self-Compassion *- Tara Brach [23 min]*

Reading

Thinking with the Heart: The origin of *Soften, Soothe, Allow* *by Chris Germer*
The Soften, Soothe, Allow process *one-page description of the Soften, Soothe, Allow process*
Buddhism's Pain Relief *by Rick Heller*
The Strange Case of Chronic Back Pain *by Ron Siegel*

Practice sheets

Formal Practice ***[PDF]*** *[or **WORD format**]* - Various *(Soften-Soothe-Allow Meditation on 1st day)*
Informal Practice ***[PDF]*** *[or **WORD format**]* -see **The Soften, Soothe, Allow process**

Supplementary materials related to this week's topic

"Inner Listening" - An Introduction to Focusing *article and videos by Ann Weiser-Cornell*
The RAIN of Self-Compassion *article, video, and guided meditation by Tara Brach*
Living Well With Pain & Illness *book by Vidyamala Burch*
Back Sense: Halting the Cycle of Chronic Back Pain *book by Ron Siegel*
Lower Back Ache? Be Active and Wait It Out *New York Times article*
How To Be Sick *book by Toni Bernhard*

NOTE: *If you are compiling a manual based on the suggestions in **MBSR Manual**, you would print a copy of this page as well as the Readings and Practice Sheets given above. For a version of this page which has been reformatted for your manual go to the **printer-ready version of this page**.*

Psychotherapy NETWORKER
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Thinking with the Heart

The origin of Soften, Soothe, Allow

by Christopher Germer

My path to understanding the importance of lovingkindness in mindfulness-based psychotherapy wasn't always smooth. Madeline was one of my first client-teachers.

She was an 82-year-old woman who, even though in good health and of sound mind, despaired that she'd have to leave her beloved home of 45 years, because she lived on a portion of a suburban street where neighborhood children congregated to play . . . and scream. The noise kept her from sleeping, and she was experiencing chronic stomach and neck tension. She'd tried what she could to reduce the noise level—talking to the children's parents, playing soothing music to shut out the sounds. In spite of such steps, however, she lived in fearful anticipation of the next child's shriek. Madeline felt sad about her noise sensitivity because she wanted to enjoy the ebullience of her neighborhood kids, just as she'd enjoyed her own children's energy earlier in her life.

Initially I thought Madeline might benefit from listening in a more spacious way to the sounds around her—not focusing all the time on the children's screaming. I made Madeline an audiotape, "Mindfulness of Sound," that taught her to passively notice all the sounds in her environment. It didn't work. She said she just found the noise of the children too disturbing.

Next I thought she might benefit from internal exposure. If she could mindfully explore her physical and emotional reactions to the noise, perhaps she'd be able to relax. And if her body felt better, I hoped, maybe she'd obsess less about the noise. Ever cooperative, Madeline explored her sensations, thoughts, and emotions whenever she noticed she was anxious: "Where does it hurt?" "What does it feel like?" "Does the pain come and go?" "What thoughts and feelings come along with the stress of those noisy kids?" I instructed her to simply notice what she was feeling in her body and how her body reacted to the external sounds. This exercise didn't help either, not the least little bit. All it did was focus Madeline on just how bad she felt, and made her even more upset with herself and her situation.

The closer Madeline got to her distress, the more overwhelmed she became. We might call this exposure without desensitization, or mind-less exposure. The trick with mindfulness techniques is to maintain attentional stability and a certain nonattachment as uncomfortable experience is allowed into awareness, but not become emotionally overwhelmed. In some cases, medication may be required as an adjunct to mindfulness-based treatment. I suggested to Madeline that she discuss taking Klonopin or Paxil with her physician. But she demurred—she rarely took medicine, on principle, and wanted to continue exploring behavioral techniques.

By now, I seriously doubted that I could help Madeline. Then I recollected that she'd volunteered for many years at a nursing home, brought Vietnamese children to the United States after the war, and was active in her church. I started to wonder whether she could bring the same quality of compassion that she had for others to herself. Would lovingkindness help her better tolerate her distress?

Together, we came up with a new meditation: "Soften, allow, and love." Madeline was enthusiastic about this one from the start, so I made another 20-minute audiotape for her to practice with.

The meditation begins with simple awareness of whatever sensations may be occurring in the body. Can you feel the pressure of your body on the couch? Can you notice the movement of your breath? After a minute, attention is shifted to an unpleasant physical sensation. For Madeline, this was either her tense stomach or her neck. The first component of the meditation, "softening," refers to relaxing that uncomfortable part of the body. However, to avoid frustration if relaxation doesn't occur, softening is an invitation to relax.

When you feel discomfort, can you soften that part of your body? You don't have to relax; just

allow that spot on your body to soften—if it's ready to.

The next component is "allowing." This refers to allowing the physical sensations of the body to be just what they are—unpleasant, neutral, or pleasant. It's an ancient Buddhist meditation technique.

Can you allow yourself to feel the discomfort as long as it lingers? Can you just let it be, as long as it's there, even if it hurts? You don't have to change it—it'll pass at its own time. Can you let it come and go as it wants to?

Finally, in the "love" component, you try to recollect a feeling of love that can be redirected at your own body. This is a variation on the lovingkindness practice. Instead of reciting phrases, we capture a feeling—a brain state, if you will—and associate it with a new object of awareness. In this case, the new object is a difficult body sensation.

Now, imagine what it was like when one of your children had a tummyache, just like you. Can you sense in your heart what you might have felt, or feel, as you sympathize with his or her struggle? Can you hold that feeling in your heart?

Now, can you give your own stomach the same love that you'd feel for your child if he or she were suffering in the same way? Can you bring some love to the very place where it hurts?

This meditation then led Madeline to fill her whole body with the same love she'd identified, and let that feeling of love gradually radiate out into the room and into her community.

After Madeline learned this meditation, she innocently inquired, "Where does the love come from?" "Where can I draw it from, if it doesn't come up on its own?" We decided that love just seems to be a quality that comes naturally to everyone. Sometimes we feel it most for a child or a pet. It seems to be inherent in all of us, just like awareness. The skill is to recollect what love feels like and to direct it where it's needed most.

Eventually we expanded Madeline's loving awareness beyond her physical pain to encompass the emotional discomfort she felt when her home became too noisy.

Two weeks after learning this exercise, Madeline reflected aloud, "I think I have to learn to love myself more!" Four weeks later, she was feeling some enthusiasm for "working" with her noise sensitivity, and she said she felt 50 percent better. She surprised herself that she was actually beginning to feel affection for the noisy kids. She bought a lovely hat for one neighbor girl—one just like hers—when the child admired it.

Six months after Madeline learned this practice, I called her to inquire how she was feeling. She was still practicing self-compassion on a daily basis. She said, "When I hear a scream and I'm up and about, I kind of welcome it, because it's a part of my world. It gives me a chance to practice, too. I'm not saying I'm 100 percent cured, because there are times when I get annoyed, like when I'm reading the Bible and am with God. Then the noise is intrusive. But I'm generally much happier. I didn't know I could give love to myself!

I asked her if the practice changed anything else in her life. She replied, "I have a sense of my own worth. I don't have to please people. More on top of things, you know? I don't feel victimized. I'm more accepting. If people say something wrong, I let it go. I don't have to be right. I can let it go."

I still wanted to know specifically how she was practicing lovingkindness. She said she intentionally recalled the great compassion she'd felt for her youngest son, about 44 years ago, when he'd awoken with his eyes sealed shut from discharge. Her little boy was terrified, and she was filled with love for him at that moment. "Now I direct that love at myself," she said. "Where exactly do you direct it?" I asked. "I direct it at my upper body. I don't quite know how to describe it; my heart, yeah, it's a heart thing," Madeline replied.

Christopher Germer, PhD, is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Arlington, Massachusetts, specializing in mindfulness and compassion-based psychotherapy. He is a founding member of the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy, a clinical instructor in psychology at Harvard Medical School, author of *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*, and co-editor of *Mindfulness and Psychotherapy* and *Wisdom and Compassion in Psychotherapy: Deepening Mindfulness in Clinical Practice*. Dr. Germer lectures and conducts workshops internationally on the art and science of mindful self-compassion, and is co-developer, with Kristin Neff, of the 8-week Mindful Self-Compassion program.

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Soften, Soothe, Allow

This process was created by Kristin Neff and Chris Germer of the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion. Most of the language here comes directly from their document, Soften-Soothe-Allow.pdf.

1. *Beginning with Breath and Kindness*

Find a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take ***three relaxing breaths***. Place your hand on your heart for a few moments to remind yourself that you are in the room, and to bring kindness to yourself.

2. *Labeling the Emotion*

Let yourself ***recall a mild-moderately difficult situation*** that you are in right now, perhaps a health problem, stress in a relationship, or a loved one in pain. Do not choose a very difficult problem, or a trivial problem—choose a problem that can generate a little stress in your body when you think of it. Now clearly visualize the situation. *Who was there? What was said? What happened?*

Now see if you can ***name*** the strongest emotion—a difficult emotion—associated with that situation: *anger? sadness? grief? confusion? fear? longing? despair?* Repeat the name of the emotion to yourself in a gentle, understanding voice, as if you were validating for a friend what he/she is feeling: “That’s longing.” “That’s grief.”

3. *Bringing Mindfulness of Emotion into the Body*

Expand your ***awareness to your body as a whole***. Recall the difficult situation again and scan your body for where you feel it the most. In your mind’s eye, sweep your body from head to toe, stopping where you can sense a little tension or discomfort.

Now ***choose a single location*** in your body where the feeling expresses itself most strongly, perhaps as a point of muscle tension or an achy feeling, like a heartache. In your mind, incline gently toward that spot.

4. *Soften, Soothe, and Allow*

Soften into that location in your body. Let the muscles be soft without a requirement that they *become* soft, like simply applying heat to sore muscles. You can say, *“soft…soft…soft…”* quietly to yourself, to enhance the process. Remember that you are not trying to make the sensation go away—you are just being with them with loving awareness.

You can let yourself just soften around the edges, like around the edges of a pancake. No need to go all the way in.

Soothe yourself for struggling in this way. Put your hand over your heart and feel your body breathe. Perhaps kind words arise in our mind, such as, *“Oh my dear, this is such a painful experience. I’m so sorry it’s so hard for you right now”*.

If you wish, you can also direct kindness to the part of your body that is under stress by placing your hand in that place. It may help to think of your body as if it were the body of a beloved child. You can say kind words to yourself, or just repeat, *“soothe…soothe…soothe.”*

Allow the discomfort to be there. Abandon the wish for the feeling to disappear. Let the discomfort come and go as it pleases, like a guest in your own home. You can repeat, *“allow…allow…allow.”*

“Soften, soothe and allow.” “Soften, soothe and allow.” You can use these three words like a mantra, reminding yourself to incline with tenderness toward your suffering. *If you experience too much discomfort with an emotion, stay with your breath until you feel better.*

5. *Easing back out…*

When you’re ready, ***slowly open your eyes***, letting your attention move out into the world around you.

NOTE: *If, at any point, you experience too much discomfort, become panicky or scared, stay with your breath until you feel better. If things are still too much, try opening your eyes, looking around the room to orient yourself, maybe looking at something that is comforting or soothing to you (a favorite piece of art or photo of a loved one or pet). You may even want to reach out to a friend, take a walk, have a cup of tea. Taking care of yourself, even if it means interrupting the process, is mindfulness in action.*

Buddhadharma
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Buddhism's Pain Relief

by Rick Heller

***Rick Heller** reports on new developments in neuroscience that validate the Buddhist teachings on pain and suffering. It's further evidence of the many ways that mindfulness practice helps us deal effectively with pain.*

While many religions value introspection, scientists often view it with skepticism. After all, if something is subjective and cannot be measured, how can you be sure it's true? The insights of the Buddha were produced by self-observation. Thus, until recently, they fell outside the realm of scientific verification. But with the development of brain imaging technology such as functional MRI, it is now possible to carry out introspection and scientific observation in parallel, and to assess how well self-observation stacks up with objective methods of inquiry.

Among the Buddha's first teachings after his awakening were the four noble truths. The first three, regarding the ubiquity of suffering, its origin, and its cessation, find strong support from neuroscience research. In particular, the Buddha's views on suffering associated with physical pain appear to be valid, and perhaps *more* advanced than those in the West—especially prior to the new scientific theories on pain that were introduced in the 1960s.

In the last fifty years, and especially in the last decade, brain scientists have explored the origin of suffering and discovered something strikingly similar to the parable of the two arrows, which the Buddha offered to convey a skillful way of encountering physical pain. Physical pain, the Buddha taught, is like being shot with one arrow. The person who does not resist physical pain feels only that arrow. However, the average person who experiences pain also adds a layer of emotional suffering. Anguishing over pain is like being shot with a second arrow.

Although we commonly experience physical pain as a single phenomenon, it is actually composed of distinct elements that include the sensation itself and an aversive element we call suffering. Not only does aversion create suffering—the second arrow—it's increasingly clear that a person's attitude can affect the first arrow, the pain sensations themselves.

Ronald Siegel, a Buddhist practitioner and a psychologist on the clinical faculty of Harvard Medical School, says the practice of mindfulness can alleviate suffering and, in some cases, it can reduce the volume of physical pain sensations. Siegel is a specialist in the treatment of chronic back pain. Most cases of chronic back pain, he believes, are caused by muscular tension rather than structural problems in the body. Back pain and many other pain disorders stem from a feedback loop stirred by fear and negative thoughts that makes muscles tight.

"Once we experience a pain sensation that we are afraid is due to an injury, we bring all of our attention to it. And simply the bringing of fearful attention to pain increases the experience of pain," Siegel says. "These disorders are maintained by fear of the disorder."

In such cases, he believes that not only suffering but the amount of muscle pain itself can be reduced by a change in attitude.

"By turning our attention toward the phenomenon that we're afraid of and trying in essence to say 'yes' to the sensations, that whole aversion response tends to drop away," he says.

Siegel cautions that people with unexplained pain should first consult a physician to make sure the pain is not a symptom of a serious illness. But if a physician finds nothing threatening, and the aches and pains themselves are the chief issue, then mindfulness may be an appropriate treatment.

Mindfulness, however, is not a panacea. Ironically, Siegel was already a Buddhist practitioner when he was struck down by back pain that left him mostly bedridden for months. As he describes in his book, *Back Sense*, it was only when he learned about the approach he now teaches that he was able to free himself from pain and resume a normal life.

"I totally worked myself into the syndrome despite the meditation practice," Siegel says. "I did try meditating with the pain, but I believed that I was going to injure myself if I moved freely."

That mistaken belief was enough to maintain his pain disorder. "That's where the cognitive understanding is critical," Siegel says. "It did help to have the practice once I learned what was really the matter."

It may seem strange that we can feel intense pain sensations without anything major being wrong. In the West, until recently the standard view has been that physical pain is a warning sign of tissue damage, and that the greater the pain, the greater the damage. Called specificity theory, this model grew out of the ideas of French philosopher René Descartes. The theory came under challenge after World War II because of anomalies like the observation by U.S. Army doctor and Harvard Medical School anesthesiologist Henry K. Beecher that some soldiers who were severely wounded in battle appeared to suffer surprisingly little pain from their wounds.

The key figure in the modern understanding of pain was Ronald Melzack, a psychologist who did his research at McGill University in Montreal. In the 1960s, together Kenneth Casey, Melzack proposed that the experience of pain was composed of distinct elements, including both a sensory component and an emotional one. As well, Melzack and his MIT colleague Patrick Wall proposed gate control theory, which explains how pain sensations can be amplified based on the amount of attention paid to them.

Melzack gained his insight into the distinction between pain sensations and suffering by paying close attention to the words his patients used to describe their pain. noticed that people employed words like "shooting" or "cramping" that described sensory qualities, and other words like "punishing" or "terrifying" that described their emotional reactions. From his word list, Melzack developed the widely used McGill Pain Questionnaire and the notion that pain was a multidimensional experience.

Subsequent research verified Melzack's hypothesis about the composite nature of pain. Modern scientists no longer refer to a "pain center" but to a "pain matrix" in the brain, reflecting the understanding that several different brain regions contribute to the experience of pain.

Nerve fibers carry pain signals up the spine to a key branching point in the brain called the thalamus. From there, pain signals travel along one pathway to the somatosensory cortex, a brain region that contains a map of the human body. It records the sensory aspects of pain, and tells us *where* it hurts. Another pain pathway from the thalamus leads to the cingulate cortex. This region specializes in the unpleasantness of pain—telling us *that* it hurts.

Amazingly, people with damage to the cingulate cortex often report that pain doesn't hurt. That is, if they choose to pay attention, they can identify sensations in the body that correspond to pain. But to them, pain lacks the urgent quality that demands attention. "They used to do limbic leucotomies for pain, which is basically zapping the anterior cingulate," Alice Flaherty, a neurologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, told me. "People would say, 'I don't care about the pain anymore. I still feel it, but it's not so obnoxious.'"

The cingulate—the word is derived from the Latin for "belt"—is a complex region with a number of different functions, but brain scans and anatomical studies indicate that one of its functions is to act as a neural alarm. It's activated by physical pain, but also, as shown by the research of UCLA psychologist Naomi Eisenberger, by emotional distress like the sting of social rejection. The aversive component of both physical and emotional pain is perhaps best captured by the word *suffering*.

Our response to fear and our response to pain overlap in a subregion of the cingulate. This area prepares the body to flee. When alarmed, we tense our muscles so we can get away quickly. But as Ronald Siegel warns, if our muscles stay tense for a long time, this can lead to additional pain.

The good news is that although the feeling of alarm arises automatically, we can allow it to pass. Scientists like Naomi Eisenberger, among others, are finding that prefrontal regions of the brain, which are associated with conscious thought, are connected to the emotional areas and regulate them. When our senses take in something that might be threatening, the cingulate region generates the experience of suffering to force us to pay attention. The prefrontal regions then assess whether there really is a threat. If there is no threat—if what's going on is *acceptable*—

the prefrontal regions seem to inhibit the neural alarm in the cingulate. We relax our muscles, take a deep breath, and feel relief.

Thus, when we experience pain sensations without fear, the sense of suffering falls off. This is the physiological foundation of the parable of the two arrows. The impact of the second arrow is due to our resistance. With acceptance, it disappears.

This understanding informs Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, the program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn that is now offered at many health care centers. Carnegie-Mellon research psychologist J. David Creswell has reviewed studies of MBSR and its effect on pain.

“There seems to be a fairly consistent pattern of effect showing that mindfulness meditation is effective for reducing pain symptoms in chronic pain populations,” Creswell says.

However, he points out that mindfulness may not necessarily reduce the actual sensation of pain. “In fact,” he says, “I think that when you’re more mindful of pain, you’re actually experiencing the pain in a more direct way.”

Instead, mindfulness reduces the emotional suffering that normally accompanies pain, the second arrow in the Buddha’s parable. “I think that’s where the action is,” Creswell says. “There’s sort of a decoupling of one’s sensation of pain and the emotional response to that pain when you’re mindful.”

Creswell has some indirect evidence for this from a brain imaging study he conducted to test how mindfulness affects emotional pain. Creswell used a metric called the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale. It measures how predisposed a person is to focus on the present, based on answers to a series of questions such as, “I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.” Volunteers who were measured on this scale then had their brains scanned as they played a computer game designed to be emotionally distressing. Those more predisposed to be mindful rated the experience as less upsetting. Furthermore, the brain scans showed they had less activity in a subregion of the cingulate associated with suffering.

This is likely the target area where mindfulness has its impact on the second arrow, the aversive reaction to physical pain. Creswell is currently involved in a study to look at precisely this by testing people’s reactivity to physical pain before and after they complete an MBSR program.

It might seem like bare attention is too passive to affect our emotional reactions, but the brain is very active when we’re paying attention. “Just by simply observing and noticing how you’re responding, you are actually enlisting resources to regulate that response,” Creswell says.

Creswell attended a December 2008 meeting in Toronto that brought together about thirty-five clinicians and neuroscientists to discuss future directions for mindfulness research. Among those in attendance was Harvard Medical School neuroscience researcher Catherine Kerr. While Creswell sees mindfulness as protective against the second arrow of emotional suffering, Kerr thinks that mindful awareness of the body may have some impact on the first arrow, the pain sensations themselves. She’s done a pilot study that takes brain images of subjects as they mindfully shift awareness from one part of the body to another. One of the techniques taught in an MBSR program is the body scan method. This practice involves progressively bringing attention to the individual parts of the body, from head to toe.

“When you’re doing the body scan you focus on the toes and then you release the toes and you focus on the ankle or the bottom of the foot and you release it, and so on,” Kerr says. “The critical thing there is that you’re taking up the body part and then you learn to let it go. What you’re learning to do is to focus, maybe amplify the body part, but you also learn to inhibit it. The inhibition might be just as important as the amplification, especially for people with different types of chronic pain.”

Kerr cites evidence that the map of the human body within the brain’s somatosensory cortex reorganizes, based on the amount of attention paid to each body part. For instance, people who read Braille have more sensory territory devoted to the hand. Similarly, people who experience chronic back pain may have more neurons devoted to monitoring the back. Picture a distorted map in which a state’s size is based on the electoral votes it possesses, and so New Jersey looks bigger than Alaska. The distorted sensory map of a person in chronic pain would exaggerate the body parts in pain. Paying equal attention to all areas of the body using the body scan method may undo distorted body maps.

“Our theory is that meditation actually fine-tunes that ability to maintain sensory equanimity,” Kerr says. “That’s what we’re testing.”

There are at least two other ways by which our attention can affect the first arrow, the pure sensation of pain. Ronald Melzack and his colleague Patrick Wall described how pain signals from the extremities are filtered at the spine before they ever reach the brain. Like partygoers lined up before a nightclub's velvet ropes, pain signals clamor to get through. Whether the spinal gatekeepers admit them depends on instructions from on high. In the case of pain, signals from the brain pass down to the spine and tell the gatekeepers how exclusive they should be. "The descending pathway is usually a regulatory pathway. It could facilitate or it could inhibit," says Tarek Samad, a pharmaceuticals researcher and former assistant professor of anesthesia research at Harvard Medical School. "This is where emotional states or situations or environment affect the pain sensation." Depending on attitude and expectations, therefore, we can actually filter out pain before it reaches our consciousness. When we pay fearful attention to pain, however, we instruct the gates to open wide. As a result, we feel more intense pain.

The other way we can amplify pain is through the loop described by Ronald Siegel. When we experience fear, the brain sends signals to our muscles that tense them. When muscles are tensed for a long time, they start to hurt. When something starts to hurt, we become fearful, and we tense our muscles further.

The old Cartesian model of the pain system is simple but misleading. The real way the pain system works is not intuitively obvious, which makes the Buddha's insights into it all the more startling.

