



Mindfulness-Based **Stress** Reduction

Palouse Mindfulness MBSR course
palousemindfulness.com

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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Palouse Mindfulness

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Introduction

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

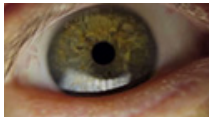
"Mindfulness is about being fully awake in our lives. It is about perceiving the exquisite vividness of each moment." - Jon Kabat-Zinn

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

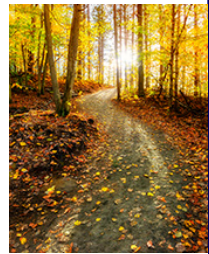
While MBSR is not a "cure" for serious medical conditions and should not be used as a substitute for medical treatment, research indicates that mindfulness training can have a significant therapeutic effect for those experiencing stress, anxiety, high blood pressure, depression, chronic pain, migraines, 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.**



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

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](#).

Palouse Mindfulness

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

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 as 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.

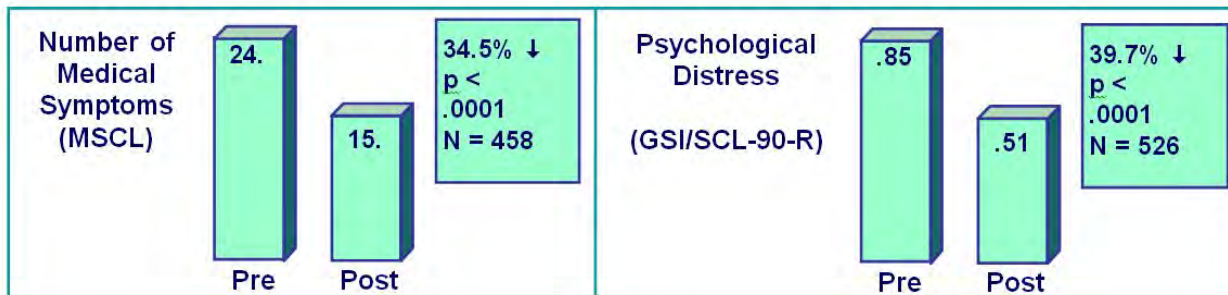
Roberta Lewis is a certified yoga teacher since 1978, trained in Integral Yoga, with several years study in Iyengar Yoga, and training in gentle patient-oriented yoga as offered at the UMass-Memorial Medical Center's Stress Reduction Program founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn. She has been a meditator in the 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.

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 meditation 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 (Zamarrá 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 (Specá 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).

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. **Mouthfuls of Mindfulness** describes a way of eating that is "not directed by charts, tables, pyramids, or scales".

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. If weight-loss and healthy eating are of interest, see **Introduction to Mindful Eating** by Michelle DuVal, and **The Mindfulness-Based Eating Solution** by Lynn Rossy. **Managing Anxiety with Mindfulness** by Rachel Green specifically addresses 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

Mouthfuls of Mindfulness - Jan Chozen Bays

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]*

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

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

What Would It Take for You to Be Still? *- article by Catherine Price*

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

Managing Anxiety with Mindfulness *video by Rachel Green [15 min]*

The Body Scan Meditation

© 2005 Jon Kabat-Zinn

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 through 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

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. If the net effect of this practice is that you are feeling overwhelmed with emotion, see [I have strong emotional \(or physical\) reactions](#).*

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*

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

Mouthfuls of Mindfulness

by Jan Chozen Bays



Photo (c) flicker.com/Debra Roby

Overeat, undereat, or just feel conflicted about how you eat? Mindfulness practice, says physician Jan Chozen Bays, can help you have a healthy and joyful relationship with food.

Mindful eating is not directed by charts, tables, pyramids, or scales. It is not dictated by an expert. It is directed by your own inner experiences, moment by moment. Your experience is unique. Therefore you are the expert. In the process of learning to eat mindfully, we replace self-criticism with self-nurturing, anxiety with curiosity, and shame with respect for your own inner wisdom.

Let's take a typical experience. On the way home from work Sally thinks with dread about the talk she needs to work on for a big conference. Before starting to work on the speech, however, she decides to relax and watch a few minutes of TV. She sits down with a bag of chips. At first she eats only a few, but as the show gets more dramatic, she eats faster and faster. When the show ends she looks down and realizes she's eaten the entire bag. She scolds herself for wasting time and for eating junk food. "Too much salt and fat! No dinner for you!" Engrossed in the drama on the screen, covering up her anxiety about procrastinating, she ignored what was happening

in her mind, heart, mouth, and stomach. She ate unconsciously. She ate to go unconscious. She goes to bed unnourished in body or heart and with her mind still anxious about the talk.

