

# An Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation

## Week 1 Mindfulness of the Breath



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# The Attitudinal Foundations of Mindfulness Practice

Adapted from Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat-Zinn

## Non-Judging

Mindfulness is developed by taking the stance of an impartial witness to your own experience. This requires standing back and observing our own thoughts. Noticing the stream of judging mind ... good / bad / neutral ... not trying to stop it but just being aware of it.

## Patience

Patience is a form of wisdom. It demonstrates that we understand and accept that some things must unfold in their own way and in their own time. We can practice being patient with ourselves as well. Why rush through some moments in order to get to other better ones? Each one is your life in that moment. A child may try to help a butterfly emerge by breaking open a chrysalis but chances are the butterfly won't benefit from this help. Patience means being completely open to each moment, accepting its fullness, knowing that like the butterfly, things will emerge in their own time.

## Beginner's Mind

Too often we let our thinking and our beliefs about what we "know" stop us from seeing things as they really are. With mindfulness, we are cultivating a mind that is willing to see everything as if for the first time and by doing so we remain receptive to new possibilities instead of getting stuck in a rut of our own "expertise." Each moment is unique and contains unique possibilities. Try this experiment with a spouse or partner, a co-worker, or even on the drive home from work. Next time, ask yourself if you are seeing this person with fresh eyes, as he/she really is? Try it with problems ... with the sky ... with the dog ... with the person in the corner shop.

## Trust

Develop a basic trust in yourself and your feelings. Trust in your own authority and intuition, even if you make some "mistakes" along the way. Learn to honor your feelings and take responsibility for yourself and your own wellbeing.

## Non-Striving

Meditation has no goal other than for you to be yourself. The irony is you already are. Pay attention to how you are right now – however that it is. Just watch. The best way to achieve your own goals is to back off from striving and instead start to really focus on carefully seeing and accepting things as they are, moment by moment. With patience and regular practice, movement towards your goals will take place by itself.

## Acceptance

Mindfulness includes seeing things as they actually are in the present. If you have a headache, accept you have a headache. Remember, now is the only time you have for anything and you have to accept yourself as you are before you can really change. Acceptance is not passive; it does not mean you have to like everything and abandon your principles and values. It does not mean you have to be resigned to tolerating things. It does not mean that you should stop trying to break free of your own self-destructive habits or give up your desire to change and grow. Acceptance is simply a willingness to see things as they are. You are much more likely to know what to do and have an inner conviction to act when you have a clear picture of what is actually happening.

## Letting Go

In mindfulness practice we let things go and we just watch. If we find it particularly difficult to let go of something because it has such a strong hold on our mind, we can direct our attention to what "holding" feels like. Holding on is the opposite of letting go. Being willing to look at the ways we hold on shows a lot about its opposite. You already know how to let go. Every night when we go to sleep we let go.



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# Mindfulness Defined

"Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally."  
-- Jon Kabat-Zinn

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The University of California Center for Mindfulness, part of the medical school's psychiatry department, defines Mindfulness Meditation this way:

"(Mindfulness) is a quality, which human beings already have, but they have usually not been advised that they have it, that it is valuable, or that it can be cultivated. Mindfulness is the awareness that is not thinking but which is aware of thinking, as well as aware of each of the other ways we experience the sensory world, i.e., seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling through the body.

"Mindfulness is non-judgmental, open-hearted, friendly, and inviting of whatever arises in awareness. It is cultivated by paying attention on purpose, deeply, and without judgment to whatever arises in the present moment, either inside or outside of us. By intentionally practicing mindfulness, deliberately paying more careful moment-to-moment attention, individuals can live more fully and less on 'automatic pilot,' thus, being more present for their own lives."

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Bishop et al. (2004:232) regard psychological "mindfulness", broadly conceptualized, as "a kind of nonelaborative, nonjudgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is". They propose a two-component operational definition of "mindfulness".

The first component involves the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. The second component involves adopting a particular orientation toward one's experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance. (2004:232)

The former mindfulness component of self-regulated attention involves conscious awareness of one's current thoughts, feelings, and surroundings, which can result in metacognitive skills for controlling concentration. The latter mindfulness component of orientation to experience involves accepting one's mindstream, maintaining open and curious attitudes, and thinking in alternative categories (developing upon Ellen Langer's research on decision-making).



# The Three Minute Breathing Space

## Awareness

Bring yourself into the present moment by adopting an upright and dignified posture. If you are comfortable doing so, close your eyes. Now ask yourself:

*"What am I experiencing right now?"*

*"... in my thoughts?"*

*"... in my feelings?"*

*"... in my bodily, physical sensations?"*

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

## Gathering

Now gently invite yourself to redirect all your attention to your breathing. Just notice each in-breath and each out-breath as they follow one another.

Your breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and to help you to become more still and more fully aware.

## Expanding

Allow your field of awareness to expand around your breathing so that it includes a sense of your body as a whole, including posture and facial expression.

The breathing space provides a way to step out of Automatic Pilot mode and to reconnect with the present moment.



## Assignments for Week 1

## ☐ Reading Assignments

1. "Mindfulness Defined"
2. "Attitudinal Foundations of Mindfulness Meditation"
3. "The Three Minute Breathing Space"

☐ **Mindfulness of the Breath in Daily Life**

1. Practice Mindfulness of Breath a minimum of 20 minutes per day, 6 days this week (guided if necessary).
2. Practice the "Three Minute Breathing Space" exercise at least once per day.

Notes/Thoughts/Questions: \_\_\_\_\_

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