Reya Stevens is a Boston-based practitioner of Theravada Buddhism who teaches Buddhist approaches to dealing with illness. "Clinging," Stevens says, referring to the Buddha's second noble truth, "is all about not wanting something to be the way it is, or wanting something to stay the way it is—which can't happen because everything is constantly changing."

It's natural to reject what's unpleasant, but this often boomerangs. "If you get into a struggle with something, like trying to get rid of something or push it away, it has a tendency to actually make the thing worse," Stevens says.

Psychologists such as Harvard's Daniel Wegner have studied what happens when we try to suppress thoughts. Our brains operate in a continuous loop in which we check our present state for conflicts with our goals. This can have a paradoxical effect when the goal is to control your own thoughts. Normally, you don't think about pink elephants. When trying *not* to think of them, however, you periodically ask yourself, "Am I thinking of a pink elephant?" The question itself produces the unwanted thought. Dartmouth researchers found that this checking behavior involves brain cells in the cingulate, though how it relates to the pain system is unclear.

Researchers at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia and elsewhere have found that trying not to think about pain actually leads to more thoughts about pain. Feeling negative about pain makes pain hurt more. In mathematics, negating a negative produces a positive. Not so with pain. Pain serves as an alarm, and feeling alarmed about pain just piles it on.

If trying to suppress pain has the effect of magnifying it, can paying attention to pain actually alleviate suffering?

Yes, but the results may not be instantaneous, says Stevens.

"The issue for some people is they're starting meditation at a time when their pain is high and they don't have the luxury of building up slowly," she says. "Many meditators will not do well by just starting to be mindful of the bare sensations of pain right from the get-go because there is too much aversion. They'll have to start by being mindful of the reactivity to pain."

Another starting point is to be mindful of things that, although not physically painful, are often experienced as unpleasant, like road noise.

"Is it noise or is it sound?" she asks. "Inherent in the word 'noise' is your aversion to it. You're labeling it as unpleasant."

Stevens herself lives with considerable pain due to a chronic illness she's had since childhood.

"I recall a number of nights where I had a lot of burning pain in the body, but it was only on the right side," she says. "I sunk my attention into the left side of my body and really stayed mindful of the left side of the body. The distress that I felt over the pain in the right side of my body disappeared because my attention was able to settle itself into the left side to relax and let go. I fell asleep, pain and all. Many, many nights I've gone to sleep that way."

Shinzen Young, a mindfulness teacher based in Burlington, Vermont, is noted for his work with people in chronic pain. In his book *Break Through Pain*, Young describes his own breakthrough during a hundred-day retreat in primitive winter conditions

at a Buddhist monastery in Japan. He found that with concentration, the pain dissolved into a sort of energy he compares to a runner's high.

"It's almost certainly the case when a person is having a dramatic experience of pain breaking up that their endorphins are through the roof," Young says.

A brain imaging study conducted on athletes in Munich has shown that the euphoria that comes with vigorous exercise is due to the transmission of internal opioids such as endorphins to the cingulate and other regions. Placebos, which can be quite effective against pain, have also been shown to increase the body's flow of these morphine-like chemicals. So while Young's hypothesis has yet to be demonstrated in the laboratory, it may well be that we can release these pain-killing substances with sufficient mindfulness practice.

Young says that to deal effectively with pain, we need three things: the clarity to untangle the individual sensory elements, concentration to focus on each element, and the equanimity to experience each element without suffering. In addition to pain's sensory and emotional components, Young adds self-talk and the mental images that arise with pain. If we can apply mindfulness to each element, we can pick them off one by one.

Turning toward pain with acceptance is a key strategy that Young teaches. But he also says we can turn away from pain and concentrate on a more pleasant object, like the breath. Unlike a distraction strategy for coping with pain, which can be fleeting, with sufficient practice concentration can be more enduring.

Young says that while mindfulness is often defined as "nonjudgmental awareness," more precisely it's a question of equanimity.

"Nonjudgmentalness can be a factor of equanimity, but equanimity is broader concept," he says.

Equanimity does not mean passivity. So when one has a physical injury, or even the kind of pain that might indicate a heart attack, instead of panicking, one can mindfully apply good judgment and do what needs to be done.

"You can have equanimity with the physical sensations, the thoughts, and the feelings," Young says, "while you take objective action."

There is nothing inherently wrong with taking a pill to relieve pain. One can mindfully lay a tablet on the tongue, sip from a glass of water, and swallow. But if mindfulness can relieve the suffering from pain, and sometimes even pain sensations themselves, doesn't it make sense to give it a try? Mindfulness can also work as a complementary therapy in conjunction with medication. In cases of severe pain, drugs often fail to block all the pain. Mindfulness can help when drugs fall short.

The best time to learn how to apply mindfulness toward pain may be before one is in severe pain. It's like having an emergency kit available with you just in case you break down. We are all of the nature to grow old, to become ill, and to die. Few of us will escape from experiencing significant physical pain at one time or another. It helps to be prepared. Dodging one arrow is enough.

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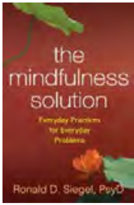

The Strange Case of Chronic Back Pain

© 2010 Ronald D. Siegel, PsyD, excerpted from *The Mindfulness Solution*

Nobody likes pain or illness. Throughout history people have gone to great lengths to avoid them—by performing rituals, gathering medicinal plants, praying to gods, or more recently developing modern hygiene and medicine. Despite our best efforts, we're still visited regularly by both.

Some pain and illness is unavoidable, and some can be prevented with thought and care. A remarkable amount of pain and illness, however, is actually caused by our attempts to get rid of it. Like the psychological difficulties we've been discussing, a lot of physical disorders result unwittingly from our efforts to avoid unpleasant experience—in essence, from swatting at mosquitoes. Stress—our reaction to things we don't like—is at the heart of all of these problems.

The range of medical conditions that are either caused or exacerbated by stress is remarkable. Depending on the criteria used, some 60–90% of all physician visits are for stress-related disorders. Take a moment to see how many of these have afflicted you at one time or another…

While each of these conditions can have many causes, they all can result from or be exacerbated by psychological processes. Foremost among those processes is our tendency to reject unpleasant experiences. Because this propensity is often central to the ailments listed above, mindfulness can help resolve them.

The strange case of chronic back pain

Chronic back pain offers a good example of how this works. I got involved in treating this condition through a personal encounter that shed light on both what causes the problem and how mindfulness practice can help resolve it. As we'll see, it turns out that the principles involved in understanding and treating chronic back pain can also help us deal with a wide range of other pain problems and stress-related medical disorders.

In the late 1980s I spent four miserable months flat on my back with a herniated disk. After working out on a cross-country ski machine, I developed pain and numbness running down my left leg. When it got worse, I sought medical advice and eventually found myself in an orthopedist's office. He did a CT scan, diagnosed the problem as a herniated L5-S1 disk, and recommended bed rest.

Since I was on the faculty of a medical school, I had access to orthopedic texts. I kept these on my nightstand next to my radiology report.

I read repeatedly that the disk might heal with rest—but if it didn't I'd need surgery, which was often unsuccessful. As the days went on, I saw no improvement.

Desperate for a more active approach, I saw a sports medicine specialist. He took a look at my CT scan and told me that if I didn't stay off my feet and avoid sitting, I'd be "begging for surgery" in six months. Not what I wanted to hear.

I was getting so depressed and anxious that I felt I couldn't stay in bed any longer. So I decided to build a platform in my office. Thus began a bizarre parody of the classical psychoanalytic scene—I'd be lying down on a makeshift couch as my patients sat up and wondered about my pathology and prognosis. Driving to work, I'd lean my car seat as far back as I could, barely seeing over the steering wheel, trying to take weight off my spine. It's a miracle that I didn't kill myself or someone else.

After a couple of months my wife, who is also a clinical psychologist, made an observation: "You know, sweetheart, you seem to complain more about the pain whenever we have an argument." You can imagine how much I appreciated her insight. Now not only did I have to suffer with this horrible pain, but I had to endure her psychological theories. I knew better. My pain was due to the disk—after all, I reread my radiology report nightly.

Still trying to be helpful, my wife brought home Norman Cousins's book Anatomy of an Illness. Cousins was a famous journalist who had cured himself of degenerative arthritis by taking high doses of vitamin C, watching Marx brothers films, and laughing. It was a very inspirational story but didn't

seem relevant. "That's very nice for Norman," I told my wife, "but I have a herniated disk!"

Around the same time, a friend had been urging me to speak with a mutual professional acquaintance. She had supposedly cured her back problem by treating it as a muscle tension disorder—a reaction to stress. "Here we go again," I thought. "This is my punishment for hanging out with psychotherapists."

Partly out of desperation, partly to get everyone to stop bugging me, I called her.

"What are you doing right now?" she asked. "Lying down—that's all I ever do."

"Why don't you go out and buy groceries for the family—your wife will appreciate it."

"Great, a feminist conspiracy," I thought. She went on to describe how she had recovered fully from chronic back pain by getting physically active and treating the pain as a muscle tension syndrome rather than an orthopedic problem.

I wasn't about to get groceries, but I was so desperate, I thought I'd try an experiment. At that point, I couldn't walk for more than a block before the pain became intense. So I set out to challenge myself. I walked a block. Right on cue, I felt pain down my left leg. Determined to persevere, I walked another two blocks. To my utter surprise, now not only did I have pain going down my left leg, but I felt it in my right leg also. "That was a brilliant idea," I thought.

Hobbling home, I realized that it actually may have been a good idea after all. According to my radiology report, I should only have pain running down my left leg. If I felt it on the right too, either I'd shattered my spine completely (a hypothesis I entertained), or the pain might be due to something else. Maybe muscle tension was at least part of the problem.

I was desperate to get better. I started reading everything I could about stress, muscle tension, and chronic back pain and began moving more even though it hurt. Within a couple of weeks I had removed the platform from my office and was driving more or less normally. Soon I was exercising and doing yoga again. I felt like I had awakened from a very bad dream.

I was so impressed by this experience that I set about to learn what I could about mind–body interactions and the potential of using psychological interventions to help with medical problems. I soon realized that mindfulness practice could be enormously useful in these efforts and began collaborating with area physicians and incorporating it into my work. What I learned studying and treating back pain held the key to using mindfulness practice to work effectively with a surprisingly wide range of stress-related disorders.

Bad Back?

It turns out that the vast majority of chronic back pain is, as in my case, caused by muscle tension, and this tension is maintained by psychological stress. It's necessary to understand this in order to get better. If we believe instead that our pain is due to a damaged disk or other spinal structure, it will be very difficult for us to relax about it and move normally.

While there isn't room here for all the details, let me mention a few of the most compelling pieces of evidence supporting this idea. First, it turns out that the condition of the spine usually has little bearing on whether or not a person is in pain:

- Approximately two-thirds of people who have never suffered serious back pain have the same sorts of "abnormal" back structures, like herniated disks, that are often blamed for chronic back pain.
- Millions of people who suffer chronic back pain show no "abnormalities" in their backs whatsoever, even after extensive testing.
- Many people continue to have pain after "successful" surgical repair. There is little relation between the mechanical success of repairs and whether the patient is still in pain.

Other studies give us clues to the role of psychological stress and muscle tension:

- The worldwide epidemic of chronic back pain is limited mostly to industrialized nations. Remarkably, there is little chronic back pain in developing countries, where people do "backbreaking" labor, use primitive furniture and tools, don't sleep on top-of-the-line Posturepedic mattresses, and drive long distances over rutted roads sitting in the backs of old pickup trucks.
- Psychological stress, and particularly job dissatisfaction, predicts who will develop disabling back pain more reliably than do physical measures or the physical demands of one's job.

- Rapidly returning to full, vigorous, physical activity is usually both safe and the most effective way to resolve back pain episodes.

None of this would make sense if most back pain were caused by herniated disks and other structural problems, but it all makes a lot of sense if back pain is caused by stress and muscle tension..

The Chronic Back Pain Cycle

Emotional stress turns into back pain through a process that my colleagues and I call the chronic back pain cycle. It can begin with either an emotional or a physical event. Imagine, for example, that you do some unusually heavy lifting, perhaps putting in an air conditioner in the early summer or shoveling snow at the start of winter. You strain your back, and it begins to hurt. If you happen to live in an industrialized culture with an epidemic of back problems, you might begin to have some worried thoughts: "I hope I didn't injure my back like my cousin did." "I hope I'll be able to go to work tomorrow." If the pain is intense or persistent, these thoughts will begin to make you anxious.

Try a little experiment right now (this will require a bit of dramatic acting—don't be shy). In pantomime, demonstrate with your face and body what fear looks like. Really ham it up. (Don't worry; nobody is watching.) Hold the pose for a few seconds. What do you feel in your body? Which muscles become tense?

You can see here for yourself that fear produces muscle tension. And you know from other experience that muscle tension increases pain. Just think about how much neck muscles can hurt after a stressful day or how painful a charley horse in the calf can be.

So this is how the chronic back pain cycle works. Our initial pain causes worried thoughts, these thoughts create anxiety, and this anxiety causes muscles to tighten. Tight muscles cause increased pain, and increased pain triggers even more dire worried thoughts. Once the cycle sets in, other emotions, such as frustration and anger, get into the act.

Take a moment to do a little more dramatic acting. In pantomime, show first frustration and then anger with your face and body. Really ham it up again. (Nobody is watching now either.) Hold each pose for a few seconds. Notice how these secondary emotions produce even more muscle tension?

The Back Sense program

My colleagues and I developed Back Sense, a step-by-step treatment program incorporating mindfulness meditation that helps people interrupt this cycle. The program has three basic elements, all of which work best in tandem with mindfulness practice: (1) understand the problem, (2) resume full physical activity, and (3) work with negative emotions. *[For more about this, see Back Sense: A Revolutionary Approach to Halting the Cycle of Chronic Back Pain]*

NOTE: *Before beginning the program, it is important to have a thorough physical examination to rule out rare but potentially serious medical causes for pain and to receive a doctor's permission to resume normal activities. Without such permission, it will be very difficult to overcome your fears. Physiatrists (rehabilitation physicians) are good sources for such evaluations, as they are most likely to encourage your return to full movement. The good news is that these rare medical disorders, which include tumors, infections, injuries, and unusual structural abnormalities, are the cause of only about one in 200 cases of chronic back pain.*

***Ronald Siegel**,* is Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School, where he has taught for over 25 years. He is a long-time student of mindfulness meditation and serves on the Board of Directors and faculty of the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy. Dr. Siegel teaches internationally about mindfulness and psychotherapy and mind–body treatment, has worked for many years in community mental health with inner-city children and families, and maintains a private clinical practice in Lincoln, Massachusetts. He is the coauthor of the self-treatment guide Back Sense, which integrates Western and Eastern approaches for treating chronic back pain, and coeditor of an acclaimed book for professionals, Mindfulness and Psychotherapy. Dr. Siegel lives in Lincoln with his wife and daughters. He regularly uses the practices in this book to work with his own busy, unruly mind.

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Practice Log – Week 5

FORMAL PRACTICE: Practice at least six times this week, alternating **Sitting Meditation** (guided or unguided) with either the **Body Scan or Yoga** (Yoga 1 or Yoga 2). On the first day, though, try the Soften, Soothe, Allow Meditation. The Soften, Soothe, Allow Meditation is 15 minutes long, so on that day, you will have a shorter practice session (if you'd like a full 30 minutes, you can add silent meditation on your own that day). As before, don't expect anything in particular from these practices. Just let your experience be your experience.

INFORMAL PRACTICE: The informal practice will be to try **Soften, Soothe, Allow** at times when you are experiencing an unwanted emotion (see the Soften, Soothe, Allow process). The unwanted emotion doesn't have to be severe. It could be, for instance, impatience waiting in line or being mildly annoyed by some minor event. ***If, at the end of the day, no unwanted emotion comes to mind****, ignore the "Soften, Soothe, Allow" format, and take the time to feel gratitude for something that happened that day (or even simply for the fact that you have no significant unwanted feelings!). We often don't take time to experience gratitude, so you might see if you can stay with the feeling of gratitude for a moment or two, and maybe even feel it in your body (e.g., warmth in chest, softness in belly, full heart, relaxed neck and shoulders…). You can make a short note about what happened when you did that somewhere on that day's row of the Informal Practice sheet.*

…Date…	Practice Comments (include which type of practice)

Informal Practice Log (Soften, Soothe, Allow) – Week 5

What was the situation? What was happening inside? *(body, mind, emotions)*	**What was the strongest emotion you were feeling?** *(e.g. anger, sadness, grief, impatience, confusion, fear, shame, longing, despair?)*	**Where in your body were you feeling this the most?** *(e.g. tightness in chest, queasiness in stomach, ache in heart, headache)*	**How did you "do" Soften-Soothe-Allow? What did you notice while you were doing this?**	**What did you notice AFTER you did the process?** *(body-mind-emotion-action)*
EXAMPLE *My boss harshly reprimanded me in an email. I went through all the things I could say in my defense. My shoulders were tense, my jaw clenched , stomach tight.*	*At first, I was shocked, then felt like I had been kicked in the stomach, I felt vulnerable and angry, but mostly I felt hurt about how unfair he had been.*	*There was a sinking feeling in my stomach, and a tightness because I really thought I had done a good job in the document he wrote to me about.*	*I softened around my stomach, noticed I could relax my shoulders, To this part of me that felt hurt, I offered a silent "of course you feel that way – you wanted praise and you got corrections instead".*	*It was strange – even though it was me comforting me, I felt understood and less vulnerable. I was able to compose myself and think constructively about how to respond to my boss.*

Week 5b - Special Instructions for Physical Pain
The Five-Step "PAIN" Process

> ***NOTE:** This page contains an alternative set of resources for Week 5 and is designed **specifically for people who are experiencing significant physical discomfort due to chronic pain, fibromyalgia, serious injury or physical disability.** All the materials you'll need for this week are given below, but you should also look over the **main Week 5 page**.*

"Physical" vs "Emotional" Pain
The complex interaction between physical, emotional and mental realms makes it inaccurate to say a discomfort is "just mental/emotional" or "just physical". Significant physical pain is emotionally difficult and significant emotional pain has physical consequences and correlates. Even so, there are some physical conditions that are so difficult that a special approach may be helpful.

Videos
In addition to **Turning Toward Difficulty** and **The Three Components of Self-Compassion**, which are also on the main Week 5 page, **Mindfulness-Based Pain Management** goes into more detail about dealing with difficult or chronic pain. This is an inspiring video in which Vidyamala Burch of **Breathworks** talks about her journey with the chronic pain and disability that began with an accident when she was a teenager, and in which she describes her novel approach to chronic pain. Jon Kabat-Zinn calls Vidyamala's approach ***"the most comprehensive, in-depth, scientifically up-to-date and user-friendly approach to learning the how of living with chronic pain and reclaiming one's life that I know of."*** If you'd like to know even more about her story, there are several interesting interviews of her in the supplementary materials.

You don't need to view *Awakening Self-Compassion* by Tara Brach, but it is a great video and if you have time and would like to see it, you'll find it located on the **main Week 5 page**.

Readings
The suggestions for informal practice described in Week 5 can be very helpful with physical issues, but Vidyamala's *Five-Step PAIN process* is likely to be more effective. **The Five-Step Model**, describes this process in detail, and **The Five-Step PAIN process** is a one-page summary which will be useful for the informal practice. Two readings also given on the main Week 5 page are **Buddhism's Pain Relief** and **The Strange Case of Chronic Back Pain** (a must-read if you or someone you know has back issues, and if so, see also Ron Siegel's **Back Sense** in the supplementary section).

Practice
The **formal practice** is the same as is given in Week 5. As indicated there, we focus a little more on the sitting meditation, alternating it with your choice of one of the other practices. On the first day, though, if you have something that happened that is mildly difficult, try the **Soften, Soothe, Allow Meditation** (see it on the menu to the left). The situation doesn't have to be a major issue, in fact, it's best if it's mild or moderate. For instance, it could be impatience while waiting in line or being mildly annoyed by some minor event.

For the daily **informal practice**, instead of Soften-Soothe-Allow, try the **Five-Step PAIN process** at times when you are experiencing physical discomfort or pain. The discomfort doesn't have to be major, it could just be a minor ache or physical irritation. *If you are lucky enough to have a day with no aches or pains to speak of, take the time to feel gratitude for this or something else that happened that day.* If you like, you can also try the *Soften, Soothe, Allow* process on one or two days instead of the Five-Step PAIN process (if you'd like to do this, more info about *Soften, Soothe, Allow*, as well as practice sheets, are given on main Week 5 page).

Below are your materials for this week:

Videos
- **Turning Toward Difficulty** *by Vidyamala Burch [10 min]*
- **Mindfulness-Based Pain Management** *by Vidyamala Burch [21 min]*
- **The Three Components of Self-Compassion** *by Kristin Neff [6 min]*

Reading
- **The Five-Step Model** *by Vidyamala Burch*
- **The Five-Step PAIN Process** *one-page description of Vidyamala Burch's "Five Step Model"*
- **Buddhism's Pain Relief** *by Rick Heller*
- **The Strange Case of Chronic Back Pain** *by Ron Siegel*

It's simply being kind to myself—meeting myself, whatever my emotional, physical or psychological state, with loving kindness. As simple, and difficult, as that!
- Marianne Elliot

Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult, once we truly understand and accept it, then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.
- M. Scott Peck

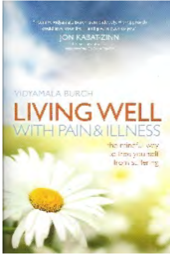
more quotes

Practice sheets

Formal Practice ***[PDF]*** *or [****WORD format****]* - Various *(Soften-Soothe-Allow Meditation on 1st day)*
Informal Practice ***[PDF]*** *or [****WORD format****]* - see **The Five-Step PAIN Process**

Supplementary materials helpful for dealing with physical pain

YOU Are Not Your Pain *book by Vidyamala Burch*
Back Sense: Halting the Cycle of Chronic Back Pain *book by Ron Siegel*
Living Well With Pain & Illness *book by Vidyamala Burch*
How To Be Sick *book by Toni Bernhard*
Explain Pain *book by David Butler*
Vidyamala Burch interview *video (more detail about Vidyamala's story) [58 min]*
Choosing to Live Well with Pain & Illness *audio interview of Vidyamala Burch [39 min]*
Choosing to Live Well with Pain & Illness *transcript of above interview*



The Five-Step Model of Mindfulness

Excerpted from Living Well With Pain and Illness by Vidyamala Burch

Inside this new love…
Become the sky …
Escape …..
Walk out like someone suddenly born into color.
Do it now.
You're covered with thick cloud.
Slide out the side …
Your old life was a frantic running
from silence
The speechless full moon
comes out now.
RUMI

Now that you have a sense of the dimensions of mindfulness, it's time to explore how to develop it, as mindfulness is a way of living that's cultivated by practice. Few people live with continual awareness, so for most of us mindfulness training means becoming aware once you're already distracted. You'll probably find yourself caught up in distractions hundreds of times a day, but choosing awareness even once is a victory, no matter how fleeting that moment may be. It's a step in retraining yourself after years of unhelpful habitual behavior. In time, awareness itself becomes a habit.