The next time this happens she decides to eat chips but to try eating them mindfully. First she checks in with her mind. She finds her mind is worried about an article she promised to write. Her mind says she needs to get started on it tonight. She checks in with her heart and finds she is feeling a little lonely because her husband is out of town. She checks in with her stomach and body and discovers she is both hungry and tired. She needs some nurturing. The only one at home to do it is herself.

Throwing a Small Party

She decides to treat herself to a small chip party. (Remember, mindful eating gives us permission to play with our food.) She takes twenty chips out of the bag and arranges them on a plate. She looks at their color and shape. She eats one chip, savoring its flavor. She pauses, then eats another. There is no judgment, no right or wrong. She is simply seeing the shades of tan and brown on each curved surface, tasting the tang of salt, hearing the crunch of each bite, feeling the crisp texture melt into softness. She ponders how these chips arrived on her plate, aware of the sun, the soil, the rain, the potato farmer, the workers at the chip factory, the delivery truck driver, the grocer who stocked the shelves and sold them to her.

With little pauses between each chip, it takes ten minutes for the chip party. When she finishes, she checks in with her body to find out if any part of it is still hungry.

She finds her mouth and cells are thirsty, so she gets a drink of orange juice. Her body is also saying it needs some protein and something green, so she makes a cheese omelet and a spinach salad. After eating she checks in again with her mind,

body, and heart. The heart and body feel nourished but the mind is still tired. She decides to go to bed and work on the talk first thing in the morning, when the mind and body will be rested. She is still feeling lonely, although less so within the awareness of all the beings whose life energy brought her the chips, eggs, cheese, and greens. She decides to call her husband to say good night. She goes to bed with body, mind, and heart at ease and sleeps soundly.

Mindful eating is a way to rediscover one of the most pleasurable things we do as human beings. It also is a path to uncovering many wonderful activities going on right under our noses and within our own bodies. Mindful eating has the unexpected benefit of helping us tap into our body's natural wisdom and our heart's natural capacity for openness and gratitude. We ask ourselves questions like:

Am I hungry?

Where do I feel hunger?

What part of me is hungry?

What do I really crave?

What am I tasting just now?

These are very simple questions, but we seldom pose them.

Mindfulness Is the Best Flavoring

As I write this I am eating a lemon tart that a friend gave to me. After writing for a few hours I'm ready to reward myself with a tart. The first bite is delicious. Creamy, sweet-sour, melting. When I take the second bite, I think about what to write next. The flavor in my mouth decreases. I take another bite and get up to sharpen a pencil. As I walk, I notice I am chewing, but there is almost no lemon flavor in this third bite. I sit down, get to work, and wait a few minutes.

Then I take a fourth bite, fully focused on the smells, tastes, and touch sensations in my mouth.

Delicious, again! I discover, all over again (I'm a slow learner) that the only way to keep that "first bite" experience, to honor the gift my friend gave me, is to eat slowly, with long pauses between bites. If I do anything else while I'm eating—if I talk, walk, write, or even think—the flavor diminishes or disappears. The life is drained from my beautiful tart. I could be eating the cardboard box.

Here's the humorous part. I stopped tasting the lemon tart because I was thinking. About what? Mindful eating! Discovering that, I grin. To be a human being is both pitiful and funny.

Why can't I think, walk, and be aware of the taste of the tart at the same time? I can't do all these at once because the mind has two distinct functions, thinking and awareness. When the thinking is turned up, the awareness is turned down. When the thinking function is going full throttle, we can eat an entire meal, an entire cake, an entire carton of ice cream, and not taste more than a bite or two. When we don't taste, we can end up stuffed to the gills but feeling completely unsatisfied. This is because the mind and mouth weren't present, weren't tasting or enjoying, as we ate. The stomach became full but the mind and mouth were unfulfilled and continued calling for us to eat.

If we don't feel satisfied, we'll begin to look around for something more or something different to eat. Everyone has had the experience of roaming the kitchen, opening cupboards and doors, looking vainly for something, anything, to satisfy. The only thing that will cure this, a fundamental kind of hunger, is to sit down and be, even for a few minutes, wholly present.

If we eat and stay connected with our experience and with the people who grew and cooked the food, who served the food, and who eat alongside us, we will feel most satisfied, even with a meager meal. This is the gift of mindful eating, to restore our sense of satisfaction no matter what we are or are not eating.

Jan Chozen Bays is a pediatrician, mother, wife, and longtime meditation teacher. She is the author of Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food.

