

Open to Inner Peace 3

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In this article we will take a therapeutic and personal development perspective on meditation. We will describe some of the principles of mindfulness, introduce some 'mindful' meditations and provide an insight into how to incorporate it into our daily lives and gain fairly immediate benefit.

"You cannot stop the waves, but you can learn to surf"

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness provides tools to help us develop awareness and control our attention.

Translation of the Sanskrit word *Sati* meaning:

- **Awareness** – being conscious of your experience;
- **Attention** – focused awareness and the ability to sustain awareness at will;
- **Remembering** – remembering to pay attention to your experiences from moment to moment.

This enables us to recognise we have 'choices' as to how to respond to situations rather than reacting on auto-pilot. This leads to an increased sense of well-being and helps us be more effective and productive.

Mindfulness is about developing the ability to be grounded in the present and being aware and recognising all these other thoughts about past and future in context so that we can make a considered response instead of working on auto-pilot and just reacting without really thinking about it. Without this ability we are vulnerable to anyone or anything just pressing our buttons and off we fly.

It helps us recognise that we have **choices** about how we consider the past and future and the actions we take right now in this moment.

Shamash Alidina in "Mindfulness for Dummies" defines Mindfulness as "paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, with qualities like compassion, curiosity and acceptance." He goes on to say that "Through being mindful, you discover how to live in the present moment in an enjoyable way rather than worrying about the past or being concerned about the future. The past has already gone and can't be changed. The future is yet to arrive and is completely unknown....the present moment is the only place you can create, decide, listen, think, smile, act or live".

Some Mindful Meditations

How can you benefit from Mindfulness ?

Studies have demonstrated that practicing mindfulness 30 to 45 minutes every day for 8 weeks will result in a significant difference to our ability to concentrate, focus our attention and relate to those around us;

If we are more aware of thoughts, emotions and physical sensations we will be in a better position to take mindful action instead of automatic reaction;

How do I find the time ?

Commuting on public transport is ideal – do a body scan or meditate on the sounds and sensations that the train or bus is creating.

Use the 3 Step Breathing space for a minute or two if you feel stressed or before making an important decision or communication. Even pausing to take a few deep breaths will help.

Do routine tasks mindfully – eating a meal, walking, gardening, housework.

With practice it will become second nature and we will begin to live our whole lives mindfully – then we will get the real benefits.

Three Step Breathing Space

This short practice can be used at any time in the day when we are stressed, feeling down, agitated or just need to pause and reconnect with ourselves. It can be done seated, standing or lying. It is in three equal parts, each can take a minute or so or as long as you feel:

Become aware

Get into a comfortable position and bring yourself into the present moment and then ask what is going on for you right now:

- **Thoughts** – what thoughts are in your mind? - About your day, planning thoughts, worries. Be aware of them, don't judge as to what you should or should not be thinking. Accept and allow that these are the thoughts in your mind right now in this moment;
- **Emotions and feelings** – how are you feeling? - Joy, happiness, anxiety. Is there an emotion or feeling you cannot put a label on? Be aware that these are the emotions you are feeling right now, don't try to change, but accept and allow them;
- **Physical sensations** – what physical sensations are you aware of in your body? - Sensations linked to thoughts or emotions. The feel of your breath.

Notice, acknowledge and accept all these experiences without judging them. Stay with them, allowing any negative feelings or experiences to be present.

Gather

Then gently focus your full attention to your breath, to the movement of the breath through your nose to your lower abdomen. Hold your attention in your abdomen experiencing how it raises

slightly on the in breath and sinks slightly on the out breath. Be aware of *this* breath, follow *this* breath, experience *this* breath.

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

Expand

Expand your awareness to your whole body, and the space it takes up, as if your whole body is breathing - expand as you breath in, contract as you breath out. Move your attention out to your skin, feel your clothes or the air on your skin, sense the space around you.

To gently end this practice, bring your attention to your connection to the floor. Feel connected and grounded and take the positive sensations and feelings that came out of this practice into whatever comes next for you in your day.

This breathing space provides a way to step out of automatic pilot mode, where we may just react without thinking, and reconnect with the present moment.

Body Scan Meditation

The body scan meditation is a wonderful way to develop our awareness and control our attention. If your attention drifts at any time, congratulate yourself for recognising it and gently return to your practice.

1. Sit or lie and get comfortable;
2. Start with breath -watching for a few moments;
3. Move your attention around your body alternately focusing very narrowly on a specific bit in turn eg toes, sole, ankle etc and identifying any sensations or lack of sensations. Then broaden your attention to a larger part eg whole leg and as you breathe in, sense the breath going into that whole part and it expanding and then contracting as you breathe out;
4. The order and exact way you approach this is not critical, but taking your time and focusing your attention in and out is. Here is an example;
 - a. Left leg to your toes, sole, top of foot, ankle, calf, knee, thigh and hip individually then whole leg.
 - b. Right leg and do the same;
 - c. Pelvis and up your back to your collar bones and down your chest to your lower abdomen, then your whole torso;
 - d. Shoulders and down both arms in steps, then the whole of your arms;
 - e. Neck and up into your head including your face and scalp, then your whole head;
5. Finally, as you breathe in sense the breath going into your whole body and it expanding and then contracting as you breathe out;
6. As your practice comes to an end be aware of your contact with the earth through the floor that is grounding you. When you are ready open your eyes and gently move into the rest of your day taking any learning with you.