Mindfulness practice is like any other training. If you want to become an athlete, you need to develop certain muscles so you can run with ease; to cultivate mindfulness you must train your awareness so that it becomes an increasingly reliable source of strength and stability. This chapter describes five steps or progressive stages in developing mindfulness that offer a realistic and sustainable approach to practice for those of us living with pain and illness. I have included a short mindfulness exercise with the first four steps. (There's an audio version of the exercises at soundstrue.com/burch.)

STEP ONE
THE STARTING POINT: AWARENESS

The first step in developing mindfulness is simply to become more familiar with what's actually happening in each moment. For example, you can become aware of your breath; of your body as you sit, walk, stand, or lie down; and of your sensations - pleasant or painful. You can notice your thoughts and emotions as discrete aspects of your experience instead of overidentifying with them. You can become more aware of other people and the world around you. You might suddenly notice little things such as the sensation of the sun on your skin, the taste of an orange, or the greenness of the grass on a summer's day. Becoming more aware can be like moving from a two-dimensional, black-and-white world to one that has three dimensions and is saturated with color.

EXERCISE: PRESENT-MOMENT AWARENESS

Notice what you're experiencing right now. Can you feel the book in your hands as you hold it? Is it warm or cold. rough or soft, heavy or light? Does holding it feel comfortable? Are your shoulders relaxed or hunched? What about your belly: is it tight or soft? What happens when you bring your attention to these areas? Do they relax a little? Feel free to shift your posture in any way you want as you become more aware.

Now notice the sensations of contact between your body and your support. Does your body feel heavy or light, relaxed or tense? Just notice how your body feels without judging your experience.

How does the breath in your body feel in this moment? What parts of your body move with the breath?

What sounds and smells are you aware of?

How many colors can you see? Can you simply enjoy them. noticing all the different shades and textures?

As you draw this exercise to a close, see if you can carry this quality of awareness into the rest of your day, being alert, engaged, and curious about your experience.

STEP TWO
MOVE TOWARD THE UNPLEASANT

The second step - moving toward unpleasant aspects of experience - is deeply counterintuitive and probably comes as a surprise. It may even sound masochistic. In fact, facing pain is essential because those of us with chronic pain' usually resist it through trying to block the pain out or else drowning in it. In neither case do we really see the pain for what it is.

When you first turn your attention to painful sensations, you may be more aware of your resistance than of the pain itself, but you can work with this by gently "leaning into" the resistance with your awareness and using your breath to drop your awareness more deeply into your body. You can breathe in with a sense of awareness and breathe out with a sense ofletting go.

Over time you can learn to adopt a kindly, nonjudgmental attitude to the whole of your experience and allow painful sensations simply to be present. You can develop a caring attitude toward your pain - like that of the natural impulse of a mother to gather a child who is hurt into her arms and hold him or her tenderly. Even though she can't remove the child's pain, her loving response will ease his or her distress.

REBECCA

Rebecca has been disabled since birth and has been, through more than forty operations. She has meditated for many years and recently told me how turning toward the pain has helped her:

Turning toward the pain meant facing the fear that it would get out of control and I'd be overwhelmed. I'd never really looked into the pain, and that 'meant I'd turned it into a monster. So I tried to look at the monster. What shape was it? Where exactly was it located? Did it have a color? I became interested in the pain's real nature. I found that however bad it was, it didn't kill me! I discovered that some kinds of pain are more bearable than others; for instance, I can bear more of a fresh pain than old, nagging pain. I also saw how I solidify the idea of pain, as if it were a hot and jagged mountain. But when I turn toward it I see that it changes from moment to moment, and noticing those differences helped me to experience the pain instead of being caught in reactions.

Taking Things One Moment at a Time

It's easy to think that moving toward the pain will add to the sense of drowning, as Rebecca feared. But feeling overwhelmed usually comes from being overidentified with ideas about experience. You think, Oh my God, this is awful. I can't bear it. I hate my life. I've had this pain for ten years and it will never go away. It's getting worse; I feel so tired. I won't be able to go out with my friends and they'll reject me. No wonder I have no friends left. Before you know it, you're caught up in thoughts about how your pain stretches interminably into the past and will continue indefinitely into the future.

When you bring awareness and curiosity to the actual experience of pain, often you find that it's not as bad as you feared. Focusing on direct perception of the sensations rather than ideas about them brings you' into the present moment in which experience is always fluid and changing. You see that you only ever experience your pain one moment at a time - as I understood in the hospital experience I described in chapter I (see page 5). The fear that I couldn't get through until morning dissolved when I realized that I simply had to live each moment, that the present moment is always bearable, and that the only authentic and sustainable way to be fully alive is to be open to all life's moments, not just the ones I prefer.

EXERCISE: MOVING TOWARD THE UNPLEASANT

As you sit or lie down, gently open your awareness to include any unpleasant or painful sensations. Let them enter your field of awareness with an attitude of tenderness and kindly curiosity. Remember to keep breathing! We commonly tense against pain and hold the breath, but see if you can soften toward the pain with gentle breaths.

Maybe you are more aware of a sense of resistance and tension than of the pain itself. If so, see if you can investigate this resistance a little more directly-turning your attention toward it, like shining a soft light onto something that's hidden in shadow. Maybe you can "lean into" it with your awareness, as if you were gently 'leaning against a dense, yet, pliant, object. Allow it to soften a little with each in- and out-breath. Maybe you can feel the resistance softening as you let the body settle onto the earth with each out-breath.

As you open to the pain itself, notice what the actual sensations are like and sense how they are always changing. Maybe they feel hard and tight one moment, a little softer the next? Or are they sharp one moment and then tingly?

Can you tell exactly where the pain is located in your body? Be precise about this.You may notice that the pain is more localized than you thought. This may be the first time you've investigated your pain directly, so be patient with any disturbed thoughts or feelings of fear and anxiety that may arise. Notice how these are also constantly changing. See if you can relax a little around whatever unpleasant experiences you notice, and remember to let the weight of your body settle down onto the earth beneath you and soften your breath each time you notice you're tensing.

STEP THREE
SEEKING THE PLEASANT

This third step in developing mindfulness in fact grows naturally out of the second, but it may seem even more surprising: it involves becoming sensitive to the pleasant elements of your experience. Hardening against pain also shuts out the pleasurable side of life, and we lose the sensitivity that allows us to feel vibrantly alive and experience pleasure and love. You might not feel the pain so much, but you'll numb yourself to other people, the beauty of nature, or the simple pleasure of the body's warmth while sitting in the sun. When I've been most able to be with my pain as a changing, dynamic experience, I've also been most in touch with the poignancy and subtlety of the human condition and most able to appreciate the world around me:

As you develop a more straightforward relationship with pain, you make the surprising discovery that there's always something pleasant, even beautiful, in your experience when you look for it. Everyone I've worked with, even those suffering severe pain, has found something pleasant to focus on, and for those of us living with chronic pain or illness this can be a revelation.

Seeking the pleasant is like being an explorer searching for hidden treasure. It might be as simple as noting the warmth of your hands or a pleasant feeling in the belly, or seeing a shaft of sunlight streaming through the window. If you're in the hospital it could be the smell of flowers by your bed or the pleasure of being with someone you love: maybe you notice the way their eyes crinkle when they smile or the quality of their touch as they hold your hand.

As I've become more mindful, I'm much more attuned to the subtleties of my sensations. I notice how my hair feels against my forehead; when I meditate with my eyes closed, I notice the contact between my eyes and eyelids. Through such sensitivity the present moment becomes richer, more multifaceted, and more alive.

GERALDINE

A severe neck problem gave me such bad vertigo that every day I would admit defeat and go to bed. I'd .given up my career and seemed to be spending half my life in bed. I felt furious and depressed; I felt that the condition was ruling me and dictating my life and the lives of my husband and my two young children.

My attitude gradually changed as I developed mindfulness. One day I was lying in bed feeling dreadful, but instead of the usual negative thoughts about how terrible it was, I noticed how comfortable the pillow felt under my head, the feeling of being warm, how soft the light was in the bedroom, and I reflected on how lucky I was to have such a supportive family.

What to Do If You Can't Find Anything Pleasant

If you have a lot of pain the suggestion that there is something pleasurable in your experience may seem laughable. You'll need to explore this area with an open mind and a willingness to experience new things, letting go of any fixed ideas about your experience. You may be surprised.

A few years ago I was in the hospital following surgery, having developed an infection that caused tremendous pain. As I searched for pleasant sensations, I noticed I was enjoying the contact between my body and the crisp, clean bedsheets. That

moment was particularly beautiful because the contrast with the pain made the feeling more pleasurable than usual.

Seeking the Pleasant Isn't Simply Distraction

Well-meaning friends and professionals may have encouraged you to "think positively" when you're in pain. That can be good advice, but you may simply be painting a veneer of false positivity over your suffering, which is just another form of avoidance. Seeking out pleasant aspects of experience as the third step of mindfulness is different. In the second step you have acknowledged your pain with kindness, rather than trying to distract yourself from it or blocking it out. This attitude of sensitivity, openness, and honesty to the whole of your experience, including your pain, now allows you to gently turn to the pleasant aspects of the moment that have been there all along, just outside your field of awareness. You can feel stable and whole, rather than grasping for pleasure to avoid your pain. Amazing as it can seem, pleasure is always present, but you close yourself to it when dominated by your pain. As you let in pleasurable sensations, you may feel relief that you're at last giving them attention.

EXERCISE: SEEKING THE PLEASANT

Start off by being aware of your whole body as you sit or lie down. Notice the breath rising and falling, and allow your body to rest down toward the earth, particularly on each out-breath.

If pain is present, let go of any tendency to tense up, and gently shift your focus to notice anything that's pleasant in this moment-like focusing the close-up lens of a camera on a beautiful object.

Notice pleasant physical sensations first of all, no matter how subtle they may be. It might be a sense of warmth in your hands, a pleasant tingling somewhere in your body, or perhaps a sense of relief around the heart area now that you're allowing yourself to come to rest with your experience in its wholeness: Maybe there's a curious sensation in your left earlobe that you realize is pleasant! Spend some time moving through your body with your awareness and pause when you find something pleasurable.

Now expand your awareness and notice any pleasant sounds. Spend a few moments simply appreciating them as sounds. Notice any tendency to get caught up in wondering about 'their source or wanting them to last. Just let them rise and fall.

Look around you and notice anything that's beautiful or pleasant in your immediate environment. It might be the light in the room or a picture on the wall. Just appreciate it as if you're seeing it for the first time.

DEBBIE

Debbie lives with severe musculoskeletal pain and fatigue, and she came to the Breathworks course when she was down and exhausted. She laughed out loud when she heard about looking for pleasant aspects of her experience. It seemed ludicrous that she might feel anything but unremitting pain and despair. But as she sat preparing to meditate, she noticed the wall in front of her and realized she was appreciating the care that had gone into the brickwork. It was a revelation to find that often there were pleasant things in her experience that she usually didn't notice because she was so identified with her pain.

STEP FOUR

BROADENING AWARENESS TO BECOME A BIGGER CONTAINER AND CULTIVATING EQUANIMITY

In the fourth step you broaden your awareness to include both the unpleasant and pleasant aspects of your experience, like switching from a focused to a wide-angle lens. In this stage, rather than focusing closely on sensations of pain or pleasure, you become aware of the diverse aspects of each moment as they come into being and pass away without automatically pushing away the unpleasant or clinging to the pleasant. Practicing mindfulness isn't about escaping difficulty; it's about holding the whole of experience in a wider perspective with equanimity and depth.

The Zen teacher Charlotte Joko Beck calls this state "becoming a bigger container."2 Often you feel too small to accommodate what happens, as if you are a restrictive and narrow container. That causes stress. But if you feel yourself to be a bigger container, you can manage whatever happens and maintain perspective with a deep sense of inner spaciousness. Ultimately, the container may be limitless and allow a sense of space, freedom, and stability.

If you put a teaspoon of salt in a small glass of water it will have a strong taste, but if you add the

same amount of salt to a lake, the water will be largely unaffected, With mindfulness you can become like a deep and clear lake: individual experiences don't overwhelm you, and you can remain steady through life's ups and downs while being honest about what's happening.

It can be a huge relief to accept the whole of your experience. It allows you to relax much more deeply. When you experience the sensations of your body right here, right now, whatever they may be, you can rest within it, settling your awareness in the stability of the belly rather than identifying with anxious thoughts in your head about your pain or illness. Truly settling in the body feels like coming home.

A Sense of Connectedness with Others

Another aspect of this fourth step is to become sensitive to and aware of other people. You may notice how you communicate with your friends and family and how they communicate with you. As you feel greater emotional robustness and become more able to take things in, you may become less touchy and shrug off difficulties rather than being dragged down by them. You can relax and enjoy other people's company much more.

EXERCISE: OPENING TO THE WHOLE OF EXPERIENCE

Bring your awareness to your whole experience as you sit or lie down reading this book. Notice the contact between your hands and the book and the broader sense of your body on the chair or the bed. Gather your awareness around the breath for a few moments. See if you can feel from the inside how the breath gently rocks the body, and settle down onto the earth with each breath. You might imagine you're floating on a gentle ocean swell being rocked by the constant, rhythmic movement.

Imagine all the different aspects of your experience in this moment are taking place within a broad and open field of awareness. Let everything rise and fall with a fluid sense of change and flow, neither pushing away painful experience nor clinging to things you find pleasant. You'll probably find you relax for a moment and then get caught up in particular experiences. Never mind. Every time you notice a moment of resistance or clinging you can relax back down again into a sense of breadth and openness. Allow your awareness to be centered down in your belly.

Let your awareness be open and inclusive, including everything, whether it's an internal experience or something you perceive through your senses, such as a sound.

Awareness of the World

A final dimension of the bigger container is becoming aware of the world around you. I had a strong experience of this in my late twenties when I spent eighteen months making a film based on images from nature. Meditation was teaching me to "be," and that enabled me to become aware of the world around me instead of running away from my pain. I could no longer climb and hike, but photography allowed me to combine my love of nature with my pleasure in making things. The film was stimulated by my hospital experience and my curiosity about time and space and the mystery of the timeless present moment.

As I traveled through some of the most beautiful places in New Zealand, I was trying to see more deeply into the world. I would lie on my back looking up at the sky-blue as only New Zealand skies can be - and photograph the endlessly changing clouds and colors. I photographed black iron sand on a volcanic beach so close up that it could have been an image of a galaxy: flames leaping and dancing, shattering the illusion that a frozen image might halt the fire's relentless movement; smooth water fracturing into the hectic cascades of a rapid. I learned to see the incredible beauty in the depths of things and the constantly changing nature of matter and how it's impossible to hang on to anything because the nature of everything is change. How can you grasp a handful of clouds? As soon as I captured an image of a wave, it was gone.

My quest was to appreciate life's exquisite beauty without clinging to it with a grasping fist, to be open to the textures of the world around me while allowing experience to slip through open fingers. These fascinations have stayed with me ever since, and they hold important lessons for my own life.

STEP FIVE
CHOICE: LEARNING TO RESPOND, RATHER THAN REACT

With this wider perspective you can move on to the fifth step: choosing to respond rather than react to your experiences, especially when they include difficulties.t The sense that you have the freedom to

choose how you respond is the heart of mindfulness practice.

In a sense, each of the five steps involves choice: you choose to start noticing your experience rather than avoiding it, to move toward the painful and seek out the pleasant aspects, and to broaden out your awareness. These stages tease apart the different aspects of experience, helping you distinguish between primary suffering - the actual painful or unpleasant sensations - and secondary suffering, which springs from your resistance to them. This creates a sense of spaciousness, as if you're a bigger container. Rather than feeling your pain is right on top . of you and you're trapped in a battle that leaves no space to choose your response, you can find ways to respond creatively to any circumstances with a soft and pliant heart. The previous steps of mindfulness prepare the way for you to act with initiative and confidence.

When life is approached in this way, with mindfulness, it can be a stream of choices and creative possibilities instead of .continuous distraction and resistance.

Here's an example from my diary of how I work with this myself:

Today I woke up feeling tired and nauseous but also willing myself to do my writing as I'd planned. I wanted to override the back pain, fatigue, and nausea. I felt myself hardening against my pain, and the tension grew in my body. Then I caught myself and decided I would stop, lie down, and listen to a meditation CD. By the end I felt that I'd broken out of an old groove of behavior and I had more perspective. I realized it didn't really matter whether I got my writing finished today. Now it's 5:30 and the writing is flowing. I'm using my timer to remind me to take a break after twenty minutes at my desk, and when I hear it beeping I again face the choice: do I react by ignoring it, or do I respond by lying down?

Mindfulness Is Not Suppression

It's easy to hear about the value of responding, not reacting, and to think that you shouldn't react. You, might judge difficult emotions and think that you've failed in mindfulness practice if you feel moody or irritable. But mindfulness is being honestly aware of what's happening, not pasting on a layer of false equanimity. If you feel grumpy, the practice is to be aware of that without judging, and then you can find the best way to respond.

Living with pain is hard, so it's understandable if you feel emotions such as grumpiness or anger, but if you can acknowledge those feelings when they arise, then you will find space around them. Such emotions often feed on themselves in an escalating spiral of blame, self-pity, and rage, but it's always possible to find moments in which you can choose to encourage more helpful states of mind. It isn't easy, and it may be humiliating to face your negativity, but each time you manage this, it's a little taste of freedom.

One of the main emotional effects of my pain is that I can get impatient and grumpy, especially in lengthy discussions or group situations that require patience. If there's a decision to be made, I just want to make it quickly, and behind this is the thought that the sooner I finish, the sooner I'll be able to lie down. But this attitude is hard for others, and it has affected my relationships and friendships. I wish it wasn't like this, but I'm finding that the best thing is just to own up to feeling irritable when it happens instead of thinking 1 can prevent it ever arising. My mindfulness practice helps me to notice what's happening without being too defensive and to take steps to behave differently.

Recently I was on a training retreat, and my colleague Ratnaguna demonstrated this honest and authentic aspect of mindfulness very well. When we had a meeting to discuss the retreat program he seemed withdrawn, and before long he told me that he felt irritable. But he communicated this without blaming anyone. His meditation experience meant he could be precise and uncomplicated in evaluating what he was feeling, so it was easy to empathize with him. He also knew from past experience that this kind of irritability grows out of sadness; he simply needed time alone to be with his experience, and he knew that it would then settle and pass. I found it inspiring that Ratnaguna could be honest about his difficult emotions without suppressing them or overidentifying with them and that he had the courage to move toward the sadness underlying them, giving it the space to subside naturally.

SPECIAL ISSUES FOR PRACTICING MINDFULNESS WITH PAIN AND ILLNESS

Mindfulness can sound deceptively simple, so I want to go into a few more areas that are particularly relevant to those of us living with pain or illness.

Working with Intense Pain

Sometimes the experience of physical pain is so intense that you just can't work with it using awareness, no matter how much meditation, relaxation, or other techniques you've practiced. It's important not to feel you've failed if you're overwhelmed by your physical experience; it's still possible to get back on track.

After my last surgery I was in the hospital for six weeks. Until the last few days I felt emotionally positive and managed to maintain equanimity and patience, but then the pain grew very intense, and I fell into fear, despondency, and self-pity. A friend visited and I moaned about another friend by whom I felt let down. When she left I felt even worse: not only did l have to cope with my pain, I also felt guilty about my reaction and its effect on my friend. The next morning I phoned her and apologized; I immediately felt better. I began the slow climb out of the pit and learned an important lesson: even when I was in the most hellish state and couldn't stop my reactions, I could still rectify the situation later by finding a moment of choice.

Prescription Medication and Mindfulness

People sometimes think they can't practice mindfulness and take painkillers, tranquilizers, antidepressants, and so on, as they affect the mind. In my view there's no inherent conflict. Some drugs do cloud the mind, but severe pain clouds it as well. If I reduce my medication too far, ,I end up tense and exhausted, which doesn't help me develop awareness, so I take several pain medications at a dose worked out with my pain-management consultant. The key is to find an optimum dose that leaves the mind as clear as possible without becoming overwhelmed by the pain.

Practicing mindfulness does help many people to feel more relaxed and happy - and also to sleep better, allowing them to reduce medication such as tranquilizers or sleeping pills. Keep in mind that you should always make adjustments to your medication in consultation with a health professional.

Distraction and Mindfulness

Does developing mindfulness of experience, including pain, mean there's no place for distraction? I think it has a place if you take into account your motivation and whether your condition is acute or chronic. With acute pain that you know will pass, it can help to take your mind off it to do something more enjoyable than simply watching the pain. But with a chronic condition, continually distracting yourself may create a habit of avoidance that, in fact, brings greater suffering. If a mother ignores a crying child because she's busy, the child will just cry louder, and the mother's activity becomes more stressful because of the background screaming. But if the child is given some attention he or she may calm down, and then the mother can relax as well. A painful body is similar. If you include the pain in your awareness, you can accommodate it within a broad perspective while getting on with other things and pursuing your interests. This approach makes for a more fulfilling and successful life in the long run.

I call the attempt to escape and deny painful experience "compulsive distraction," but an alternative is "aware diversion," when you consciously choose to take your mind off the pain by engaging with something else. There's definitely a place for this within mindfulness-based pain management. Often I decide to read a novel or watch a movie as a stimulating and enjoyable way to relax and have downtime. Choosing consciously to do so feels very different from just rushing from one distraction to another.

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The Five-Step PAIN Process

This process summarizes the "Five-Step Model of Mindfulness," found in chapter 5 of [Living Well With Pain & Illness] by [Vidyamala Burch]. It is similar to the "STOP" One Minute Breathing Space, in that it begins with a pause to take stock of what's happening (Step One) and ends with an opening to the outside world and new possibilities (Step Five), but this process is specifically for very difficult physical pain (or painful emotions).

Step One — The Starting Point: Awareness

(Similar to "S" and "T" of STOP) Bring yourself into the present moment by bringing awareness to Thoughts (what are you saying to yourself), Feelings (enjoying, upset, excited, sad, mad, etc.) and Physical Sensations (tightness, holding, lightness). You might also notice where you are, what you are seeing and sensing of the outside world (sun on your face, what your hands are touching, other people,…) "Take a breath" is simply a cue to be aware of breath, not necessarily to change it.