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)

Week 2 - Attention and The Brain

Introduction to Sitting Meditation

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.



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

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 your 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.

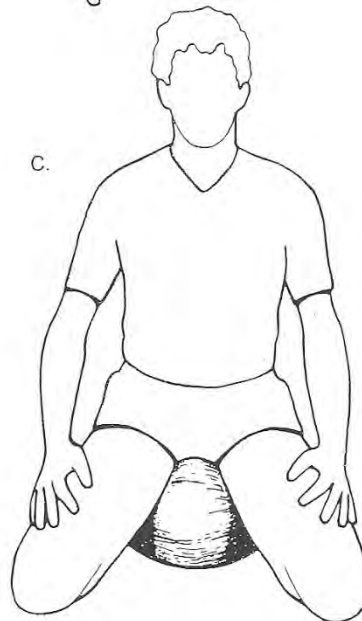
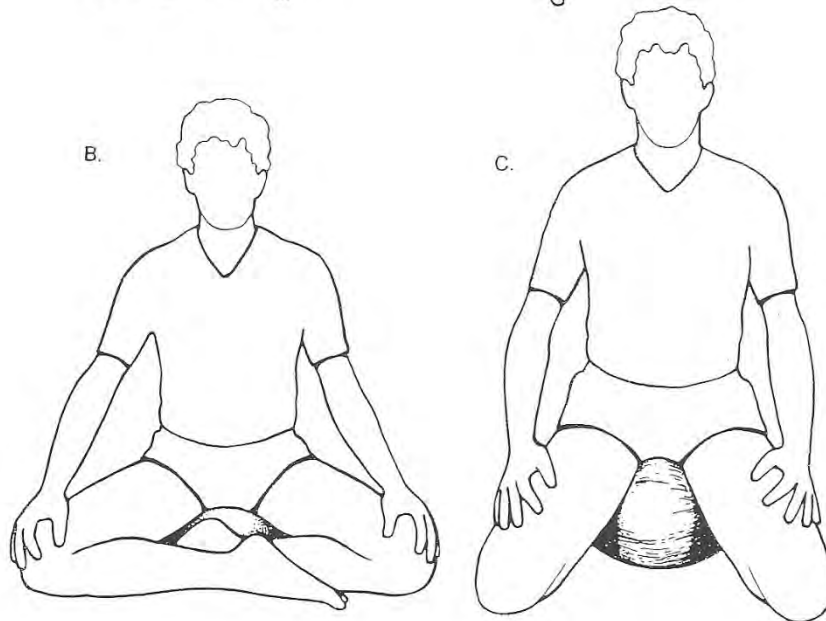
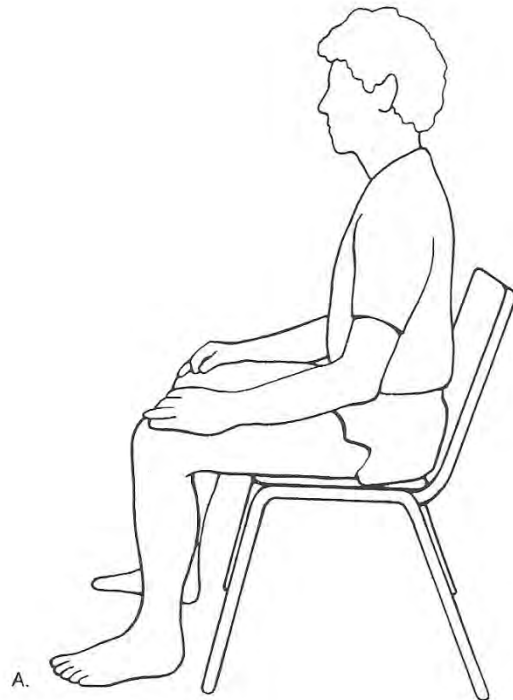
It is at this point that the work of self-observation gets particularly interesting and fruitful. Normally every time the mind moves, the body follows. If the mind is restless, the body is restless. If the mind wants a drink, the body goes to the kitchen sink or the refrigerator. If the mind says, "This 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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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 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.***

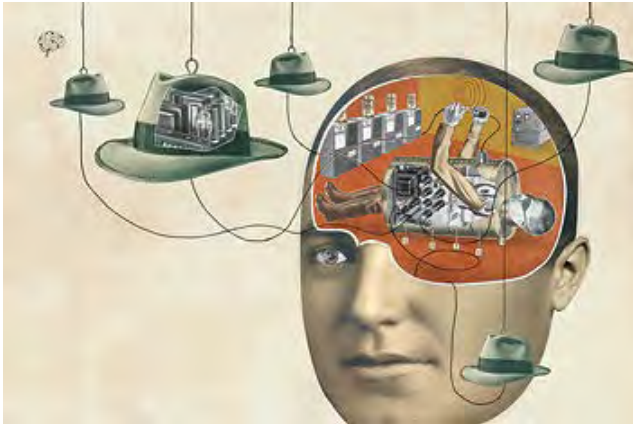
Every moment of every day, if we truly look, there is something extraordinary to pay attention to: the stunning earrings worn by the grocery clerk, a child's unself-conscious laugh, the color of the sky, or the miracle of our own breath.