Step Two — Move toward the Unpleasant

We normally react to pain in one of two ways: (1) to try to block or distract from the discomfort, or (2) get swallowed up in it, drowning in the discomfort and its associated fears (what if this continues, etc.). This step offers a third choice that may sound like option (2), but is actually quite different. Rather than drowning in it and the associated fears, you move your attention away from the story line and fearful interpretations, and instead, observe precisely the sensations corresponding to the discomfort. What precisely are the sensations (burning, cutting, tingling, aching, etc.)? Where are they precisely? What is the shape of the discomfort? Where are the boundaries? How thick, thin, deep or shallow is it?

Step Three — Seeking the Pleasant

At any moment, there are thousands of places we can put our attention, and pain is a siren call to pay attention to a particular set of inputs, whether physical sensation or our thoughts telling us how bad it feels. This step invites you to explore your inner and outer world, looking for something pleasant in your experience. As Vidyamala puts it in her book, "Seeking the pleasant is like being an explorer searching for hidden treasure. It might be as simple as noting the warmth of your hands or a pleasant feeling in the belly, or seeing a shaft of sunlight streaming through the window."

Step Four — Broadening Awareness

Like the "O" of the STOP process, here you broaden your awareness so that it includes both the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of your experience, including your whole body, your surroundings, so that you are much bigger than an specific unpleasant or pleasant aspect of your experience. Joko Beck, in Everyday Zen refers to this as "becoming a bigger container."

Step Five — Choice: Responding Rather than Reacting

Like the "P" of STOP, you let your attention now move into the world around you, letting yourself naturally respond rather than react habitually to the situation you are in, curious and open, with perhaps more possibility and choice than you might have had before this exploration. You may even be surprised by what happens next after creating this pause…

Practice Log – Week 5b (dealing with physical discomfort)

FORMAL PRACTICE: Practice at least six times this week, alternating **Sitting Meditation** (guided or unguided) with either the **Body Scan or Yoga** (Yoga 1 or Yoga 2). On the first day, though, try the Soften, Soothe, Allow Meditation. The Soften, Soothe, Allow Meditation is 15 minutes long, so on that day, you will have a shorter practice session (if you'd like a full 30 minutes, you can add silent meditation on your own that day). As before, don't expect anything in particular from these practices. Just let your experience be your experience.

INFORMAL PRACTICE: The informal practice will be to try the PAIN process at a time when you are experiencing physical discomfort or pain (see The Five-Step PAIN Process). The discomfort doesn't have to be major, it could just be a minor ache or physical irritation. ***If you are lucky enough to have a day with no aches or pains to speak of***, *ignore the "Five-Step PAIN Process" format, and take the time to feel gratitude for something that happened that day (or even simply for the fact that you had a day with no aches or pains!). We often don't take time to experience gratitude, so you might see if you can stay with the feeling of gratitude for a moment or two, and maybe even feel it in your body (e.g., warmth in chest, softness in belly, full heart, relaxed neck and shoulders…). You can make a short note about what happened when you did that somewhere on that day's row of the Informal Practice sheet.*

…Date…	Practice Comments (include which type of practice)

Informal Practice Log (PAIN Process) – Week 5b (dealing with physical discomfort)

Where were you, what was going on when you noticed the physical discomfort?	**What were the actual sensations?** *(burning, tingling, aching…) Shape? Boundaries? Texture?*	**Where did you find something pleasant?** (could be as simple as warmth in hands, or sun on skin)	**What did you notice when you included both the pleasant and unpleasant?** "becoming a bigger container"	**What did you notice AFTER you did the process?** *(body-mind-emotion-action)*
EXAMPLE *I was working at my desk and my back was killing me. I thought, "How am I going to get through the day like this? I have so much to do!*	*Compressed area in small of back: tight, binding, pinching. It's oblong and about 1" thick in middle, tapers off at edge. Texture like granite.*	*My legs don't hurt, actually feel relaxed, pleasant… sensing warmth and ease there. Recalling nice interaction with friend this afternoon…*	*I felt much bigger, that there is much more to me than this area in my back. The back pain didn't go away, but I felt it as only part of me, not all, not so troubling.*	*Still had much to do, but my focus was no longer only on the back pain and not about "fixing" the pain, could move forward…*

Palouse Mindfulness
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Week 6 - Mindfulness and Communication
Mountain & Lake Meditations

If you were to consider all the truly stressful situations in your life, you'd probably find that many, if not most, involve other people. This week, we focus on communication and what it means to be mindful in our interactions with others, whether it be family members, co-workers or neighbors. Our focus up until now has been on our internal world (thoughts, feelings and sensations); now we move from the intra-personal to the inter-personal, taking into account another's world, and the place where their world and ours meet. This means recognizing that "the other" (person or persons) have their own perceptions, feelings and needs, which are almost certainly different than ours.

Listening
Most of us don't really listen very deeply when we are in conversation. As Tara Brach says in **The Sacred Art of Listening**: *"We spend most of our moments when someone is speaking, planning what we're going to say, evaluating it, trying to come up with our presentation of our self, or controlling the situation. Pure listening is a letting go of control. It's not easy and takes training… The bottom line is when we are listened to, we feel connected. When we're not listened to, we feel separate."*

Dealing with Conflict
Effective communication with those who we disagree with is extraordinarily difficult. If you are like most people, you have a fall-back strategy to deal with conflict that was learned early in life, one that is habitual and embedded in interactions with others. The three most common strategies are: **accommodate** ("be nice"), **demand** ("me first"), or **withdraw** ("I don't care"). There is a fourth way, one that involves investigating both your world and the other's world, that can sometimes yield a surprising and creative solution that honors both worlds. In the martial art, Aikido, this would be called **blending**, a move that harms neither party and turns conflict into more of a dance than a fight. This is complex and an art form in itself, and forms the basis of Marshall Rosenberg's **Non-Violent Communication (NVC)**, something that is briefly introduced this week.

Videos
Susan Piver, in an entertaining and provocative presentation, **The Art of Being Heard**, describes four principles of mindful communication (timing, listening, agenda-less-ness, confidence). Her description of confidence may surprise you, especially given the fact that this particular presentation was given to a business audience. In the second video, Tara Brach talks about **The Sacred Art of Listening**, and in **Awakening Through Conflict**, she begins to answer the question of how one deals with conflict in communication.

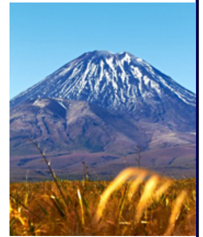
Reading
Included in the reading is a written companion to the video above by Tara Brach, also called **The Sacred Art of Listening.** Anger is sometimes confused with hatred and identified as an emotion that a "spiritual" person would not have. Sylvia Boorstein clarifies this misunderstanding with **The Most Frequently Asked Question**. Our typical way of dealing with anger is to either externalize it or stuff it, and in **The Answer to Anger** Pema Chodron describes a powerful middle way, neither exploding nor imploding. **Conflict Management Styles** describes the four ways of dealing with conflict outlined above (accommodate, demand, withdraw, blend), and **The Heart of Non-Violent Communication (NVC)** by Marshall Rosenberg, is an introduction to NVC, a skillful way of communicating in difficult situations. For those wishing to know more about NVC, see the Supplementary Materials.

Daily Practices
This week, we introduce the **Mountain Meditation** and the **Lake Meditation**, one of which we suggest you try at least once this week, in place of one of your normal 30 minute practices. These are both shorter practices (20 min), so on the day you do one of these meditations, you will have a shorter practice session (if you'd like a full 30 minutes, you can add 10 minutes of silent meditation on your own that day).

For the **formal practice** this week, we are now at a point where you can freely choose between any of the three main practices you've experienced so far: Body Scan, Sitting Meditation, Yoga (and the Mountain Meditation or Lake Meditation at least one day).

The **informal practices** up until now have been focusing on the intra-personal (what's happening inside you) and now we begin paying attention to the inter-personal, using the **Communication Calendar**, noticing what happens when we bring mindfulness to relationships.

Videos
The Art of Being Heard *by Susan Piver [16 min]*
The Sacred Art of Listening *by Tara Brach [19 min]*
Awakening Through Conflict *by Tara Brach [9 min]*



To listen is to lean in softly with a willingness to be changed by what we hear.
- Mark Nepo

It's easy to judge. It's more difficult to understand. Understanding requires compassion, patience, and a willingness to believe that good hearts sometimes choose poor methods. Through judging, we separate. Through understanding, we grow.
- Doe Zantamata

When is the last time that you had a great conversation, a conversation that wasn't just two intersecting monologues, which is what passes for conversation a lot in this culture? But ... a great conversation, in which you overheard yourself saying things that you never knew you knew? That you heard yourself receiving from somebody words that absolutely found places within you that you thought you had lost ... a conversation that brought the two of you on to a different plane? ... a conversation that continued to sing in your mind for weeks afterwards ... I've had some of them recently ... they are food and drink for

the soul.
- John O'Donohue

Reading

The Sacred Art of Listening *article by Tara Brach*
The Most Frequently Asked Question *by Sylvia Boorstein*
The Answer to Anger *by Pema Chodron*
Conflict Management Styles *summary of communication styles*
The Heart of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) *by Marshall Rosenberg*

Practice sheets

Formal Practice ***[PDF]*** *[or* ***WORD format****]* - Body Scan, Sitting, Yoga *(+ Mountain or Lake Med.)*
Informal Practice ***[PDF]*** *[or* ***WORD format****]* - Communication Calendar

Supplementary materials related to this week's topic

Deep Listening *video by Frank Ostaseski [3 min]*
Can We Talk? (3 mindfulness practices) *article by Lili Powell (Mindful Magazine)*
What Really Makes Us Happy *video of Robert Waldinger [21 min]*
Non-Violent Communication *interview of Marshall Rosenberg [21 min]*
Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life *book by Marshall Rosenberg*
Intimate Relationship as a Spiritual Crucible *article by John Welwood*
Tuning In: Tips on how to be a good listener *article by David Rome*
E-Mail Is Easy to Write (and to Misread) *article by Daniel Goleman*
AH, FOWL - The Anger Process *adapted from Barbara De Angelis' "Love Letters"*

The Sacred Art of Listening

Nourishing Loving Relationships

by Tara Brach

To listen is to lean in softly
With a willingness to be changed
By what we hear.
– Mark Nepo –

What happens when there's a listening presence? When we're fully in that listening presence, when there's that pure quality of receptivity, we become presence itself. And whether you call that God or pure awareness or our true nature, the boundary of inner and outer dissolves and we become a luminous field of awakeness. When we're in that open presence we can really respond to the life that's here. We fall in love.

This state of listening is the precursor or the prerequisite to loving relatedness. The more you understand the state of listening – of being able to have the sounds of rain wash through you, of receiving the sound and tone of another's voice – the more you know about nurturing a loving relationship.

In a way it's an extremely vulnerable position. As soon as you stop planning what you're going to say or managing what the other person's saying, all of a sudden, there's no control. You're open to your own sadness, your own anger and discomfort. Listening means putting down control. It's not a small thing to do.

We spend most of our moments when someone is speaking, planning what we're going to say, evaluating it, trying to come up with our presentation of our self, or controlling the situation.

Pure listening is a letting go of control. It's not easy and takes training. And yet it's only when we can let go of that controlling that we open up to the real purity of loving. We can't see or understand someone in the moments that we are trying to control what they are saying or trying to impress them with what we are saying. There's no space for that person to just unfold and be who they are. Listening and unconditionally receiving what another expresses, is an expression of love.

The bottom line is when we are listened to, we feel connected. When we're not listened to, we feel separate. So whether it's the communicating between different tribes or religions, ethnicities, racial groups or different generations, we need to listen. The more we understand, the less we fear; the less we fear, the more we trust and the more we trust, the more love can flow.

> *Isn't it true to that to get to know the beauty and majesty of a tree*
>
> *You have to be quiet and rest in the shade of the tree?*
>
> *Don't you have to stand under the tree?*
>
> *To understand anyone, you need to stand under them for a little while*
>
> *What does that mean?*
>
> *It means you have to listen to them and be quiet and take in who they are*
>
> *As if from under, as if from inside out.*

Tara Brach *is senior teacher and founder of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington. She is author of "Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life With the Heart of a Buddha" (2003) and "True Refuge - Finding Peace and Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart" (2013)*

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source: http://blog.tarabrach.com/2013/04/to-listen-is-to-lean-in-softly-with.html

Lion's Roar
BUDDHIST WISDOM *for* OUR TIME
January 4, 2016

The Most Frequently Asked Question

by Sylvia Boorstein

Does spiritual practice mean we can never get angry? No, says Sylvia Boorstein, it's all how you work with it.

"Angry People." Illustration by *Alvaro Tapia*

In October 1989, the Dalai Lama sat alone on stage at the largest auditorium on the campus of the University of California at Irvine and answered questions from an audience of more than 6,000 people. It felt like a relaxed conversation in a very large living room. The huge crowd was amazingly quiet, listening intently as he responded carefully to each question. Then someone asked, "Do you ever get angry?"

The Dalai Lama laughed his impish, delighted laugh and said, "Of course! Things happen that I don't want to happen and anger arises. But, it's not a problem."

It seems to me that the most imperishable myth about spiritual practice, especially meditation practice, is that it promises an end to anger once and for all. It doesn't. When something happens that we don't want to happen, anger arises. It is the way of the human nervous system. Perhaps it's one way, through eons of evolution,that human beings have survived. When we feel threatened in any way, anger triggers the adrenaline we need to protect ourselves. The potential of the adult human mind, however, is to recognize anger, locate the fear that gave rise to it, and respond wisely, remedying the situation without complicating it. Anger does not need to be a problem.

It's understandable that the myth persists. The dharma centers I know are generally quiet. They have a culture of temperate response. I even teach smiling as a practice. It's a gesture that inclines the mind in the direction of ease, and when smiling is difficult, it alerts the practitioner to the presence of the distress in the mind. I also teach a lot about cultivating the compassionate response of the heart that is our fundamental nature, but still, when things don't go the way I want them to, anger arises.

Here are questions I often hear asked about anger:

Q. Does cultivating compassion really mean I can never express my anger again?

A. Cultivating compassion doesn't ever mean you can't express anger. An unexpressed anger creates a breach in relationships that no amount of smiling can cross. It's a secret. A lie. The compassionate response is one that keeps connections alive. It requires telling the truth. And telling the truth can be difficult, especially when the mind is stirred up by anger.

The Vinaya, the compendium of monks' rules in the Pali canon, lists five "Reflections before Admonishing." Is now a good time to speak? Am I telling the whole truth? Is my voice gentle, not harsh? Am I motivated by kindness? Am I motivated by a desire to be helpful?

I keep a framed card with those five reflections on a table in my study and people often borrow it. I enjoy thinking of the Buddha as a psychotherapist offering advice that is timeless in its relevance.

Q. Surely holding in the anger can't be good for you. I've worked many years in therapy to get in touch with my anger. What should I do now?

A. Getting in touch with one's anger, if that was formerly a frightening thing to do, is surely a success. It means that we are less hidden to ourselves, more present, more aware of information that could help us respond in ways that could end our suffering. We have the capacity, as adults, to hold in the impulsive, reflexive, often destructive expression of anger and choose instead a clear, useful communication.

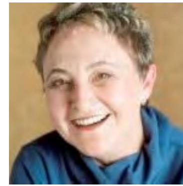
Q. What will happen to my passion?

A. My experience of angry explosions or smoldering grudges is that they confuse and fatigue my mind and

diffuse passion. I think passion comes from seeing clearly. The Buddha taught that choosing wisely in the midst of challenge leads to “clear comprehension of purpose.” I take that to mean lively response powered by resolve. The bodhisattva vow to end suffering in all beings is the most passionate pledge I can imagine.

My reading of the Dalai Lama’s answer about anger not being a problem was that he always managed a wise response. I usually do, and when I don’t, I apologize for not presenting my needs in a more useful form. The first verse of the sixth-century Buddhist commentator Shantideva’s Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life says that wholesome deeds amassed over eons are erased in one moment of anger. Students sometimes ask, “Do you really believe that?” I say, “I don’t know. It’s certainly inspiring. I pay special attention when I respond angrily so I can discover what frightened me. I feel dismay about the suffering I caused myself and the other person. Since my practice is habituating my heart to kindness, moments of lapse inspire me.”

The morning after the Dalai Lama’s question and answer session in Irvine, the newspapers announced that he had been awarded that year’s Nobel Peace Prize.



Sylvia Boorstein is a psychologist and leading teacher of Insight Meditation. Her many best-selling books include *Pay Attention, for Goodness' Sake* and *Happiness Is An Inside Job.*

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source: http://www.lionsroar.com/the-most-frequently-asked-question/

March 2005

The Answer to Anger & Aggression is Patience

by Pema Chödrön

We can suppress anger and aggression or act it out, either way making things worse for ourselves and others. Or we can practice patience: wait, experience the anger and investigate its nature. Pema Chödrön takes us step by step through this powerful practice.

The Buddhist teachings tell us that patience is the antidote to anger and aggression. When we feel aggression in all its many forms—resentment, bitterness, being very critical, complaining and so forth—we can apply the different practices we've been given and all the good advice we've heard and given to other people. But those often don't seem to help us. That's why this teaching about patience caught my interest a few years ago, because it's so hard to know what to do when one feels anger and aggression.

I thought, if patience is the antidote to aggression, maybe I'll just try that. In the process I learned a lot about what patience is and about what it isn't. I would like to share with you what I've learned, to encourage you to find out for yourself how patience works with aggression.

To begin with, I learned about patience and the cessation of suffering. It's said that patience is a way to de-escalate aggression. I'm thinking here of aggression as synonymous with pain. When we're feeling aggressive—and in some sense this would apply to any strong feeling—there's an enormous pregnant quality that pulls us in the direction of wanting to get some resolution. It hurts so much to feel the aggression that we want it to be resolved.

So what do we usually do? We do exactly what is going to escalate the aggression and the suffering. We strike out; we hit back. Something hurts our feelings, and initially there is some softness there—if you're fast, you can catch it—but usually you don't even realize there is any softness. You find yourself in the middle of a hot, noisy, pulsating, wanting-to-just-get-even-with-someone state of mind: it has a very hard quality to it. With your words or your actions, in order to escape the pain of aggression, you create more aggression and pain.

At that point, patience means getting smart: you stop and wait. You also have to shut up, because if you say anything it's going to come out aggressive, even if you say, "I love you."

Once, when I was very angry at a colleague of mine, I called him on the telephone. I can't even remember now what I was angry about, but at the time I couldn't sleep because I was so furious. I tried meditating with my anger and working with it and doing practices with it, but nothing helped, so I just got up in the middle of the night and called him. When he answered the phone, all I said was, "Hi, Yeshe." But he immediately asked, "Did I do something wrong?" I thought I would very sweetly cover over what I was really feeling and say something pleasant about all the bad things he had done, whatever they were. But just by the tone of my greeting to him, he knew. That's what it's like with aggression: you can't speak because everyone will feel the vibes. No matter what is coming out of your mouth, it's like you're sitting on top of a keg of dynamite and it's vibrating.

Patience has a lot to do with getting smart at that point and just waiting: not speaking or doing anything. On the other hand, it also means being completely and totally honest with yourself about the fact that you're furious. You're not suppressing anything—patience has nothing to do with

suppression. In fact, it has everything to do with a gentle, honest relationship with yourself. If you wait and don't feed your discursive thought, you can be honest about the fact that you're angry. But at the same time you can continue to let go of the internal dialogue. In that dialogue you are blaming and criticizing, and then probably feeling guilty and beating yourself up for doing that. It's torturous, because you feel bad about being so angry at the same time that you really are extremely angry, and you can't drop it. It's painful to experience such awful confusion. Still, you just wait and remain patient with your confusion and the pain that comes with it.

Patience has a quality of enormous honesty in it, but it also has a quality of not escalating things, allowing a lot of space for the other person to speak, for the other person to express themselves, while you don't react, even though inside you are reacting. You let the words go and just be there.

This suggests the fearlessness that goes with patience. If you practice the kind of patience that leads to the de-escalation of aggression and the cessation of suffering, you will be cultivating enormous courage. You will really get to know anger and how it breeds violent words and actions. You will see the whole thing without acting it out. When you practice patience, you're not repressing anger, you're just sitting there with it—going cold turkey with the aggression. As a result, you really get to know the energy of anger and you also get to know where it leads, even without going there. You've expressed your anger so many times, you know where it will lead. The desire to say something mean, to gossip or slander, to complain—to just somehow get rid of that aggression—is like a tidal wave. But you realize that such actions don't get rid of the aggression; they escalate it. So instead you're patient, patient with yourself.

Developing patience and fearlessness means learning to sit still with the edginess of the energy. It's like sitting on a wild horse, or on a wild tiger that could eat you up. There's a limerick to that effect: "There was a young lady of Niger, who smiled as she rode on a tiger. They came back from the ride with the lady inside and the smile on the face of the tiger." Sitting with your discomfort feels like riding on that tiger, because it's so frightening.

When we examine this process we learn something very interesting: there is no resolution. The resolution that human beings seek comes from a tremendous misunderstanding. We think we can resolve everything! When we human beings feel powerful energy, we tend to be extremely uncomfortable until things are resolved in some kind of secure and comforting way, either on the side of yes or the side of no. Or the side of right or the side of wrong. Or the side of anything at all that we can hold on to.

But the practice we're doing gives us nothing to hold on to. Actually, the teachings themselves give us nothing to hold on to. In working with patience and fearlessness, we learn to be patient with the fact that we're human beings, that everyone who is born and dies from the beginning of time until the end of time is naturally going to want some kind of resolution to this edgy, moody energy. And there isn't any. The only resolution is temporary and just causes more suffering. We discover that as a matter of fact joy and happiness, peace, harmony and being at home with yourself and your world come from sitting still with the moodiness of the energy until it rises, dwells and passes away. The energy never resolves itself into something solid.

So all the while, we stay in the middle of the energy. The path of touching in on the inherent softness of the genuine heart is to sit still and be patient with that kind of energy. We don't have to criticize ourselves when we fail, even for a moment, because we're just completely typical human beings; the only thing that's unique about us is that we're brave enough to go into these things more deeply and explore beneath our surface reaction of trying to get solid ground under our feet.

Patience is an enormously wonderful and supportive and even magical practice. It's a way of completely changing the fundamental human habit of trying to resolve things by going either to the right or the left, calling things right or calling things wrong. It's the way to develop courage, the way to find out what life is really about.

Patience is also not ignoring. In fact, patience and curiosity go together. You wonder, Who am I? Who am I at the level of my neurotic patterns? Who am I at the level beyond birth and death? If you wish to look into the nature of your own being, you need to be inquisitive. The path is a journey of investigation, beginning to look more deeply at what's going on. The teachings give us a lot of suggestions about what we can look for, and the practices give us a lot of suggestions on how to look. Patience is one

extremely helpful suggestion. Aggression, on the other hand, prevents us from looking: it puts a tight lid on our curiosity. Aggression is an energy that is determined to resolve the situation into a hard, solid, fixed pattern in which somebody wins and somebody loses.

When you begin to investigate, you notice, for one thing, that whenever there is pain of any kind—the pain of aggression, grieving, loss, irritation, resentment, jealousy, indigestion, physical pain—if you really look into that, you can find out for yourself that behind the pain there is always something we are attached to. There is always something we're holding on to.

I say that with such confidence, but you have to find out for yourself whether this is really true. You can read about it: the first thing the Buddha ever taught was the truth that suffering comes from attachment. That's in the books. But when you discover it yourself, it goes a little deeper right away.

As soon as you discover that behind your pain is something you're holding on to, you are at a place that you will frequently experience on the spiritual path. After a while it seems like almost every moment of your life you're there, at a point where you realize you actually have a choice. You have a choice whether to open or close, whether to hold on or let go, whether to harden or soften.

That choice is presented to you again and again and again. For instance, you're feeling pain, you look deeply into it, and you notice that there's something very hard you're holding on to. And then you have a choice: you can let go of it, which basically means you connect with the softness behind all that hardness. Perhaps each one of us has made the discovery that behind all the hardness of resistance, stress, aggression and jealousy, there is enormous softness that we're trying to cover over. Aggression usually begins when someone hurts our feelings. The first response is very soft, but before we even notice what we're doing, we harden. So we can either let go and connect with that softness or we can continue to hold on, which means that the suffering will continue.

It requires enormous patience even to be curious enough to look, to investigate. And then when you realize you have a choice, and that there's actually something there that you're attached to, it requires great patience to keep going into it. Because you will want to go into denial, to shut down. You're going to say to yourself, "I don't want to see this." You'll be afraid, because even if you're starting to get close to it, the thought of letting go is usually very frightening. You may feel that you're going to die, or that something is going to die. And you will be right. If you let go, something will die. But it's something that needs to die and you will benefit greatly from its death.

On the other hand, sometimes it's easy to let go. If you make this journey of looking to see if there's something you're holding on to, often it's going to be just a little thing. Once when I was stuck with something huge, Trungpa Rinpoche gave me some advice. He said, "It's too big; you can't let go of it yet, so practice with the little ones. Just start noticing all the little ways you hold when it's actually pretty easy and just get the hang of letting go."

That was extremely good advice. You don't have to do the big one, because usually you can't. It's too threatening. It may even be too harsh to let go right then and there, on the spot. But even with small things, you may—perhaps just intellectually—begin to see that letting go can bring a sense of enormous relief, relaxation and connection with the softness and tenderness of the genuine heart. True joy comes from that.

You can also see that holding on increases the pain, but that doesn't mean you're going to be able to let go, because there's a lot at stake. What's at stake is your whole sense of who you are, your whole identity. You're beginning to move into the territory of egolessness, the insubstantial nature of oneself—and of everything, for that matter. Theoretical, philosophical, distant-sounding teachings can get pretty real when you're beginning to have an inkling of what they're actually talking about.

It takes a lot of patience not to beat up on yourself for being a failure at letting go. But if you apply patience to the fact that you can't let go, somehow that helps you to do it. Patience with the fact that you can't let go helps you to get to the point of letting go gradually—at a very sane and loving speed, at the speed that your basic wisdom allows you to move. It's a big moment even to get to the point where you realize you have a choice. Patience is what you need at that point to just wait and soften, to sit with the restlessness and edginess and discomfort of the energy.

I've come to find that patience has a lot of humor and playfulness in it. It's a misunderstanding to think of it as endurance, as in, "Just grin and bear it."

Endurance involves some kind of repression or trying to live up to somebody else's standards of perfection. Instead, you find you have to be pretty patient with what you see as your own imperfections. Patience is a kind of synonym for loving-kindness, because the speed of loving-kindness can be extremely slow. You are developing patience and loving-kindness for your own imperfections, for your own limitations, for not living up to your own high ideals. There's a slogan someone once came up with that I like: "Lower your standards and relax as it is." That's patience.

One of the Indian Buddhist teacher Atisha's slogans says, "Whichever of the two occurs, be patient." It means that if a painful situation occurs, be patient, and if a pleasant situation occurs, be patient. This is an interesting point in terms of patience and the cessation of suffering, patience and fearlessness, and patience and curiosity. We are actually jumping all the time: whether it's pain or pleasure, we want resolution. So if we're really happy and something is great, we could also be patient then, in terms of not just filling up the space, going a million miles an hour—impulse buying, impulse speaking, impulse acting.

I'd like to stress that one of the things you most have to be patient with is, "Oops, I did it again!" There's a slogan that says, "One at the beginning and one at the end." That means that when you wake up in the morning you make your resolve, and at the end of the day you review, with a caring and gentle attitude, how you have done. Our normal resolve is to say something like, "I am going to be patient today," or some other such set-up (as someone put it, we plan our next failure). Instead of setting yourself up, you can say, "Today, I'm going to try to the best of my ability to be patient." And then in the evening you can look back over the whole day with loving-kindness and not beat yourself up. You're patient with the fact that when you review your day, or even the last forty minutes, you discover, "I've talked and filled up all the space, just like I've done all my life, as long as I can remember. I was aggressive with the same style of aggression that I've used as long as I can remember. I got carried away with irritation exactly the same way that I have for the last..." If you're twenty years old, it's been twenty years that you've been doing it that way; if you're seventy-five years old, it's seventy-five years that you've been doing it that way. You see this and you say, "Give me a break!"

The path of developing loving-kindness and compassion is to be patient with the fact that you're human and that you make these mistakes. That's more important than getting it right. It seems to work only if you're aspiring to give yourself a break, to lighten up, as you practice developing patience and other qualities such as generosity, discipline and insight. As with the rest of the teachings, you can't win and you can't lose. You don't get to just say, "Well, since I am never able to do it, I'm not going to try." You are never able to do it and still you try. And, interestingly enough, that adds up to something; it adds up to loving-kindness for yourself and for others. You look out your eyes and you see yourself wherever you go. You see all these people who are losing it, just like you do. Then, you see all these people who catch themselves and give you the gift of fearlessness. You say, "Oh wow, what a brave one—he or she caught themselves." You begin to appreciate even the slightest gesture of bravery on the part of others because you know it's not easy, and that inspires you tremendously. That's how we can really help each other.

Pema Chödrön *was ordained in 1974 as a nun in the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism and in 1985 became director or Gampo Abbey, the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the West. She has gone on to become one of the West's most prominent teachers of the Mahayana path. Her many popular books include* ***The Places That Scare You****,* ***When Things Fall Apart****, and* ***Start Where You Are****.*

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source: http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=1309

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

As we grow up, we typically settle on one of these three strategies as a habitual strategy for dealing with conflict (which one is your favorite?):

DEMAND: Hold firm (fight) (*What I need/want is most important)*

"My way or the highway"
Frame conflict in terms of own interests; little concern for other party; highly assertive.
Push until you get your way.
[I satisfy my needs at the expense of yours.]

ACCOMMODATE : Be nice (freeze) *(What you need/want is most important)*

"Go along to get along", "Don't make waves"
Give in, conform to reduce conflict, make peace
Yield or subordinate own interests to other party
[I satisfy your needs at the expense of my own.]

WITHDRAW: Walk Away (flight) (*It's too difficult to deal with)*

"I don't care", "I'm not going to play this game"
Withdraw, avoid, retreat, turn back, walk away
Ignore, deny, or suppress the problem
[Neither you nor I satisfy our needs.]

The most common strategy for resolving conflict is compromise:

COMPROMISE: We each give a little

"I give some, you give some"
Moderately demanding/moderately accommodating; "splitting the difference"
Settle for "half a loaf"; cut both goals in half and glue together; zero-sum game
[We each give up some of our needs in order to satisfy the other party.]

But, there's another way...

(above the line: **common, traditional, non-creative - one or both parties get less than they want)**

(below the line: **rare, more difficult, but *much* more powerful - root goals of *both* parties satisfied)**

BLEND: We both get our needs met

Requires mindful awareness and exploration of:
Behavior (body language, tone) / **Feelings** / **Needs** (both yours and theirs)
This process is **more circular than linear** and necessarily creative:
The exact form of the outcome is often non-obvious and sometimes even counter-intuitive.

Three steps are involved:

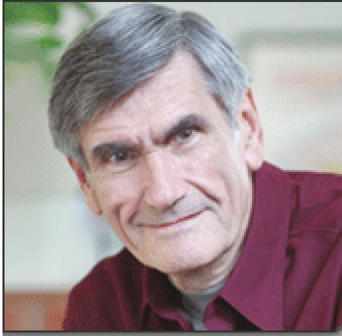
1. Recognition and acceptance of both party's feelings and perceived needs
2. Discovery and inquiry into other party's intentions and root goals
3. Mutual exploration of potential solutions satisfying intention and root goals of both parties

[For more about resolving conflicts in this way, see ***Non-Violent Communication*** by Marshall Rosenberg. **]**

The Heart of Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

A Brief Introduction to the Concepts of NVC

by Marshall Rosenberg (adapted from *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*)



I believe compassion is our natural state of being — that it's natural to feel joy in giving and receiving from the heart. Accordingly, for most of my life I've been preoccupied with two questions: What happens to disconnect us from our compassionate nature, leading us to behave violently or exploitatively? And conversely, what empowers some to stay connected to our compassionate nature even under the worst circumstances?

While studying the factors that affect our ability to stay compassionate, I was struck by the crucial role that language can play. While we may not consider the way we talk to be "violent," words often lead to hurt and pain toward ourselves or to others. That's because so many of us have been trained to speak in terms of moralistic judgments, evaluations and labels that disconnect us from compassion.

I have since identified a specific approach to communicating — called Nonviolent Communication (NVC) — that leads us to give from the heart, connecting us in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish.

Reconnecting to Our Natural State

NVC guides us to reframe how we express ourselves and how we hear others. Instead of habitual, automatic reactions, our words become conscious responses based firmly on awareness of what we perceive, feel and want in that moment.

Within the framework of NVC, we're led to express ourselves with honesty and clarity, while simultaneously paying others a respectful and empathic attention. In any exchange, we come to hear our own deeper needs and those of others. NVC trains us to observe carefully, and to specify behaviors and conditions that are affecting us. The form is simple, yet powerfully transformative.

A Way to Focus Attention

There is a story of a man on all fours under a street lamp, searching for something. A policeman passing by asked what he was doing. "Looking for my car keys," replied the man, who appeared slightly drunk. "Did you drop them here?" inquired the officer. "No," answered the man, "I dropped them in the alley." Seeing the policeman's baffled expression, the man hastened to explain, "But the light is much better here."

Like this story, I find that my cultural conditioning leads me to focus attention on places where I am unlikely to get what I want. I developed NVC as a way to train my attention on places that have the potential to yield what I am seeking.

The use of NVC does not require that the persons with whom we are communicating be literate in NVC or even motivated to relate to us compassionately. If we stay motivated solely to give and receive compassionately, and do everything we can to let others know this is our only motive, they will join us in the process, and eventually we will be able to respond compassionately to one another.

I'm not saying that this always happens quickly. I do maintain, however, that compassion inevitably blossoms when we stay true to the principles and process of NVC.

The NVC Process

To arrive at a mutual desire to give from the heart, we focus the light of consciousness on four areas — referred to as the four components of the NVC model:

First, we observe what the others are saying or doing that is either enriching or not enriching our life. The trick is to be able to articulate this observation without introducing any judgment or evaluation.

Next, we state how we feel when we observe this action: are we hurt, scared, joyful, amused, irritated? And thirdly, we say what needs of ours are connected to the feelings we have identified. An awareness of these three components is present when we use NVC to clearly and honestly express how we are.

For example, a mother might express these three pieces to her teenage son by saying, "Felix, when I see two balls of soiled socks under the coffee table and another three next to the TV, I feel irritated because I am needing more order in the rooms that we share in common."

She would follow immediately with the fourth component – a very specific request: "Would you be willing to put your socks in your room or in the washing machine?" This fourth component addresses what we are wanting from the other person that would enrich our lives or make life more wonderful for us.

Thus, part of NVC is to express these four pieces of information very clearly, whether verbally or by other means. The other part of this communication consists of receiving the same four pieces of information from others. We connect with them by first sensing what they are observing, feeling and needing; then we discover what would enrich their lives by receiving the fourth piece — their request.

As we keep our attention focused on the areas mentioned, and help others do likewise, we establish a flow of communication, back and forth, until compassion manifests naturally: what I am observing, feeling, and needing; what I am requesting to enrich my life; what you are observing, feeling and needing; what you are requesting to enrich your life …

The NVC Process:

- The concrete actions we observe that affect our well-being
- How we feel in relation to what we observe
- The needs, values, desires, etc. that create our feelings
- The concrete actions we request in order to enrich our lives

The essence of NVC is in our consciousness of the four components, not in the actual words that are exchanged.

Applying NVC in Our Lives and World

When we use NVC in our interactions — with ourselves, with another person or in a group — we become grounded in our natural state of compassion. It is therefore an approach that can be effectively applied at all levels of communication and in diverse situations.

Some people use NVC to create greater depth and caring in their intimate relationships. Others use it to build more effective relationships at work. Still others use this process in the political arena. Worldwide, NVC now serves as a valuable resource for communities facing violent conflicts and severe ethnic, religious or political tensions.

I feel blessed to be able to travel throughout the world teaching people a process of communication that gives them power and joy. Now, with my book, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, I am pleased and excited to be able to share the richness of Nonviolent Communication with you.

Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D., *is the author of Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, Speak Peace in a World of Conflict, Life-Enriching Education, and several booklets. He serves as the founder and director of educational services for the Center for Nonviolent Communication.*

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Source: nonviolentcommunication.com/freeresources/article_archive/heartofnvc_mrosenberg.htm

Practice Log – Week 6

FORMAL PRACTICE: Practice at least six times this week, doing either a **Body Scan**, **Yoga** (either Yoga 1 or Yoga 2), or **Sitting Meditation** (guided or unguided). Also, **do either the Mountain Meditation or the Lake Meditation at least once**. As before, don't expect anything in particular. Just let your experience be your experience.

INFORMAL PRACTICE: Each day, at the end of the day before you go to bed, recall and record one communication experience on the Communication Calendar. It doesn't need to be a particularly difficult communication, simply one in which you can recollect wanting something in particular to come out of the conversation (even if it was simply wanting a smile or a particular kind of response).

NOTE: For the first time, in this informal practice, we are expanding our mindfulness to include another person's world, and there is a space (4th column) to consider what ***they*** wanted out of the communication and what ***they*** actually got. To really do this, you'd have to, at least for the moment, put yourself in the other party's shoes. A complete exploration of this would, of course, include asking them about this, which would be critical in an important communication. There is a very powerful process that includes a methodology for really understanding another's feelings-wants-needs-perceptions, Non-Violent Communication, which is well worth exploring, but is beyond the scope of this week's practice.

…Date…	Practice Comments (include whether yoga, body scan, or sitting)

Informal Practice Log (Communication Calendar) – Week 6

Describe this communication. With whom? Subject?	What did you want from them and/or how did you want to be treated?	What did you actually get (in terms of outcome and treatment)?	What do you think the <u>other person</u> wanted? What did they actually get (outcome/treatment)?	How did you feel (physically & emotionally) during and after?	What do you notice NOW (physical/emotional/mental) as you recall this communication?
EXAMPLE *Called phone company about changing my phone plan, this was the 3rd time I was transferred.*	*I wanted her to change my plan, to take responsibility, to be sympathetic and understanding.*	*I was told I had to talk to someone else and I was transferred a 4th time. She was unsympathetic, even rude.*	*To have me talk to someone else, for me not to be upset. She got me to agree to talk to someone else, but I remained irritated and upset.*	*Tight stomach, shoulders, angry at her and all the time it was taking. Better, once I got to right person.*	*At first, tightness, but then uneasiness in stomach – feel a little sheepish for being so angry at someone only trying to do their job.*

Week 7 - Mindfulness and Compassion
Lovingkindness Meditation

In some mindfulness courses, the linkage between mindfulness and compassion is not very explicit. If one were to rely only on a secular definition of mindfulness, which typically emphasizes paying close attention to one's own experience and staying in the present moment, an argument could be made that a trained killer could be perfectly mindful, *and be a more effective killer as a result*, with no contradiction to this secular definition. Of course, something seems very wrong with this, since kindness and compassion are at the core of almost every meditative tradition. Moreover, ***self***-kindness may be the most important component of MBSR - it's the oil that makes the gears of mindfulness work. Without it, the practices are at best, dry, and at worst, harsh and counter-productive. *Ironically, although self-compassion may be the most important component of mindfulness, it is almost totally overlooked in many mindfulness programs.*

Videos and Reading

The first video, **The Evolutionary Roots of Compassion**, by Dacher Keltner of U.C., Berkeley, provides evidence for the idea that we, as humans, have a deep-seated inclination to care for others. The article, **Survival of the Kindest**, indicates that even Darwin believed this. As natural as the capacity for compassion is, Matthieu Ricard, a Buddhist monk who has logged 50,000 hours of meditation practice and who also has a PhD in cellular genetics, makes the case for consciously supporting this capacity in the video, **Cultivating Altruism**.

We also explore the natural linkages there are with mindfulness and compassion in Shauna Shapiro's video, **How Mindfulness Cultivates Compassion**, and her article, **Does Mindfulness Make You Compassionate?**

In our culture, it can be argued that the person we are least kind to is ourselves, and in **Self-Compassion**, Farida Zaman points out our tendency to be overly critical of ourselves and describes some ways to cultivate a healthy self-compassion. In the video, **Overcoming Objections to Self-Compassion**, and in the article, **The Five Myths of Self-Compassion**, Kristin Neff explores misconceptions about self-compassion, including the belief that motivation requires self-criticism, and the idea that being kinder to ourselves makes us complacent and less effective.

Daily Practices

In keeping with this theme, we introduce the **Lovingkindness Meditation**, which we suggest you try at least once this week. It is a shorter practice (13 min), so when you do this meditation, you can extend it for another 17 minutes to give yourself a full 30 minutes on that day. Or, if you'd like to extend a bit of lovingkindess to yourself(!), you can stop at the end of the 13 minute meditation.

For the **formal practice** this week, you can choose between any of the three main practices you've experienced so far: Body Scan, Sitting Meditation, Yoga, including at least one day of the Lovingkindness meditation.

For the **informal practice**, on any given day, you may choose any of the practices you've experienced so far (e.g., simple awareness, mindful eating, STOP, Soften-Soothe-Allow) and enter your experience on the supplied log.

Videos

- **The Evolutionary Roots of Compassion** *by Dacher Keltner [4 min]*
- **Cultivating Altruism** *by Matthieu Ricard [18 min]*
- **How Mindfulness Cultivates Compassion** *by Shauna Shapiro [16 min]*
- **Overcoming Objections to Self-Compassion** *video by Kristin Neff [12 min]*

Reading

- **Survival of the Kindest** *by Paul Ekman*
- **Does Mindfulness Make You More Compassionate?** *by Shauna Shapiro*
- **Self-Compassion** *by Farida Zaman*
- **The Five Myths of Self-Compassion** *by Kristin Neff*

Practice sheets

- **Formal Practice** ***[PDF]*** *[or **WORD format**]* - Body Scan, Sitting, Yoga *(+ Lovingkindness)*
- **Informal Practice** ***[PDF]*** *[or **WORD format**]* - Any *(Simple Awareness, Mindful Eating, STOP, Soften..., etc.)*

Supplementary materials related to this week's topic

- **The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion** *book by Christopher Germer*
- **Compassionate Ethics in Difficult Times** *video by the Dalai Lama [11 min]*
- **First, Forgive Yourself** *interview of Tara Brach by Tej Rae*
- **Universal Compassion** *video by Sylvia Boorstein and Sharon Salzberg [3 min]*
- **Unconditional Love** *video by Tara Brach [29 min]*
- **Mindfulness and Self-Compassion** *by Kristin Neff [21 min]*
- **Making Friends with Yourself** *article based on Pema Chodron's "4 Keys to Waking Up"*

If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.

- Henry Longfellow

Hurt people hurt people. That's how pain patterns get passed on, generation after generation after generation.

Break the chain today. Meet anger with sympathy, contempt with compassion, cruelty with kindness. Greet grimaces with smiles. Forgive and forget about finding fault. Love is the weapon of the future.

- Yehuda Berg

To love our neighbors as we love ourselves means also to love ourselves as we love our neighbors. It means to treat ourselves with as much kindness and understanding as we would the person next door who is in trouble.

- Frederick Buechner

November 2010

Survival of the Kindest

by Paul Ekman

Psychologist Paul Ekman reveals Charles Darwin's real view of compassion—and it's not what you might think. His belief that altruism is a vital part of human and even animal life is being confirmed by modern science.

In 1871, eleven years before his death, Charles Darwin published what has been called his "greatest unread book," *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. His little-known discussion of sympathy in this book reveals a facet of Darwin's thinking that is contrary to the competitive, ruthless, and selfish view of human nature that has been mistakenly attributed to the Darwinian perspective.

In the fourth chapter, entitled "Comparison of the Mental Powers of Man and the Lower Animals," Darwin explained the origin of what he called "sympathy" (which today would be termed empathy, altruism, or compassion), describing how humans and other animals come to the aid of others in distress. While he acknowledged that such actions were most likely to occur within the family group, he wrote that the highest moral achievement is concern for the welfare of all living beings, both human and nonhuman.

It should be no surprise, given Charles Darwin's commitment to the continuity of species, that he claimed that concern for the welfare of others is not a uniquely human characteristic. Darwin tells the following story: "Several years ago a keeper at the Zoological Gardens showed me some deep and scarcely healed wounds on the nape of his own neck, inflicted on him whilst kneeling on the floor, by a fierce baboon. The little American monkey who was a warm friend of this keeper, lived in the same compartment, and was dreadfully afraid of the great baboon. Nevertheless, as soon as he saw his friend in peril, he rushed to the rescue, and by screams and bites so distracted the baboon that the man was able to escape." This incident is consistent with F.B.M. de Waal's 2004 study, "On the Possibility of Animal Empathy."

The likelihood of such actions, Darwin said, is greatest when the helper is related to the person needing help. "It is evident in the first place," he wrote in *The Descent of Man*, "that with mankind the instinctive impulses have different degrees of strength; a savage will risk his own life to save that of a member of the same community, but will be wholly indifferent about a stranger; a young and timid mother urged by the maternal instinct will, without a moment's hesitation, run the greatest danger for her own infant…"

Darwin recognized, however, that exceptional people will help total strangers in distress, not just kin or loved ones. "Nevertheless many a civilized man who never before risked his life for another, but full of courage and sympathy, has disregarded the instinct of self-preservation and plunged at once into a torrent to save a drowning man, though a stranger. In this case man is impelled by the same instinctive motive, which made the heroic little American monkey, formerly described, save his keeper by attacking the great and dreadful baboon." Darwin's line of thinking has been borne out by K.R. Munroe's 1996 study of exceptional individuals who rescue strangers at risk of their own life, *The Heart of Altruism: Perceptions of A Common Humanity*.