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*

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 about 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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source: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1580438,00.html>

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.

References:

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For the study where Zen meditation impacted gray matter, see:
G. Pagoni and M. Cekic, 'Age Effects on Gray Matter Volume and Attentional Performance in Zen Meditation', *Neurobiology of Aging*, 2007, 28(10), 1623-1627.

For the study where meditation produced effects at the genetic level, see:
J. A. Dusek, H. H. Otu, A. L. Wohnhueter, M. Bhasin, L. F. Zerbini, M. G., Joseph, H. Benson, and T. A. Liberman, 'Genomic Changes Induced by the Relaxation Response', *PLoS ONE*, 2008, 3(7), e2576, 1-8.

For the effect of the Buddhist Insight meditation on the prefrontal cortex, see:
S. W. Lazar, C. A. Kerr, R. H. Wasserman, J. R. Craig, D. N. Greve, M. T. Treadway, M. McGarvey, B. T. Quinn, J. A. Dusek, H. Benson, S. L. Rauch, C. I. Moore, and B. Fischi, 'Meditation Experience is Associated with Increased Cortical Thickness', *Neuroreport*, 2005, 16(17), 1893-1897.

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

Practice Log - Week 2

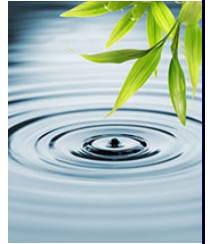
FORMAL PRACTICE: Read the [description of the Sitting Meditation](#). Between now and next week, practice at least six times, alternating the [Sitting Meditation](#) with the [Body Scan](#). As before, don't expect anything in particular from either of these exercises. See if you can give up all expectations 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)

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.

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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...

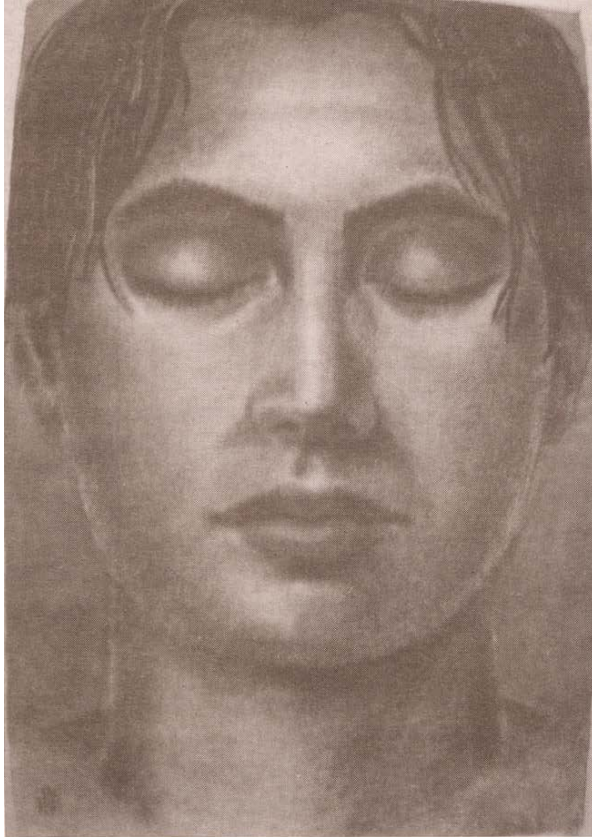
For meditation, and especially mindfulness meditation, is not the throwing of a switch and catapulting yourself anywhere, nor is it entertaining certain thoughts and getting rid of others. Nor is it making your mind blank or willing yourself to be peaceful or relaxed. It is really an inward gesture that 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*.

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.

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 plank.

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.



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/the-reality-below-thoughts>

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? distinguishes between acute stress, which is short-term and adaptive, and chronic stress, which is the primary cause of stress-related health problems and **Anatomy of Fear** is a graphic depiction of the stress response. **Understanding the Stress Response** describe the physiological and neurological effects of stress and **Harnessing the Upsides of Stress** talks about the power of recognizing and acknowledging stress, providing specific situations where believing that stress is not bad is helpful, without making the claim that this is true in every situation, as Kelly McGonigal seems to do, above, in her video. **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?