Darwin did not consider why compassion toward strangers, even at the risk of one's life, is present in only some people. Is there a genetic predisposition for such concerns, or does it result solely from upbringing, or from some mix of nature and nurture? Nor did Darwin write about whether it is possible to cultivate such stranger-compassion in those who do not have it.

Today these questions are the focus of theory (see P. Gilbert, ed., *Compassion*, Routledge, 2005) and empirical investigation (D. Mobbs, et. al., "A Key Role for Similarity in Vicarious Reward," Science, 2009). In "Compassion: An Evolutionary Analysis and Empirical Review," in *Psychological Bulletin*, Goetz, Keltner, and Simon-Thomas analyze the psychological literature on empathy, altruism, and compassion, integrating new evidence that they believe suggests compassion should be considered an emotion. In a forthcoming paper, "Compassion and Altruism: A Reformulation and Research Agenda," Erika Rosenberg and I consider what we call familial compassion to be an emotion, albeit with a restricted target, but argue that it is not useful to classify other forms of compassion as emotions.

Darwin did offer an explanation of the origin of compassion: "We are," he wrote, "impelled to relieve the sufferings of another, in order that our own painful feelings may be at the same time relieved…" However, as Buddhist scholar B. Alan Wallace points out, not all people respond to suffering in this way. He notes that a person might, for instance, reflect, "How fortunate I am that I'm not that other person." Many years ago in my own research I found that about a third of the people who witnessed a film of a person suffering showed suffering on their own faces, but that an equal number manifested disgust at the sight of suffering. These proportions were the same among Japanese in Tokyo and Americans in California, indicating that the reactions were not affected by culture.

Darwin also described how natural selection favored the evolution of compassion, regardless of what originally motivated such behavior: "In however complex a manner this feeling may have originated, as it is one of high importance to all those animals which aid and defend one another, it will have been increased through natural selection; for those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring."

However, contrary to Darwin's expectation, there are no countries today, or in the known past, in which compassion and altruism toward strangers are shown by the majority of the population, and later in this chapter Darwin wrote more realistically about the extent of compassion.

Darwin concluded the discussion of the origin and nature of compassion and altruism by describing what he considered the highest moral virtue. He wrote: "As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races. [If they appear different] experience unfortunately shews [sic] us how long it is before we look at them as our fellow creatures. Sympathy beyond the confines of man, that is humanity to the lower animals, seems to be one of the latest moral acquisitions… This virtue [concern for lower animals], one of the noblest with which man is endowed, seems to arise incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they extend to all sentient beings."

During discussions I held with the Dalai Lama about emotions and compassion, on which our book *Emotional Awareness* was based, I read this last Darwin quote to him. The Dalai Lama's translator, Thupten Jinpa, exclaimed, "Did he use that phrase 'all sentient beings'?" Jinpa was surprised because this phrase is the exact English translation of the Buddhist description of the all-encompassing compassion of a bodhisattva.

Charles Darwin was rare among thinkers of his time in taking this view, and only in the latter part of the twentieth century did such a concern for compassion toward nonhuman beings become more popular. Darwin was far ahead of his time.

This remarkable similarity between the Buddhist view of virtue and Darwin's raises the tantalizing possibility that Darwin might have derived his views from Buddhist writings. Darwin did know at least something about Buddhism by the time he wrote *The Descent of Man*. J.D. Hooker, Darwin's closest

friend, spent many years in the Himalayas. Leading Darwin scholar Janet Browne told me, "Darwin might easily have discussed such matters with J.D. Hooker after Hooker's travels in Sikkim and elsewhere in India," and Alison Pearne, coeditor of *Evolution: The Selected Letters of Charles Darwin*, notes that Hooker mentioned Buddhism in his letters to Darwin from India. Nonetheless, the nub of Darwin's ideas on morality and compassion appear in his 1838 notebooks, two years after his return from the voyage of the Beagle, when Darwin was twenty-nine. This was five years before he met Hooker.

Randal Keynes, Darwin's great-great-grandson, described Darwin's thinking about these issues in the notebooks as follows: "His comments were carelessly worded, but he was in no doubt about his underlying aim. [Darwin wrote:] 'Might not our sense of right and wrong stem from reflection with our growing mental powers on our actions as they were bound up with our instinctive feeling of love and concern for others? If any animal with social instincts developed the power of reflection, it must have a conscience."

Darwin noted in his notebook: "Without regarding the origin…the individual forgets itself, & aids & defends & acts for others at its own expense." Darwin was also interested at this early point in his life in the origins of morality: "What *has* produced the greatest good (or rather what is necessary for good at all) is the (instinctive) moral senses… In Judging of the rule of happiness we must look far forward (& to the general action)—certainly because it is the result of what has generally been best for our good far back… society could not go on except for the moral sense."

Darwin noted his debt to David Hume. In 1838 Darwin read Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* and thought it important for developing a theory divorced from divine instruction. As Randal Keynes remarks *in Darwin, His Daughter & Human Evolution*:

> David Hume had put sympathy at the center of his thinking about the natural sources of moral principles. He saw it as a natural feeling rather than an attitude based on reasoning from some abstract notion. "There is some benevolence, however small, infused into our bosom; some spark of friendship for humankind; some particle of the dove kneaded in our frame, along with the element of the wolf and the serpent." Charles now developed this idea and speculated how our moral sense might also grow naturally from that feeling. [Darwin wrote:] "Looking at Man, as a Naturalist would at any other mammiferous animal, it may be concluded that he has parental, conjugal and social instincts… these instincts consist of a feeling of love or benevolence to the object in question… such active sympathy that the individual forgets itself, and aids and defends and acts for others at his own expense."

In concluding the introduction to their edition of *Descent of Man*, James Moore and Adrian Desmond wrote that some of Darwin's contemporaries who studied this book emphasized the "humane aspects of Darwin's Victorian values: duty, selflessness and compassion…Frances Cobbe [a feminist theorist and pioneer animal rights activist] excused readers who could picture 'the author as a man who has…unconsciously attributed his own abnormally generous and placable nature to the rest of his species, and then theorized as if the world were made of Darwins.' "

Darwin's thinking about compassion, altruism, and morality certainly reveals a different picture of this great thinker's concerns than the one portrayed by those who focus on the catchphrase "the survival of the fittest" (in fact a quote from Spencer, not Darwin). Those unacquainted with his writings, and even some scientists, are unaware of Darwin's commitment to the unity of mankind, his abolitionist convictions, and his intense interest in moral principles and human and animal welfare.

Paul Ekman is a renowned expert in emotional skills and nonverbal communication, pioneering techniques to unmask deception and other mental states through facial recognition. He collaborated with the Dalai Lama on the 2008 book, *Emotional Awareness*. In 2009, *TIME magazine* named him one of its top 100 influential people.

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Greater Good
The Science of a Meaningful Life
February 27, 2013

Does Mindfulness Make You More Compassionate?

by Shauna Shapiro

Mindfulness is more than just moment-to-moment awareness, says ***Shauna Shapiro****. It is a kind, curious awareness that helps us relate to ourselves and others with compassion.*

I attended my first meditation retreat in Thailand 17 years ago. When I arrived, I didn't know very much about mindfulness and I certainly didn't speak any Thai.

At the monastery, I vaguely understood the teachings of the beautiful Thai monk who instructed me to pay attention to the breath coming in and out of my nostrils. It sounded easy enough. So I sat down and attempted to pay attention, 16 hours a day, and very quickly I had my first big realization: *I was not in control of my mind*.

I was humbled and somewhat distraught by how much my mind wandered. I would attend to one breath, two breaths, maybe three—and then my mind was gone, lost in thoughts, leaving my body sitting there, an empty shell. Frustrated and impatient, I began to wonder, "Why can't I do this? Everyone else looks like they're sitting so peacefully. What's wrong with me?"

On the fourth day, I met with a monk from London, who asked how I was doing. It was the first time I had spoken in four days, and out of my mouth came a deluge of the anxieties I had been carrying around with me. "I'm a terrible meditator. I can't do it. I am trying so hard, and every time I try harder, I get even more tangled up. Meditation must be for other, more spiritual, calmer kinds of people. I don't think this is not the right path for me."

He looked at me with compassion and a humorous twinkle in his eye. "Oh dear, you're not practicing mindfulness," he told me. "You are practicing impatience, judgment, frustration, and striving." Then he said five words that profoundly affected my life: "*What you practice becomes stronger*." This wisdom has now been well documented by the science of neuroplasticity, which shows that our repeated experiences shape our brains.

The monk explained to me that mindfulness is not just about paying attention, but also about *how* you pay attention. He described a compassionate, kind attention, where instead of becoming frustrated when my mind wandered, I could actually become curious about my mind meandering about, holding this experience in compassionate awareness. Instead of being angry at my mind, or impatient with myself, I could inquire gently and benevolently into what it felt like to be frustrated or impatient.

In this way, I began to cultivate kindness toward myself, as well as a sense of interest and curiosity for my lived experience. I started to practice infusing my attention with care and compassion, similar to a parent attending to a young child, saying to myself, "I care about you. I'm interested. Tell me about your experience."

Understanding this connection between mindfulness and compassion has been transformational, helping me embrace myself and my experience with greater kindness and care. It has also deeply informed my clinical and academic work. In my writing and research, I've explicitly articulated a model of mindfulness that includes the attitudes of how we pay attention. Instead of trying to control or judge our experience, we take an interest in it with attitudes of compassion and openness. We are cultivating awareness, yes, but it is important to acknowledge the human dimension of that awareness. It is not a sterile, mechanical awareness. Rather, it is a kind, curious, and compassionate awareness.

Research has started to document empirical evidence of this connection between mindfulness and compassion, consistently finding over the past two decades that mindfulness increases empathy and compassion for others and for oneself.

For example, in my first research publication, published in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* in 1998, we found that Jon Kabat-Zinn's eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program significantly increased empathy in medical students.

Another study that my colleagues and I conducted, published in the *International Journal of Stress Management* in 2005, concluded that MBSR training increased self-compassion in health care professionals. More recently, we examined the impact of mindfulness training on counseling psychology students and discovered that it significantly increased self-compassion—which, in turn, led to declines in stress and negative emotion and increases in positive emotion.

Basically, the research shows that mindfulness increases empathy and compassion for others and for oneself, and that such attitudes are good for you. To me, that affirms that when we practice mindfulness, we are simultaneously strengthening our skills of compassion—evidence that mindfulness isn't simply about sharpening attention.

Yet what we don't know is precisely *how* mindfulness produces these positive effects. Answering this question is an important next step for future research and exploration, so that we can better understand the precise elements and active ingredients essential to mindfulness training.

Although there is not much research focused specifically on how mindfulness helps us cultivate compassion and empathy, I can offer some ideas, based on my years of research and practice and discussions with other experienced meditators.

First, as I explain above, I believe truly practicing mindfulness helps us learn how to become more compassionate toward ourselves—which, evidence suggests, is intertwined with being more compassionate toward others. One study I often cite, especially when teaching psychotherapists and students who are training to become therapists, demonstrates that how we treat ourselves is highly correlated with how we treat others: When therapists rated how compassionate they were with themselves versus how critical and self-blaming, their ratings correlated highly with how they related to their patients.

It's just as the wise monk from London taught me years ago: *What we practice becomes stronger*. If you think about it, we are relating to ourselves 24 hours a day—we are practicing this way of relating constantly. So if mindfulness truly does, as I believe, involve a kind, open, curious attitude toward yourself, it builds the self-compassion that helps foster compassion toward others. That's why I tell my students, "Cultivate self-compassion—do it for your future patients!"

I think it is important to clarify, however, that self-compassion doesn't mean we are always filled with happiness and lovingkindness. Simply put, what it means is that our awareness of what's happening is always kind, always compassionate. So even if I'm feeling angry or frustrated, I am embracing my experience with a compassionate awareness. When we begin to welcome our experience in this way, we are better able to be with it, see it clearly, and respond appropriately to it—and, research suggests, we'll be strengthening the skills that help us extend compassion toward others.

In this way, I like to think of mindfulness as a big cooking pot. I put all of my experiences into this pot. This pot is always kind, always welcoming, even if the stuff I put into it is not (e.g., anger, sadness, confusion). I cook all of it—the pain, the confusion, the anger, the joy—steadily, consistently holding it in this kind, compassionate pot of mindfulness. By relating to my experiences in this way, I am better able to digest and receive nourishment from them, just as when you put a raw potato in a pot and cook it for many hours, it becomes tasty and nourishing.

Another way that mindfulness cultivates compassion is that it helps us see our interconnectedness. For example, let's say that the left hand has a splinter in it. The right hand would naturally pull out the splinter, right? The left hand wouldn't say to the right hand, "Oh, thank you so much! You're so compassionate and generous!" The right hand removing the splinter is simply the appropriate response—it's just what the right hand does, because the two hands are part of the same body.

The more you practice mindfulness, the more you begin to see that we're all part of the same body—that I as the right hand actually feel you, the left hand's pain, and I naturally want to help.

Mindfulness cultivates this interconnectedness and clear seeing, which leads to greater compassion and understanding of the mysterious web in which we all are woven.

A third reason mindfulness appears to cultivate empathy and compassion is that it guards against the feelings of stress and busyness that make us focus more on ourselves and less on the needs of other people.

This was famously demonstrated in the classic Good Samaritan experiments conducted by John Darley and Daniel Batson in the 1970s. Darley and Batson assigned seminary students at Princeton University to deliver a talk on the Good Samaritan. While on their way to their presentation, the students passed someone (working with the researchers) who was slumped over and groaning. The researchers tested all kinds of variables to see what might make the students stop to help, but only one variable mattered: whether or not the students were late for their talk. Only 10 percent of the students stopped to help when they were late; more than six times as many helped when they were not in a hurry.

This study suggests that people are not inherently morally insensitive, but when we're stressed, scared, hurried, it's easy to lose touch with our deepest values. By helping us stay attuned to what's happening around us in the present moment, regardless of the time, mindfulness helps us stay connected to what is most important. As the Zen monk Suzuki Roshi teaches, "The most important thing is to remember the most important thing."

For me, the most important thing is to continue to explore, with an open heart and mind, what mindfulness truly is, and help illuminate how it can be of greatest benefit. We clearly do not have all the answers yet; I think what is most interesting is to ask the questions. As Rilke said, "Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves."

The exploration of mindfulness requires great sensitivity and a range of methodological glasses. Our science—and our lives—will benefit by looking through all of them, illuminating the richness and complexity of mindfulness.

Shauna Shapiro, Ph.D.*, is a professor at Santa Clara University, a clinical psychologist, and internationally recognized expert in mindfulness. She has published over 100 journal articles and book chapters, and co-authored the critically acclaimed book, The Art and Science of Mindfulness, as well as Mindful Discipline: A Loving Approach to Setting Limits and Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child.*

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Spirituality & Health
September/October 2011

Self-Compassion

The Secret to Empowered Action is Learning Not to Beat Yourself Up

by Emma Seppala
Illustration by Farida Zaman

Strive for more, work even harder, aim to be the best! We live in a society that regularly sends us such messages. Meanwhile, most of us don't stop to consider whether our goals are possible or whether they would even bring us lasting happiness. Even if we were to win a gold medal at the Olympics, our status as reigning champion would only last a few years and would most likely be accompanied by anxiety about losing in the future. On my first day at Yale, one of the deans proclaimed, "You are not only the elite; you are the elite of the elite," and I still remember the wave of nausea this comment evoked in me. Success, after all, is a precarious position. While we strive to become infallible and to retain our position at the top, we cannot escape suffering.

This suspicion was confirmed as I observed my fellow classmates progress through freshman year. Each of us had previously been at the top of his or her class in high school. But we now found ourselves as one smart student among many, no longer special and no longer standing out. Yet we still continued to sweat, struggle, and strive. We had learned that we had to be the best. Most of us found this experience hard to bear, and it left me wondering whether this maddening competitiveness is the reason why anxiety and depression are exceptionally rampant on Ivy League campuses.

Kristin Neff, associate professor of human development at the University of Texas and a pioneer of research on self-compassion, believes that our society's emphasis on achievement and self-esteem lies at the heart of much unnecessary and even counterproductive suffering. From an early age, we are taught to build our self-esteem by competing successfully, yet competition is a losing battle. Psychologists have discovered that most people believe they are above average and better than others on almost every trait (the better-than-average effect). This belief helps us ward off painful feelings of inadequacy, but it comes at a price. When our self-esteem rests on the premise of successfully competing against others, we are always precariously teetering on the edge of losing. Social comparison and competition also foster disconnection by causing us to view others as obstacles to overcome in order to keep our position, mark our territory, and vanquish potential rivals. We ultimately feel more separate from others when the primary goal of our desire for success is to belong and to be loved.

It is quite simply impossible to be better than everyone at all times. Yet research shows that when we lose we tend to feel highly self-critical, adding to our misery. Faced with criticism, we become defensive and may feel crushed. Mistakes and failure make us so insecure and anxious that we give up early when faced with future challenge. Down the road this type of competitive self-esteem has been tied to larger societal problems such as loneliness, isolation, and even prejudice.

After observing the pitfalls of self-esteem, Neff went looking for an alternative, a way to set and achieve our goals without beating up ourselves — or anyone else — in the process. Through the practice of Buddhism, she found it in the form of self-compassion. With self-compassion, you value yourself not because you've judged yourself positively and others negatively but because you're intrinsically deserving of care and concern like everyone else. Where self-esteem leaves us powerless and distraught, self-compassion is at the heart of empowerment, learning, and inner strength.

Treating Yourself Like Your Best Friend

Working hard, striving to meet one's goals, and performing to the best of one's potential are obviously tremendously useful skills in the areas of both professional and personal growth. However, Neff 's research suggests that replacing self-esteem with self-compassion may have far superior implications for our mental health and well-being. In one study, for example, Neff found that when faced with a threatening situation (having to describe one's weaknesses in a job interview), self-compassion was associated with lower anxiety, whereas self-esteem did not impact anxiety levels.

Neff defines self-compassion as "being kind and understanding toward oneself in instances of pain or failure, rather than being harshly self-critical; perceiving one's experiences as part of the larger human experience, rather than seeing them as isolating; and holding painful thoughts and feelings in mindful awareness, rather than over-identifying with them." (See "The Three Elements of Self-Compassion," page 62.)

It is, in a sense, taking on the attitude that one might have toward a friend who has failed at something. Rather than berating him, judging him, and adding to his despair, we listen with empathy and understanding, encourage him to remember that mistakes are only normal, and validate his emotions without adding fuel to the fire. Self-compassion is the ability to act with ourselves as we would with such a friend.

Neff explains that self-compassion is not a way of avoiding goals or becoming self-indulgent. Instead, self-compassion is a great motivator because it involves the desire to alleviate suffering, to heal, to thrive, and to be happy. A parent who cares about her child will insist on the child's eating vegetables and doing her homework, no matter how unpleasant these experiences are for the child. Similarly, taking it easy on yourself may be appropriate in some situations, but in times of over-indulgence and laziness, self-compassion involves toughening up and taking responsibility.

A Better Way to Deal with Failure

When you are motivated by self-compassion, you see failure as the best learning opportunity. Criticism, for example, usually consists of a grain of truth that pertains to us and a grain of resentment or untruth that pertains to the critic's perception. Because of the sting that accompanies criticisms, we either become defensive or beat ourselves up — and ultimately miss the useful lesson. With self-compassion, however, we view failure with greater calm and understand it as an opportunity from which growth can follow.

Moreover, by preventing the defeating effects of self-criticism, self-compassion allows us to maintain peace of mind and thereby retain our energy. By remaining level-headed and understanding in the face of rejection, failure, or criticism, we develop an unshakable strength and ensure emotional stability independent of external circumstances. Neff explains that self-compassion provides a stable sense of self-worth that fluctuates much less over time, because it is not contingent on looking a certain way or competing successfully. In this way, it allows us to both experience well-being and contribute to society in meaningful ways.

Though research into the physiology of self-compassion versus self-criticism is still pending, Neff hypothesizes a simple model. Harsh self-criticism activates the sympathetic nervous system ("fight or flight") and elevates stress hormones such as cortisol in our bloodstream. When this sting has a hold on us, we cannot learn from or engage with the kernel of truth that may be there to serve us. Self-compassion, on the other hand, may trigger the mammalian care-giving system and hormones of affiliation and love, such as oxytocin. Also known as the "cuddle hormone," oxytocin is released in lactating mothers, during hugging and sex, and is associated with feelings of well-being, allowing us to hold the truth without attacking ourselves.

Developing Self-Compassion

We all know of people who seem to take care of everyone but themselves — and who berate themselves for not doing more. Neff's work confirms this observation: there is no correlation between the

trait of self-compassion and feelings of compassion toward others. She noticed that many people, women in particular, are far more compassionate and kinder to others than to themselves. She gives the example of a pediatric oncology nurse who spent her life giving to others, yet was extremely hard on herself because she felt that she was not doing enough.

Yet self-compassion can be learned. It is a practice that can help us all become less self-critical and perhaps even achieve more and give more. One great example of self-compassion in action is Bonnie Thorne, who has been devoted to humanitarian work throughout her life, starting with caring for street children, disadvantaged youth, and prostitutes by successfully raising funds for service organizations. Most recently, she is leading the funding agenda for the university of Wisconsin– Madison's Center for Investigating Healthy Minds' mission to use rigorous scientific research to improve well-being in the community. Bonnie explains, "Self-compassion gives me permission to breathe my own humanity into each situation that arises and greets me and to transmit that energy into kindness to others." To know Bonnie is to see her take advantage of every opportunity and interaction to connect with others in friendship, warmth, and the intention to serve where she can.

Thorne explains that as a child, she received tremendous pressure to perform and succeed. She had few compassionate role models and was highly self-critical. However, when she was placed in foster care, she witnessed the unconditional compassion of foster parents who whole-heartedly raised her as well as other foster children of diverse races and backgrounds. Bonnie attributes their love and respect and the safe environment they created to her development into a more integrated, creative, and giving person. Through her foster parents' acceptance and kindness, the self-critical voice within her began to quiet down. Bonnie keeps that critical voice quiet with a regular meditation practice.

A Boost for High-Achievers

Etelle Higonnet is another example of how learning self-compassion can empower even super-achievers. The daughter of Harvard professors, Higonnet graduated with honors from Yale College and attended Yale law School and then continued in a blaze of successes, working at Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the United Nations. Her human rights work saved thousands of lives, and she received recognition and awards. But she tells of an important shift in her life.