The Anatomy of Fear - *Discovery Magazine graphic*

Understanding the Stress Response - *Harvard Health Publications*

Harnessing the Upsides of Stress - *Harvard Health Publications*

STOP: One-Minute Breathing Space

The Magic Quarter Second - *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.

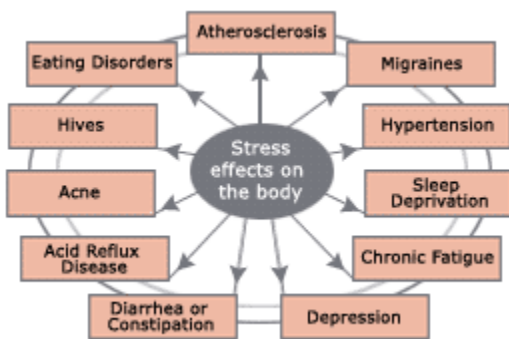
Physical responses

- 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.



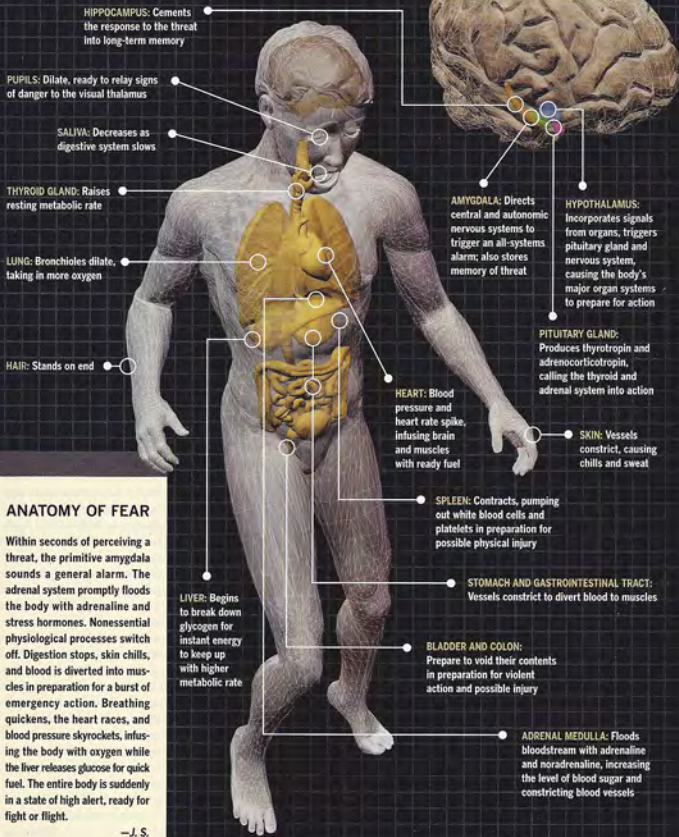
Stress Affects Your Health

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 deposition 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/>



HIPPOCAMPUS: Cements the response to the threat into long-term memory

PUPILS: Dilate, ready to relay signs of danger to the visual thalamus

SALIVA: Decreases as digestive system slows

THYROID GLAND: Raises resting metabolic rate

LUNG: Bronchioles dilate, taking in more oxygen

HAIR: Stands on end

AMYGDALA: Directs central and autonomic nervous systems to trigger an all-systems alarm; also stores memory of threat

HYPOTHALAMUS: Incorporates signals from organs, triggers pituitary gland and nervous system, causing the body's major organ systems to prepare for action

PITUITARY GLAND: Produces thyrotropin and adrenocorticotropin, calling the thyroid and adrenal system into action

HEART: Blood pressure and heart rate spike, infusing brain and muscles with ready fuel

SKIN: Vessels constrict, causing chills and sweat

SPLEEN: Contracts, pumping out white blood cells and platelets in preparation for possible physical injury

STOMACH AND GASTROINTESTINAL TRACT: Vessels constrict to divert blood to muscles

LIVER: Begins to break down glycogen for instant energy to keep up with higher metabolic rate

BLADDER AND COLON: Prepare to void their contents in preparation for violent action and possible injury

ADRENAL MEDULLA: Floods bloodstream with adrenaline and noradrenaline, increasing the level of blood sugar and constricting blood vessels

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.



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.

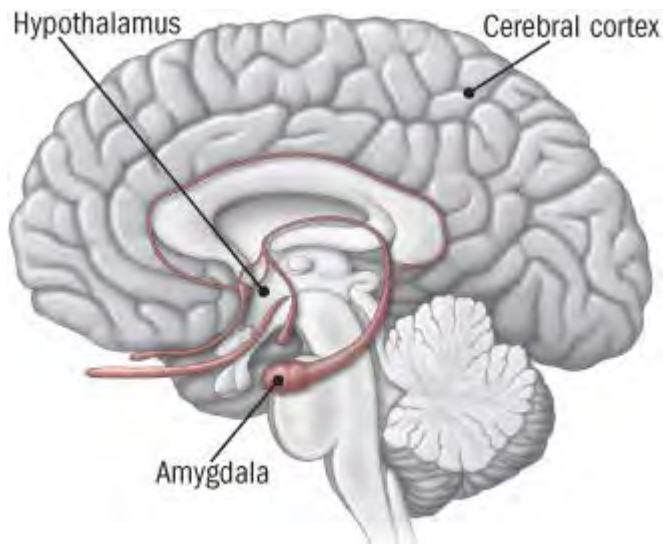
This combination of reactions to stress is also known as the "fight-or-flight" response because it evolved as a survival mechanism, enabling people and other mammals to react quickly to life-threatening situations. The carefully orchestrated yet near-instantaneous sequence of hormonal changes and physiological 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.

Dusek JA, et al. "Stress Management Versus Lifestyle Modification on Systolic Hypertension and Medication Elimination: A Randomized Trial," *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* (March 2008): Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 129–38.

Holt-Lunstad J, et al. "Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-Analytic Review," *PLoS Medicine* (July 27, 2010): Vol. 7, No. 7, electronic publication.

McEwen B, et al. *The End of Stress as We Know It* (The Dana Press, 2002).

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

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Source: https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Mental_Health_Letter/2011/March/understanding-the-stress-response



Harnessing the upsides of stress

Changing your mindset doesn't mean taking a Pollyanna view of the world. The key isn't to deny stress, but to recognize and acknowledge it — and then to find the upside, because a full-throttle fight-or-flight response is not the only possible reaction to stress (at least when the stress does not involve a potentially life-threatening situation).

In people with a more stress-hardy mindset, the stress response is often tempered by the challenge response, which accounts for the so-called excite-and-delight experience that some people have in stressful situations, such as skydiving. Like the typical stress response, the challenge response also affects the cardiovascular system, but instead of constricting blood vessels and ramping up inflammation in anticipation of wounds, it allows for maximum blood flow, much like exercise. The balance of hormones is different, too, including more DHEA.

Another modification to the stress response is called tend-and-befriend. It explains why, after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, or the 2016 massacre at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, people felt the need to reach out to friends and relatives in the community — to assure themselves that loved ones were all right, to comfort the distressed or bereaved, and to shore up social networks. Connecting in this way actually helps reduce stress as opposed to, say, watching an endless loop of TV coverage. That's because tend-and-befriend also involves different balances of hormones — in particular, increased levels of oxytocin, which enhances bonding between a mother and child or between sexual partners, for example. It makes the brain's reward centers more responsive to social contact, and it is an important part of resilience.

Dialing back from full-on fight-or-flight can be simply a matter of changing your mindset. Studies have shown that when participants are told "You're the kind of person whose performance improves under pressure," it does — by as much as one-third. How can you shift your mindset? A 2015 book called *The Upside of Stress* by Kelly McGonigal gives multiple ideas. Here are just a few suggestions:

- When you notice a racing heart — for example, before you give a presentation or initiate a tough conversation — realize that your body is trying to give you more energy and see if you can capitalize on that.
- If you are feeling nervous, pause to consider why, and ask yourself if it's because you're doing something that matters to you and therefore reinforces your values and gives meaning to your life.
- Don't deny the stress, but redirect your energy away from it and toward the task at hand.
- If you are feeling overwhelmed with work or cares, try doing some small act of kindness for someone and note the mental reward you reap.
- Nurture your social networks. Caring creates resilience.
- Try to focus on the larger purpose of whatever you're doing. When you're stuck in a traffic jam taking your daughter to school, remember that it's because you love her and want her to get a good education.
- Whatever you're doing, don't pretend that stress doesn't exist. People who deny it tend to isolate themselves and reinforce their fears. Instead, ask yourself why you're experiencing this stress and look for any positive aspects to it. Are you learning something from it? Are you gaining strength? Are you connecting with people on a more fundamental level? Do you feel more intensely alive?

For additional information on the dangers of stress and ways to relieve and manage it, buy [Stress Management](#), a Special Health Report from Harvard Medical School.



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*.