Says Higonnet, "I grew up with the idea that you should always criticize yourself and that you should never be satisfied but should always strive for better. If you received an A, why didn't you get an A+? If you're on the top soccer team, why are you not the number one scorer on the soccer team? It was 'quitters never win, and winners never quit' in all domains of life, from sports to academics." As a college student, human rights violations outraged her. Her activist spirit was fueled with anger, and she threw herself into overdrive to combat human rights issues.

"It took a car accident in which I nearly lost my life and a deep experience with yogic practice and philosophy that allowed my activist anger to be transformed into activist action. I realized that, despite the human rights violations being wrong, being angry would not change anything and would only hurt me and estrange me from others. Only solutions, and not anger, really change things."

After surviving the car accident, Etelle began to feel a deep sense of gratitude for a life she now understood to be a gift. Soon thereafter, she took an intensive week-long yogic breathing and philosophy workshop that shifted her perspective. "The Art of Living course was like a tsunami of yogic learning all at once that taught me explicitly about loving others and myself and developing harmony, balance, acceptance, and compassion, not only for myself and other people but for the planet itself. That's when I understood that life was not about winning, competing, or suffering through pain in order to win. It opened up a whole way of seeing love and acceptance and balance and harmony as a big part of me and that's how I try to live my life now. I've noticed that I am much more effective and happy."

Self-Compassion in Students and Veterans

Carole Pertofsky, head of health promotion at Stanford university, is a passionate advocate of resiliency and well-being through self-compassion. Pertofsky sees many Stanford students who are passionate about service but suffer from overexertion. She advocates the following: "Put your own oxygen mask on before giving it to others. If you run out of oxygen, you aren't going to help anybody. Our own basic needs must be met first; only then do we have the ability to help others. As humans, when we over-give, we become empty on the inside. We

dry up and feel resentful. Our energy runs scarce, and we feel as if we have no more to give." This state has often been called "compassion fatigue" and is common in service professions, such as those of social workers and humanitarian aid workers.

Pertofsky also works with students who succumb to what's called the "Stanford floating duck" syndrome: on the surface they look like they are calmly gliding along, but if you look underneath the water you'll observe their legs pedaling away furiously, just to stay afloat. Carole teaches: "When we stop being self-critical and self-harming and start being kind to ourselves, it opens up the pathway to increase resilience." Rather than wasting energy pretending to be calm while being closet workaholics and overachievers, students can actually learn to take care of themselves and to be balanced and happy.

In my own research with veterans at the university of Wisconsin–Madison, I have found that self-compassion can be very helpful for returning soldiers. One man I'll call Mike was highly self-critical and had developed extreme forbearance and self-discipline — attributes that earned him awards for courageous actions in combat. But at home he could not reconcile his actions as a soldier with his values as a civilian, and he had come to think of himself as a terrible human being. Suffering from anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, Mike could not sleep at night. After participating in a yoga, breathing, and meditation-based workshop as part of our study, Mike's attitude changed. He shared that though he remembers everything that happened, he understands that his past actions under orders do not represent who he is as a person now. Mike has recovered his ability to sleep.

Neff tells a similar story of working with a group of young veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. She taught them ways in which, in a challenging or anxiety-provoking situation, it is possible to evoke self-compassion through touch. From an observer's perspective, they are simply crossing their arms, but there is a private intention of giving a self-hug. One of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder is feeling severely isolated. She describes how one of the toughest-looking veterans in the room said, "I don't want to let go." He felt such relief from this new attitude of self-nurturing. And that's something you can try right now.

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Practices for Boosting Self-Compassion

1) Write yourself a letter: Take the perspective of being a compassionate friend, so you can imagine that you are this other person. Ask yourself, "What would a compassionate and kind friend say to me right now? What would his or her words be?" Later, come back and read the letter, and receive it from yourself.

2) Write down your Self-talk: If you are self-criticizing because your jeans don't fit or you said the wrong thing in a situation, write down the self-critical words that come to mind, and then ask if you would ever say these words to a friend. What would a friend say?

3) Develop a self-Compassion mantra: Neff suggests developing something that is easily memorized, so that when something difficult happens you can go to your phrases. These are not positive affirmations but reminders. Here is the self-compassion she developed for herself: "This is a moment of suffering. Suffering is part of life. May I be kind to myself in this moment; may I give myself the compassion that I need." Neff's son has autism, and when he would have a tantrum in public, she would immediately turn to her self-compassion mantra, partly as a focus for her mind but also because what she needed most at that moment was emotional support for herself, so she could deal with the situation calmly and with more grace.

For additional techniques by Kristin Neff to increase self-compassion, go to self-compassion.org.

The Three Elements of Self-Compassion

Self-kindness: Self-compassion entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or flagellating ourselves with self-criticism. Self-compassionate people recognize that being imperfect, failing, and experiencing life difficulties are inevitable, so they tend to be gentle with themselves when confronted with painful experiences, rather than getting angry when life falls short of set ideals. People cannot always be or get exactly what they want. When this reality is denied or fought against, suffering increases in the form of stress, frustration, and self-criticism. When this reality is accepted with sympathy and kindness, greater emotional equanimity is experienced.

Common humanity: Frustration at not having things exactly as we want them is often accompanied by an irrational but pervasive sense of isolation — as if "I" am the only person suffering or making mistakes — but all humans suffer. The very definition of being "human" means that one is mortal, vulnerable, and imperfect. Therefore, self-compassion involves recognizing that suffering and personal inadequacy is part of the shared human experience — something that we all go through, rather than being something that happens to "me" alone. It also means recognizing that personal thoughts, feelings and actions are impacted by "external" factors, such as parenting history, culture, and genetic and environmental conditions, as well as the behavior and expectations of others. Thich Nhat Hahn calls the intricate web of reciprocal cause-and-effect in which we are all imbedded "interbeing." Recognizing our essential interbeing allows us to be less judgmental about our personal failings. After all, if we had full control over our behavior, how many people would consciously choose to have anger issues, addiction issues, debilitating social anxiety, eating disorders, and so on? Many

aspects of ourselves and the circumstances of our lives are not of our choosing but instead stem from innumerable factors (genetic and/or environmental) over which we have little control. By recognizing our essential interdependence, therefore, failings and life's difficulties do not have to be taken so personally but can be acknowledged with nonjudgmental compassion and understanding.

Mindfulness: Self-compassion also requires taking a balanced approach to our negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated. This equilibrated stance stems from the process of relating personal experiences to those of others who are also suffering, thus putting our own situation into a larger perspective. It also stems from the willingness to observe our negative thoughts and emotions with openness and clarity, so that they are held in mindful awareness. Mindfulness is a nonjudgmental, receptive mind-state in which one observes thoughts and feelings as they are, without trying to suppress or deny them. We cannot ignore our pain and feel compassion for it at the same time. Mindfulness requires that we not be "over-identified" with thoughts and feelings, so that we are caught up and swept away by negative reactivity.

— Kristin Neff, PhD

*Happiness — real, lasting happiness — can best be experienced when we are engaged in the flow of life - connected to rather than separate from everything else," writes self- compassion pioneer **Kristen Neff, Ph.D.** Her fine new book,* Self-Compassion: Stop Beating Yourself Up and Leave Insecurity Behind *(William Morrow, 2011) provides a clear path for letting go into joy.*

– The Editors

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The Five Myths of Self-Compassion

What Keeps Us from Being Kinder to Ourselves?

by Kristin Neff

Most people don't have any problem with seeing compassion as a thoroughly commendable quality. It seems to refer to an amalgam of unquestionably good qualities: kindness, mercy, tenderness, benevolence, understanding, empathy, sympathy, and fellow-feeling, along with an impulse to help other living creatures, human or animal, in distress.

But we seem less sure about self-compassion. For many, it carries the whiff of all those other bad "self" terms: self-pity, self-serving, self-indulgent, self-centered, just plain selfish. Even many generations removed from our culture's Puritan origins, we still seem to believe that if we aren't blaming and punishing ourselves for something, we risk moral complacency, runaway egotism, and the sin of false pride.

Consider Rachel, a 39-year-old marketing executive with two kids and a loving husband. A deeply kind person, devoted wife, involved parent, supportive friend, and hard worker, she also finds time to volunteer for two local charities. In short, she appears to be an ideal role model.

But Rachel's in therapy because her levels of stress are so high. She's tired all the time, depressed, unable to sleep. She experiences chronic low-level digestive problems and sometimes—to her horror—snaps at her husband and kids. Through all this, she's incredibly hard on herself, always feeling that whatever she's done isn't good enough. Yet she'd never consider trying to be compassionate to herself. In fact, the very idea of letting up on her self-attack, giving herself some kindness and understanding, strikes her as somehow childish and irresponsible.

And Rachel isn't alone. Many people in our culture have misgivings about the idea of self-compassion, perhaps because they don't really know what it looks like, much less how to practice it. Often the practice of self-compassion is identified with the practice of mindfulness, now as ubiquitous as sushi in the West. But while mindfulness—with its emphasis on being experientially open to and aware of our own suffering without being caught up in it and swept away by aversive reactivity—is necessary for self-compassion, it leaves out an essential ingredient. What distinguishes self-compassion is that it goes beyond accepting our experience as it is and adds something more—embracing the experiencer (i.e., ourselves) with warmth and tenderness when our experience is painful.

Self-compassion also includes an element of wisdom—recognition of our common humanity. This means accepting the fact that, along with everyone else on the planet, we're flawed and imperfect individuals, just as likely as anyone else to be hit by the slings and arrows of outrageous (but perfectly normal) misfortune. This sounds obvious, but it's funny how easily we forget. We fall into the trap of believing that things are "supposed" to go well and that when we make a mistake or some difficulty comes along, something must have gone terribly wrong. (Uh, excuse me. There must be some error. I signed up for the everything-will-go-swimmingly-until-the-day-I-die plan. Can I speak to the management please?) The feeling that certain things "shouldn't" be happening makes us feel both shamed and isolated. At those times, remembering that we aren't really alone in our suffering—that hardship and struggle are deeply embedded in the human condition—can make a radical difference.

I remember being at the park with my son, Rowan, when he was about four years old, at the peak of his autism. I was sitting on the bench, watching all the happy children playing on the swings, chasing each other, and having fun while Rowan was just sitting on the top of the slide repeatedly banging his hand (something known as stimming). Admittedly, I started to go down the path of self-pity: "Why can't I have a 'normal' child like everyone else? Why am I the only one who's having such a hard time?" But years of self-compassion practice gave me enough presence of mind to catch myself, pause, take a deep breath, and become aware of the trap I was falling into.

With a little distance from my negative thoughts and feelings, I looked out at the other mothers and their children and thought to myself, "I'm assuming that these kids are going to grow up with carefree,

unproblematic lives, that none of these mothers will have to struggle as they raise their children. But for all I know, some of these kids could grow up to develop serious mental or physical health issues, or just turn out to be not very nice people! There's no child who's perfect, and no parent who doesn't go through some form of hardship or challenge with their children at one time or another."

And at that moment, my feelings of intense isolation turned into feelings of deep connection with the other mothers at the park, and with all parents everywhere. We love our kids, but damn—it's tough sometimes! As odd as it may sound, by practicing self-compassion as we muddle through, we don't feel so alone.

Fortunately, this isn't just wishful thinking about another self-help approach. In fact, there's now an impressive and growing body of research demonstrating that relating to ourselves in a kind, friendly manner is essential for emotional wellbeing. Not only does it help us avoid the inevitable consequences of harsh self-judgment—depression, anxiety, and stress—it also engenders a happier and more hopeful approach to life. More pointedly, research proves false many of the common myths about self-compassion that keep us trapped in the prison of relentless self-criticism. Here are five of them.

1. Self-compassion is a form of self-pity

One of the biggest myths about self-compassion is that it means feeling sorry for yourself. In fact, as my own experience on the playground exemplifies, self-compassion is an antidote to self-pity and the tendency to whine about our bad luck.

This isn't because self-compassion allows you to tune out the bad stuff; in fact, it makes us more willing to accept, experience, and acknowledge difficult feelings with kindness—which paradoxically helps us process and let go of them more fully. Research shows that self-compassionate people are less likely to get swallowed up by self-pitying thoughts about how bad things are. That's one of the reasons self-compassionate people have better mental health.

A study by Filip Raes at the University of Leuven examined the association of self-compassion with ruminative thinking and mental health among undergraduates at his university. He first assessed how participants were using the self-report Self-Compassion Scale I developed in 2003, which asks respondents to indicate how often they engage in behaviors corresponding to the main elements of self-compassion. Examples include statements such as "I try to be understanding and patient toward aspects of my personality I don't like"; "When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through"; and "When something painful happens, I try to take a balanced view of the situation."

Raes found that participants with higher levels of self-compassion tended to brood less about their misfortune. Moreover, he found that their reduced tendency to ruminate helped explain why self-compassionate participants reported fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression.

2. Self-compassion means weakness

John had always considered himself a pillar of strength—an ideal husband and provider. So he was devastated when his wife left him for another man. Secretly racked with guilt for not doing more to meet her emotional needs before she sought comfort in someone else's arms, he didn't want to admit how hurt he still felt and how hard it was for him to move on with his life.

When his colleague suggested that he try being compassionate to himself about his divorce, his reaction was swift: "Don't give me that hearts-and-flowers stuff! Self-compassion is for sissies. I had to be hard as nails to get through the divorce with some semblance of self-respect, and I'm not about to let my guard down now."

What John didn't know is that instead of being a weakness, researchers are discovering that self-compassion is one of the most powerful sources of coping and resilience available to us. When we go through major life crises, self-compassion appears to make all the difference in our ability to survive and even thrive. John assumed that being a tough guy during his divorce—stuffing down his feelings and not admitting how much pain he was in—is what got him through. But he wasn't "through": he was stuck, and self-compassion was the missing piece that would probably have helped him to move on.

David Sbarra and his colleagues at the University of Arizona examined whether self-compassion helps

determine how well people adjust to a divorce. The researchers invited more than 100 people recently separated from their spouses to come into the lab and make a four-minute stream-of-consciousness recording of their thoughts and feelings about the separation experience. Four trained judges later coded how self-compassionate these discussions were, using a modified version of the Self-Compassion Scale. They gave low scores to participants who said things like "I don't know how I managed to do this. It was all my fault. I pushed him away for some reason. I needed him so much, still need him. What did I do? I know I did it all wrong." High scores were given to people who said things like "Looking back, you have to take the best out of it and move on from there. Just forgive yourself and your ex for everything you both did or didn't do."

The researchers found that participants who displayed more self-compassion when talking about their breakup evidenced better psychological adjustment to the divorce at the time, and that this effect persisted nine months later. Results held even when controlling for other possible explanations, such as participants' initial levels of self-esteem, optimism, depression, or secure attachment. Studies like this one suggest that it's not just what you face in life, but how you relate to yourself when the going gets tough—as an inner ally or enemy—that determines your ability to cope successfully.

3. Self-compassion will make me complacent

Perhaps the biggest block to self-compassion is the belief that it'll undermine our motivation to push ourselves to do better. The idea is that if we don't criticize ourselves for failing to live up to our standards, we'll automatically succumb to slothful defeatism. But let's think for a moment how parents successfully motivate their children. When Rachel's teenage son comes home one day with a failing English grade, she could look disgusted and hiss, "Stupid boy! You'll never amount to anything. I'm ashamed of you!" (Makes you cringe, doesn't it? Yet that's exactly the type of thing Rachel tells herself when she fails to meet her own high expectations.) But most likely, rather than motivating her son, this torrent of shame will just make him lose faith in himself, and eventually he'll stop trying altogether.

Alternatively, Rachel could adopt a compassionate approach by saying, "Oh sweetheart, you must be so upset. Hey, give me a hug. It happens to all of us. But we need to get your English grades up because I know you want to get into a good college. What can I do to help and support you? I believe in you." Notice that there's honest recognition of the failure, sympathy for her son's unhappiness, and encouragement to go beyond or around this momentary bump in the road. This type of caring response helps us maintain our self-confidence and feel emotionally supported. Ironically, even though Rachel wouldn't even dream of taking the former approach with her son, she unquestionably believes that self-flagellation is necessary for her to achieve her goals. She assumes that her anxiety, depression, and stress are a result of her not trying hard enough.

But there's now a good deal of research clearly showing that self-compassion is a far more effective force for personal motivation than self-punishment.

For instance, a series of research experiments by Juliana Breines and Serena Chen of the University of California at Berkeley examined whether helping undergraduate students to be more self-compassionate would motivate them to engage in positive change. In one study, participants were asked to recall a recent action they felt guilty about—such as cheating on an exam, lying to a romantic partner, saying something harmful—that still made them feel bad about themselves when they thought about it. Next, they were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. In the self-compassion condition, participants were instructed to write to themselves for three minutes from the perspective of a compassionate and understanding friend. In the second condition, participants were instructed to write about their own positive qualities; and in the third, they wrote about a hobby they enjoyed. These two control conditions helped differentiate self-compassion from positive self-talk and positive mood in general.

The researchers found that participants who were helped to be self-compassionate about their recent transgression reported being more motivated to apologize for the harm done and more committed to not repeating the behavior again than those in the control conditions. Self-compassion, far from being a way to evade personal accountability, actually strengthens it.

If we can acknowledge our failures and misdeeds with kindness—"I really messed up when I got so

mad at her, but I was stressed, and I guess all people overreact sometimes"—rather than judgment—"I can't believe I said that; I'm such a horrible, mean person"—it's much safer to see ourselves clearly. When we can see beyond the distorting lens of harsh self-judgment, we get in touch with other parts of ourselves, the parts that care and want everyone, including ourselves, to be as healthy and happy as possible. This provides the encouragement and support needed to do our best and try again.

4. Self-compassion is narcissistic

In American culture, high self-esteem requires standing out in a crowd—being special and above average. How do you feel when someone calls your work performance, or parenting skills, or intelligence level average? Ouch! The problem, of course, is that, Garrison Keillor's Lake Woebegone notwithstanding, it's impossible for everyone to be above average at the same time. We may excel in some areas, but there's always someone more attractive, successful, and intelligent than we are—meaning we feel like failures whenever we compare ourselves to those "better" than us.

The desire to see ourselves as better than average, however, to get and keep that elusive feeling of high self-esteem, can lead to downright nasty behavior. Why do early adolescents begin to bully others? If I can be seen as the cool, tough kid in contrast to the wimpy nerd I just picked on, I get a self-esteem boost. Why are we so prejudiced? If I believe that my ethnic, gender, national, political group is better than yours, I get a self-esteem boost.

Indeed, the emphasis placed on self-esteem in American society has led to a worrying trend: researchers Jean Twenge of San Diego State University and Keith Campbell of the University of Georgia, who've tracked the narcissism scores of college students since 1987, find that the narcissism of modern-day students is at the highest level ever recorded. They attribute the rise in narcissism to well-meaning but misguided parents and teachers, who tell kids how special and great they are in an attempt to raise their self-esteem.

But self-compassion is different from self-esteem. Although they're both strongly linked to psychological wellbeing, self-esteem is a positive evaluation of self-worth, while self-compassion isn't a judgment or an evaluation at all. Instead, self-compassion is way of relating to the ever-changing landscape of who we are with kindness and acceptance—especially when we fail or feel inadequate. In other words, self-esteem requires feeling better than others, whereas self-compassion requires acknowledging that we share the human condition of imperfection.

Self-esteem is also inherently fragile, bouncing up and down according to our latest success or failure. I remember a time my self-esteem soared and then crashed within about five seconds. I was visiting an equestrian stable with friends, and the old Spanish riding instructor there apparently liked my Mediterranean looks. "You are veeerrrry beautiful," he told me, as I felt myself glow with pleasure. Then he added, "Don't ever shave your mooostache." Self-esteem is a fair-weather friend, there for us in good times, deserting us when our luck heads south. But self-compassion is always there for us, a reliable source of support, even when our worldly stock has crashed. It still hurts when our pride is dashed, but we can be kind to ourselves precisely because it hurts. "Wow, that was pretty humiliating, I'm so sorry. It's okay though, these things happen."

There's solid research for the idea that self-compassion helps us in good times and bad. Mark Leary and colleagues at Wake Forest University conducted a study that asked participants to make a video that introduced and described themselves. For instance, "Hi, I'm John, an environmental sciences major. I love to go fishing and spend time in nature. I want to work for the National Park Service when I graduate," and so on. They were told that someone would watch their tape and then rate them on a seven-point scale in terms of how warm, friendly, intelligent, likeable, and mature they appeared. (The feedback was bogus, of course, given by a study confederate.) Half the participants received positive ratings and the others neutral ratings. The researchers wanted to examine if participants' levels of self-compassion (as measured by scores on the Self-Compassion Scale), would predict reactions to the feedback differently from their levels of self-esteem (as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale).

They found that self-compassionate people reported similar emotional reactions in terms of how happy, sad, angry, or tense they were feeling, regardless of whether the feedback was positive or neutral. People with high levels of self-esteem, however, tended to get upset when they received neutral feedback (What, I'm just average?). They were likelier to deny that the feedback was due to

their own personality and blamed it on external factors, such as the observer's being in a bad mood. This suggests that self-compassionate people are better able to remain emotionally stable, regardless of the degree of praise they receive from others. Self-esteem, in contrast, thrives only when the reviews are good, and it may lead to evasive tactics when there's a possibility of facing unpleasant truths about oneself.

5. Self-compassion is selfish

Many people are suspicious of self-compassion because they conflate it with selfishness. Rachel, for instance, spends a large portion of her days caring for her family and many of her nights and weekends volunteering for the charities she supports. Raised in a family that emphasized the importance of service to others, she assumes that spending time and energy being kind and caring toward herself automatically means she must be neglecting everybody else for her own selfish ends. Indeed, many people are like Rachel in this sense—good, generous, altruistic souls, who are perfectly awful to themselves while thinking this is necessary to their general goodness.

But is compassion really a zero-sum game? Think about the times you've been lost in the throes of self-criticism. Are you self-focused or other-focused in the moment? Do you have more or fewer resources to give to others? Most people find that when they're absorbed in self-judgment, they actually have little bandwidth left over to think about anything other than their inadequate, worthless selves. In fact, beating yourself up can be a paradoxical form of self-centeredness. When we can be kind and nurturing to ourselves, however, many of our emotional needs are met, leaving us in a better position to focus on others.