Midway Self-Assessment

Over the past weeks, you have experienced a variety of 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). If you were to go back to your "Getting Started" worksheet, you'd see what your hopes and expectations were for this course, and although up until now, we've discouraged you from evaluating your progress against these hopes and expectations, now is a good time to assess what you've noticed since you began this course.

Even though you won't be sharing this with anyone else, it can be helpful to actually write down your thoughts at this point. Taking time for reflection will help you to notice and appreciate any positive changes that may have resulted from the practices and/or reflect on those areas where you may still be struggling, allowing the possibility of mid-course corrections.

What do you notice already starting to happen? What are you encouraged by?

What is not happening yet - what are you still struggling with?

Take a moment to see if you can recall a specific incident in your life that stands out that somehow relates to the work you have done so far in this course. What was the situation? What happened differently in this case than might have happened before you started the course?

Week 5 - Dealing with Difficult Emotions or Physical Pain
Turning Toward...



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

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

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

Feeling compassion for ourselves in no way releases us from responsibility for our actions. Rather, it releases us from the self-

Dealing with Difficult Emotions or Physical Pain

The typical responses to significant pain, whether primarily physical or emotional, are **blocking** and **drowning**. We typically try to **block or deny** the discomfort by pushing through it through force of will, by distracting ourselves, convincing ourselves we don't have a problem, and/or by self-medicating with food, alcohol or drugs. This is ultimately unsatisfactory since emotional or physical fears associated with pain have been so stupid?!?",

There is an alternative powerful method, what's been troubling that allows for a full uncomfortable, this awareness and non

*This week's materials not yet available
To be updated by 4/12/18*

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For further exploration: The "*Turning Toward...*" process described in this week's materials is just one of many methods to enter into this "middle way" of dealing with difficult emotional or physical issues. By far 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. For more about this, see **Inner Listening** - An Introduction to Focusing. For two other "middle ways", see Kristin Neff's **Softening, Soothe, Allow** or Tara Brach's **RAIN**.

Videos

There are many videos this week, but they are terrific and most of them are short, making the total time still less than 45 minutes. In **Turning Toward Difficulty**, Vidyamala Burch describes this surprising and counter-intuitive way of dealing with difficult issues and in **One Moment at a Time**, Vidyamala describes the moment her approach to dealing with her chronic pain changed and her life work in understanding and teaching this approach began. In **The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage**, Susan David explores "emotional agility" as an alternative to the more common ways of dealing with emotional pain described above (*blocking, drowning*). There are two great videos by Steven Hayes, creator of ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy), **Mindfulness and Painful Emotions** and **How to Deal with Panic Attacks**, and a video by Kelly McGonigal, **Mindfulness and Physical Pain**. Finally, 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.

Readings

The "**Turning Toward**" Process is a short description of the process that will be used for the informal practice this week, and Vidyamala's **Turning Toward: The Five-Step Model** is a detailed description of this process. Tara Brach's **Radical Acceptance** comes from her book by the same name and talks about the two wings of Radical Acceptance, a model for dealing with difficult emotions: clear seeing and self-compassion. **Buddhism's Pain Relief** relates recent advances in neuroscience with ancient Buddhist teachings.

If you or a loved one is dealing with back pain, in the Supplementary section is **Lower Back Ache?**, an article describing some recent and surprising medical recommendations. For more detail on this counter-intuitive way of working with chronic back pain, see Ron Siegel's **The Strange Case of Chronic Back Pain** and his book, **Back Sense: Halting the Cycle of Chronic Back Pain**.

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 **Turning Toward...** process (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 a sore elbow, impatience while waiting in line, or being mildly annoyed by some minor event.

The **informal practice** will be to try the **Turning Toward...** process at times when you are experiencing an unwanted emotion or physical sensation. 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:

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).

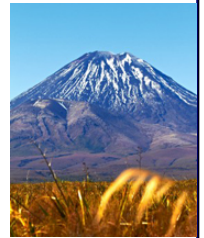
The **informal practices** up until now have been focusing on the intra-personal (what's happening inside you) and now we begin paying attention to the inter-personal, using the **Communication Calendar**, noticing what happens when we bring mindfulness to relationships.

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

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 awakens. 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)

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?

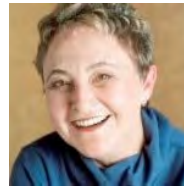
A. My experience of angry explosions or smoldering grudges is that they confuse and fatigue my mind and

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*.



March 2005

The Answer to Anger & Aggression is Patience

by Pema Chödrön



Bill Viola, *The Locked Garden*, 2000
 Color video diptych on two freestanding hinged LCD flat panels
 Video Installation, Photo: Kim Price

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 of 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.

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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Week 7 - Mindfulness and Compassion

Lovingkindness Meditation



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

Up to this point in the course, compassion has played a subtle, but important role in our meditation practice. **Self-compassion** 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 mechanical, and at worst, harsh and counter-productive. By continually bringing your attention gently but firmly back to the object of awareness, you are learning to be less critical of yourself when your attention wanders, and you may be discovering that your ability to concentrate has improved, both in meditation and in work and life.

Last week, we began the process of moving our awareness beyond ourselves by paying attention to the way we communicate with others. Indirectly, this brought a level of compassion to our communication with family, friends, and co-workers. This week, we explore our natural tendency to connect and care about others, and consider the value and potential of being compassionate even beyond our closest relationships.

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**, Emma Seppala 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 lovingkindness 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 practice sheet.

Videos

The Evolutionary Roots of Compassion - Dacher Keltner [4 min]

Cultivating Altruism - Matthieu Ricard [18 min]

How Mindfulness Cultivates Compassion - Shauna Shapiro [13 min]

Overcoming Objections to Self-Compassion - Kristin Neff [12 min]

Reading

Survival of the Kindest - Paul Ekman

Does Mindfulness Make You More Compassionate? - Shauna Shapiro

Self-Compassion - Emma Seppala

The Five Myths of Self-Compassion - 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

Compassionate Ethics in Difficult Times *video by the Dalai Lama [11 min]*

Compassion and Mindfulness - Jon Kabat-Zinn *[5 min]*

The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion *book by Christopher Germer*

First, Forgive Yourself *interview of Tara Brach by Tej Rae*

Universal Compassion *video by Sylvia Boorstein and Sharon Salzberg [10 min]*

Unconditional Love *video by Tara Brach [29 min]*

Mindfulness and Self-Compassion *video by Kristin Neff [21 min]*

Making Friends with Yourself *article based on Pema Chodron's "4 Keys to Waking Up"*



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.

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](#).

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

Etelles 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.

Emma Seppala, PhD, is a research scientist at the Center for Healthy Minds at the university of Wisconsin, as well as a contributing editor of *Spirituality & Health*

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."

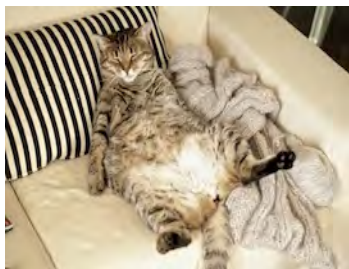
What John didn't know is that instead of being a weakness, researchers are discovering that self-compassion is one of the most powerful sources of coping and resilience available to us. When we go through major life crises, self-compassion appears to make all the difference in our ability to survive 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 Wobegone 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.

*Kristin Neff, PhD, is an associate professor of educational psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. She's author of **Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself** and the 6 CD audio set **Self-Compassion Step by Step**. In conjunction with Chris Germer, she's developed an empirically supported training program and offers workshops on self-compassion. To learn more about self-compassion, including videos, exercises, guided meditations, research articles, and the self-compassion test, go to self-compassion.org. Contact: kneff@austin.utexas.edu.*

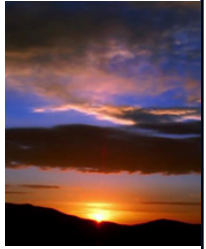
Practice Log - Week 7

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)

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

There is much evidence that gratitude is key to a happy and fulfilled life so it seems fitting to include the **Gratitude** and **The 365 Grateful Project** in the last set of videos for the course. **How My Son Ruined My Life**, by James Baraz's mother is funny but poignant and continues on that theme. In **Listening as an Act of Love**, Jon Kabat-Zinn reinforces the key role that compassion and self-compassion play in this course. **Grand Central Station** is a short, sweet piece about having compassion for those around us. The last video is **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.

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

Gratitude - Louie Schwartzberg [9 min]

The 365 Grateful Project - Hailey Bartholomew [12 min]

How My Son Ruined My Life - Selma & James Baraz [7 min]

Listening as an Act of Love - Jon Kabat-Zinn [7 min]

Grand Central Station - Sharon Salzberg [2 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]

Thanks - How Practicing Gratitude Can Make You Happier book by Robert Emmons

The Happy Secret to Better Work video by Shawn Achor [12 min]

Happiness video by Tara Brach [20 min]

Mindfulness is Not A Crystal Ball video by Susan Kaiser Greenland [2 min]

Blowing Bubbles video by Sharon Salzberg [2 min]

Layers of Awareness diagram

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](#).



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 be 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](#).