Unfortunately, the ideal of being modest, self-effacing, and caring for the welfare of others often comes with the corollary that we must treat ourselves badly. This is especially true for women, who, research indicates, tend to have slightly lower levels of self-compassion than men, even while they tend to be more caring, empathetic, and giving toward others. Perhaps this isn't so surprising, given that women are socialized to be caregivers—selflessly to open their hearts to their husbands, children, friends, and elderly parents—but aren't taught to care for themselves. While the feminist revolution helped expand the roles available to women, and we now see more female leaders in business and politics than ever before, the idea that women should be selfless caregivers hasn't really gone away. It's just that women are now supposed to be successful at their careers in addition to being ultimate nurturers at home.

The irony is that being good to yourself actually helps you be good to others, while being bad to yourself only gets in the way. In fact, I recently conducted a study with my colleague Tasha Beretvas at the University of Texas at Austin that explored whether self-compassionate people were more giving relationship partners. We recruited more than 100 couples who'd been in a romantic relationship for a year or longer. Participants rated their own level of self-compassion using the Self-Compassion Scale. They then described their partner's behavior in the relationship on a series of self-report measures, also indicating how satisfied they were with their partners. We found that self-compassionate individuals were described by their partners as being more caring (e.g., "gentle and kind toward me"), accepting (e.g., "respects my opinions"), and autonomy-supporting (e.g., "gives me as much freedom as I want") than their self-critical counterparts, who were described as being more detached (e.g., "doesn't think about me very much"), aggressive (e.g. "yells, stomps out of the room"), and controlling (e.g., "expects me to do everything his/her way").

Participants also reported being more satisfied and securely attached in their relationship with self-compassionate partners—which makes sense. If I'm withholding toward myself and relying on my partner to meet my emotional needs, I'm going to behave badly when they're not met. But if I can give myself care and support, to meet many of my own needs directly, I'll have more emotional resources available to give to my partner.

The research literature is unclear about whether self-compassion is actually necessary to be compassionate to others, given that many people do a pretty good job of caring for others while shortchanging themselves. However, a growing body of research indicates that self-compassion helps people sustain the act of caring for others. For instance, it appears that counselors and therapists who are self-compassionate are less likely to experience stress and caregiver burnout; they're more satisfied with their careers and feel more energized,

happy, and grateful for being able to make a difference in the world.

Because we evolved as social beings, exposure to other people's tales of suffering activates the pain centers of our own brains through a process of empathetic resonance. When we witness the suffering of others on a daily basis, we can experience personal distress to the point of burning out, and caregivers who are especially sensitive and empathetic may be most at risk. At the same time, when we give ourselves compassion, we create a protective buffer, allowing us to understand and feel for the suffering person without being drained by his or her suffering. The people we care for then pick up our compassion through their own process of empathic resonance. In other words, the compassion we cultivate for ourselves directly transmits itself to others.

I know this firsthand through my experience of raising an autistic child. Rowan is now 13, and although he can be a grumpy adolescent, he's a loving kid, who poses few parenting challenges. But it wasn't always so. I often faced situations that I thought were beyond my ability to cope and sometimes had to rely on the power of self-compassion to get me through.

Once, when Rowan was five, I took him to England to see his grandparents. In the middle of the transatlantic flight, he threw an almighty tantrum. I have no idea what set him off, but I suddenly found myself with a flailing, screaming child and a plane full of people looking at us with dagger eyes. What to do? I tried taking him to the bathroom in hopes that the closed door would muffle his screams. But after I'd shuffled down the aisle, trying to keep him from accidentally hitting passengers along the way, I found the toilet was occupied.

Huddled with Rowan in the tiny space outside the toilet, I felt helpless and hopeless. But then I remembered self-compassion. This is so hard for you, darling, I said to myself. I'm sorry this is happening. I'm here for you. While making sure that Rowan was safe, 90 percent of my attention was on soothing and comforting myself. My mind became flooded with compassion, to the point that it dominated my experience—far more than my screaming child. Furthermore, as I'd already discovered, when I was in a more peaceful and loving frame of mind, Rowan also calmed down. As I soothed myself, he was soothed as well.

When we care tenderly for ourselves in response to suffering, our heart opens. Compassion engages our capacity for love, wisdom, courage, and generosity. It's a mental and emotional state that's boundless and directionless, grounded in the great spiritual traditions of the world but available to every person simply by virtue of our being human. In a surprising twist, the nurturing power of self-compassion is now being illuminated by the matter-of-fact, tough-minded methods of empirical science, and a growing body of research literature is demonstrating conclusively that self-compassion is not only central to mental health, but can be enriched through learning and practice, just like so many other good habits.

Therapists have known for a long time that being kind to ourselves isn't—as is too often believed—a selfish luxury, but the exercise of a gift that makes us happier. Now, finally, science is proving the point.

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source: http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_five_myths_of_self_compassion

Translate

Practice Log – Week 7

FORMAL PRACTICE: Practice at least six times this week, doing anything you've learned up until now (Body Scan, Sitting Meditation, Yoga), with or without guidance. Since it was introduced just this week, **also do the Lovingkindness Meditation at least once**. As before, don't expect anything in particular. Just let your experience be your experience.

INFORMAL PRACTICE: At least once a day, consciously use one of the informal practices you've learned (Simple Awareness, Mindful Eating, STOP, Soften/Soothe/Allow) and make note of it on the **Informal Practice Log**.

...Date...	Practice Comments (include whether Body Scan, Sitting or Yoga)

palousemindfulness.com

Informal Practice Log – Week 7

What was the situation? What process did you use? (Simple Awareness, Mindful Eating, STOP, Soften/Soothe/Allow)	**What was going on with you when you thought to do the process? (body, mind, emotion)**	**What did you notice WHILE you were doing the process? (body, mind, emotion)**	**What did you notice AFTER you did the process? (body, mind, emotion, action)**	**What did you learn?**
EXAMPLE *I was cleaning the garage and getting frustrated with how long it was taking and decided to use Simple Awareness.*	*I felt frustrated at how long it was taking, hurrying just to get through, thinking "I HATE doing this – I have so many other things to do!"*	*I started to pay attention to the one part I was working on: the pile of tools in the corner, colors, shapes, how it felt to be holding the saw handle.*	*I actually continued with the process for a while. I was much calmer, only focused on what I was doing at THAT moment.*	*It wasn't the job itself which was frustrating, but my thinking about all the other things I had to get done.*

Week 8 - Conclusion
Developing a Practice of Your Own

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue.

Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them.

And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.

- Rainer Maria Rilke

Time to reflect...

This brings us to the final week of the course, and if you have been watching the videos, reading the recommended material, and doing the practices, you have accomplished a lot! As a result of your dedicated learning and practice, it's likely that there have been some changes in you since you began, so now might be a good time to ask: ***What changes have you noticed since you began the course?*** The changes may be different than you expected and they might not be monumental. They could include subtle shifts, such as discovering that you are sometimes able to find space in the middle of a busy day, or that you are a little more resilient in encounters with others, or you're just a little kinder to yourself in difficult situations. It's often the subtle changes that are actually most profound, because they indicate learning that has been integrated, that they come from the inside-out rather than top-down.

Developing a practice of your own

Although there are videos and readings for this week, there are no practice sheets. Sometimes, we say that the eighth week of an MBSR class starts now but does not really have an end. If this course has been useful for you so far, you may want to consider the question: ***How will you continue practicing mindfulness in your daily life, on your own?*** You may decide that you would like to continue the practice in a formal way, incorporating in your schedule a sitting meditation or yoga, for instance, or you may already have an idea of how you would incorporate into your life one or more of the many informal practices (e.g., simple awareness, mindful eating, STOP, Soften-Soothe-Allow, or PAIN processes).

Of the people who take the MBSR course and have found ways to incorporate mindfulness into their lives, every one of them does it in a unique way, a way that suits their temperament and needs. One person might continue with a 30-minute per day meditation practice, another might take a regular yoga class, another may have made their daily walk into a meditation using present-moment awareness of their inner and outer worlds as they walk, and yet another may intentionally use one or more of the many informal practices throughout their day. The important thing is not the specific practices you choose, but that you make them yours, and that they resonate with you in a way that they help you to be more alive, engaged and joyful in your daily life.

Videos and Reading

The videos include **Mindfulness is Not A Crystal Ball**, a brief summary of mindfulness in daily life by Susan Kaiser Greenland, a video by Tara Brach on **Happiness**, and a funny but poignant piece, **How My Son Ruined My Life**, by James Baraz's mother. In **Compassion and Mindfulness** and **Listening as an Act of Love**, Jon Kabat-Zinn reinforces the key role that compassion and self-compassion play in this course. The last video is a reading of **The Rabbi's Gift**, a beautiful story illustrating the transformative power of seeing the goodness in others (and ourselves). The video is narrated by M. Scott Peck himself. The readings include some short documents having to do with developing a daily mindfulness practice, an article by Rachel Naomi Remen about serving vs. helping, and a printable version of The Rabbi's Gift.

Certificate of completion

If you have completed the practices each week and absorbed the videos and readings, ***Congratulations!*** This course is not a trivial accomplishment - it takes significant commitment to do the required practice and study on your own. If you would like a certificate documenting your completion of this online course, see **Requesting a Certificate of Completion**.

Even if you choose not to get a certificate, it might be fun to look at the **Graduate Map** which has pins in every city for which there is an online graduate.

Taking it from here...

The many audio, video and written resources embedded in the eight weeks are regularly updated with new material, including **Graduate Program Readings**, which are updated monthly. To see what has changed on the site recently, see **What's New**. There are many other **Resources** available on this site, including recommendations for **Meditation Groups** and **Retreat Centers**.

If you are interested in deepening your learning through an instructor-training program, there are many good training centers, some of which are listed on the **Mindfulness Training Centers** page. Still another way to keep learning is to look at the **Gallery of Learning**. There you will find current letters of some of the other graduates (published with their permission) - skimming through those can be like a mini-refresher.

I hope this course has been useful and wish you the best on your journey from here!

If you'd like to help expand the reach of the Palouse Mindfulness course:

*If you found the course valuable, you are invited to make a small donation to help make the course even more accessible to people around the world, but this is not expected nor required. **Please donate only if you feel inspired to do this and are comfortable enough financially to do so.** See **About Contributions**.*

Videos

Mindfulness is Not A Crystal Ball *- Susan Kaiser Greenland [2 min]*
Happiness *- Tara Brach [20 min]*
How My Son Ruined My Life *- Selma & James Baraz [7 min]*
Compassion and Mindfulness and **Listening as an Act of Love** *- Jon Kabat-Zinn [12 min]*
The Rabbi's Gift *- M. Scott Peck [6 min]*

Reading

Deepening a Personal Meditation Practice *- Jon Kabat-Zinn*
Suggestions for Daily Practice *- Jon Kabat-Zinn*
In the Service of Life *- Rachel Naomi Remen*
The Rabbi's Gift *- M. Scott Peck*

Supplementary materials related to this week's topic

Sanctuary *video by Jack Kornfield [19 min]*
The Happy Secret to Better Work *video by Shawn Achor [12 min]*
Layers of Awareness *diagram*

CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS

Beginning or Deepening a Personal Meditation Practice

1. The real meditation is how you live your life.

2. In order to live life fully, you have to be present for it.

3. To be present, it helps to purposefully bring awareness to your moments – otherwise you may miss many of them.

4. You do that by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to whatever is arising inwardly and outwardly.

5. This requires a great deal of kindness toward yourself, which you deserve.

6. It helps to keep in mind that good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, the present moment is the only time any of us are alive. Therefore, it's the only time to learn, grow, see what is really going on, find some degree of balance, feel and express emotions such as love and appreciation, and do what we need to do to take care of ourselves – in other words, embody our intrinsic strength and beauty and wisdom – even in the face of pain and suffering.

7. So a gentle love affair with the present moment is important.

8. We do that through learning to rest in awareness of what is happening inwardly and outwardly moment by moment by moment – it is more a "being" than a "doing."

9. Formal and informal meditation practices are specific ways in which you can ground, deepen, and accelerate this process, so it is useful to carve out some time for formal practice on a regular daily basis – maybe waking up fifteen or twenty minutes earlier than you ordinarily would to catch some time for ourselves.

10. We bring awareness to our moments only as best we can.

11. We are not trying to create a special feeling or experience – simply to realize that this moment is already very special – because you are alive and awake in it.

12. This is hard, but well worth it

13. It takes a lot of practice.

14. Lots of practice

15. But you have a lot of moments – and we can treat each one as a new beginning.

16. So there are always new moments to open up to if we miss some.

17. We do all this with a huge amount of self-compassion.

18. And remember, you are not your thoughts or opinions, your likes or dislikes. They are more like weather patterns in your mind that you can be aware of – like clouds moving across the sky, – and so don't have to be imprisoned by.

19. Befriending yourself in this way is the adventure of a lifetime, and hugely empowering.

20. Try it for a few weeks – it grows on you.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DAILY PRACTICE

1. A good place to start cultivating mindfulness is in the body.
2. Befriending your breath is a good idea, since you can't leave home without it – and it is so related to our states of mind.
3. See if from time to time you can just feel the breath moving in and out of your body.
4. Locate where the breath sensations are most vivid, and "surf" with full awareness on those breath waves, moment by moment – in the belly, at the nostrils, or wherever.
5. Try lying in bed for a few moments after you wake up, and just ride on the waves of your own breathing moment by moment and breath by breath.
6. Experiment with expanding your awareness around your breath until it includes a sense of the body as a whole lying in bed breathing.
7. As best you can, be aware of the various sensations fluxing in the body, including the breath sensations.
8. Just rest in the awareness of lying here breathing, outside of time, even if it is only for a minute or two by the clock.
9. When you notice that the mind has a life of its own and wanders here and there, keep in mind that this is just what minds do, so there is no need to judge it.
10. Just note what is on your mind if you are no longer in touch with the breath or with the sensations of the body lying in the bed, and without judgment or criticism, just let that be part of your awareness in the moment, and feature once again the breath and the body center-stage in the field of your awareness.
11. Repeat step 10 a few million times.
12. It is very easy to fall into the thought stream and get caught up in the future (worrying, planning) and the past (remembering, blaming, pining) and in reactive and often painful emotions.
13. No need to try to stop any of this from happening when you can just bring a big embrace of openhearted, spacious, accepting awareness to it and, lo and behold, you are once again sitting on the bank of the thought stream, listening to the gurgling but not so caught up in the torrent for the moment.
14. You can cultivate mindfulness in this way lying in bed for a few moments in the morning, or in the evening before going to sleep.
15. You can also cultivate mindfulness sitting, standing, walking, and eating – in fact, in any position or situation, including brushing your teeth, taking a shower, talking on the phone, running, working out at the gym, cooking, picking up the kids, making love, whatever is unfolding in your life in the present moment.
16. It helps to be present for it and for yourself.
17. Remember – the real meditation is your life, and how you inhabit it moment by moment.

In the Service of Life

by Rachel Naomi Remen

In recent years the question how can I help? has become meaningful to many people. But perhaps there is a deeper question we might consider. Perhaps the real question is not how can I help? but how can I serve?

Serving is different from helping. Helping is based on inequality; it is not a relationship between equals. When you help you use your own strength to help those of lesser strength. If I'm attentive to what's going on inside of me when I'm helping, I find that I'm always helping someone who's not as strong as I am, who is needier than I am. People feel this inequality. When we help we may inadvertently take away from people more than we could ever give them; we may diminish their self-esteem, their sense of worth, integrity and wholeness. When I help I am very aware of my own strength. But we don't serve with our strength, we serve with ourselves. We draw from all of our experiences. Our limitations serve, our wounds serve, even our darkness can serve. The wholeness in us serves the wholeness in others and the wholeness in life. The wholeness in you is the same as the wholeness in me. Service is a relationship between equals.

Helping incurs debt. When you help someone they owe you one. But serving, like healing, is mutual. There is no debt. I am as served as the person I am serving. When I help I have a feeling of satisfaction. When I serve I have a feeling of gratitude. These are very different things.

Serving is also different from fixing. When I fix a person I perceive them as broken, and their brokenness requires me to act. When I fix I do not see the wholeness in the other person or trust the integrity of the life in them. When I serve I see and trust that wholeness. It is what I am responding to and collaborating with.

There is distance between ourselves and whatever or whomever we are fixing. Fixing is a form of judgment. All judgment creates distance, a disconnection, an experience of difference. In fixing there is an inequality of expertise that can easily become a moral distance. We cannot serve at a distance. We can only serve that to which we are profoundly connected, that which we are willing to touch. This is Mother Teresa's basic message. We serve life not because it is broken but because it is holy.

If helping is an experience of strength, fixing is an experience of mastery and expertise. Service, on the other hand, is an experience of mystery, surrender and awe. A fixer has the illusion of being causal. A server knows that he or she is being used and has a willingness to be used in the service of something greater, something essentially unknown. Fixing and helping are very personal; they are very particular, concrete and specific. We fix and help many different things in our lifetimes, but when we serve we are always serving the same thing. Everyone who has ever served through the history of time serves the same thing. We are servers of the wholeness and mystery in life.

The bottom line, of course, is that we can fix without serving. And we can help without serving. And we can serve without fixing or helping. I think I would go so far as to say that fixing and helping may often be the work of the ego, and service the work of the soul. They may look similar if you're watching from the outside, but the inner experience is different. The outcome is often different, too.

Our service serves us as well as others. That which uses us strengthens us. Over time, fixing and helping are draining, depleting. Over time we burn out. Service is renewing. When we serve, our work itself will sustain us.

Service rests on the basic premise that the nature of life is sacred, that life is a holy mystery which has an unknown purpose. When we serve, we know that we belong to life and to that

purpose. Fundamentally, helping, fixing and service are ways of seeing life. When you help you see life as weak, when you fix, you see life as broken. When you serve, you see life as whole. From the perspective of service, we are all connected: All suffering is like my suffering and all joy is like my joy. The impulse to serve emerges naturally and inevitably from this way of seeing.

Lastly, fixing and helping are the basis of curing, but not of healing. In 40 years of chronic illness I have been helped by many people and fixed by a great many others who did not recognize my wholeness. All that fixing and helping left me wounded in some important and fundamental ways. Only service heals.

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source: http://www.rachelremen.com/service.html

Dr. Remen is Clinical Professor of Family and Community Medicine at the UCSF School of Medicine and Director of the innovative UCSF course The Healer's Art, which was recently featured in US News & World Report. She is Founder and Director of the Institute for the Study of Health and Illness, a ten-year-old professional development program for graduate physicians. She is the author of the New York Times bestseller Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal, Riverhead Books, 1996. Her newest book, My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge and Belonging, Riverhead Books, 2000, is a national bestseller. As a master story-teller and public speaker, she has spoken to thousands of people throughout the country, reminding them of the power of their humanity and the ability to use their lives to make a difference. Dr. Remen has a 48-year personal history of Crohn's disease and her work is a unique blend of the viewpoint of physician and patient.

The Rabbi's Gift

by M. Scott Peck

There is a story, perhaps a myth. Typical of mythic stories, it has many versions. Also typical, the source of the version I am about to tell is obscure. I cannot remember whether I heard or read it, or where or when. Furthermore, I do not even know the distortions I myself have made in it. All I know for certain is that this version came to me with a title. It is called The Rabbi's Gift.

The story concerns a monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Once a great order, as a result of waves of anti-monastic persecution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the rise of secularism in the nineteenth, all its branch houses were lost and it had become decimated to the extent that there were only five monks left in the decaying mother house: Abbott and four others, all over 70 in age. Clearly it was a dying order.

In the deep woods surrounding the monastery there was a little hut that a Rabbi from a nearby town occasionally used for a Hermitage. Through their many years of prayer and contemplation the old monks had become a bit psychic, so they could always sense when the rabbi was in his Hermitage. "The Rabbi is in the woods, the Rabbi is in the woods once again," they would whisper to each other. As he agonized over the imminent death of his order, it occurred to the Abbott at one such time to visit the Hermitage and ask the Rabbi if by some possible chance he could offer any advice that might save the monastery.

The Rabbi welcomed the Abbott at his hut. But when the Abbott explained the purpose of his visit, the Rabbi could only commiserate with him. "I know how it is," he explained. "The spirit has gone out of the people. It is the same in my town. Almost no one comes to the synagogue anymore." So the old Abbott and the old Rabbi wept together. Then they read parts of the Torah and quietly spoke of deep things. The time came when the Abbott had to leave. They embraced each other. "It has been a wonderful thing that we should meet after all these years," the Abbott said, "but I have still failed in my purpose for coming here. Is there nothing you can tell me, no piece of advice you can give me that would help me save my dying order?"

"No, I am sorry," the Rabbi responded. "I have no advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you."

When the Abbott return to the monastery his fellow monks gathered around him to ask, "well, what did the Rabbi say?"

"He couldn't help," he Abbott answered. "We just wept and read the Torah together. The only thing he did say, just as I was leaving - it was something cryptic - was that the Messiah is one of us. I don't know what he meant. "

In the days and weeks and months that followed, the old monks pondered this and wondered whether there was any possible significance to the Rabbi's words. The Messiah is one of us? Could he possibly have meant one of us monks here at the monastery? If that's the case, which one? Do you suppose he meant the Abbott? Yes, if he meant anyone, he probably meant father Abbott. He has been our leader for more than a generation. On the other hand, he might have meant brother Thomas. Certainly brother Thomas is a holy man. Everyone knows that Thomas is a man of light. Certainly he could not have meant brother Elred! Elred gets crotchety at times. But come to think of it, even though he is a thorn in people's sides, when you look back on it, Elred is virtually always right. Often very right. Maybe the Rabbi did mean brother Elred. But surely not brother Philip. Philip is so passive, a real nobody. But then, almost mysteriously, he has a gift for somehow always being there when you need him. He just magically appears by your side. Maybe Philip is the Messiah. Of course the Rabbi didn't mean me. He couldn't possibly have meant me. I'm just an ordinary person. Yet supposing he did? Suppose I am the Messiah?

Oh God, not me. I couldn't be that much for you, could I?

As they contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might he the Messiah. And on the off, off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.

Because the forest in which it was situated was beautiful, it so happened that people still occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along some of its paths, even now and then to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed this aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it. Hardly knowing why, they began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends.

Then it happened that some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while one ask if he could join them. Then another. And another. So within a few years the monastery once again became a thriving order and, thanks to the Rabbi's gift, a vibrant centre of light and spirituality in the realm.

M. Scott Peck, MD is the author of the groundbreaking bestseller, *The Road Less Traveled*, first published in 1978. In *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (1987), he explores the role of civility in personal relationships and society. A graduate of both Harvard University and Case Western Reserve, Dr. Peck served in the Army Medical Corps before maintaining a private practice in psychiatry. During the last 20 years of his life, he devoted much of his time and financial resources to the work of the Foundation for Community Encouragement, a nonprofit organization that he helped found in 1984. See the YouTube recording of Rabbi's Gift, narrated by M. Scott Peck himself, made available by Community Building Institute.

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From the prologue of The Different Drum