



Reduce Stress with Body & Breath

Greetings!

I am so excited to guide you on your journey to a more present, embodied, and mindful way of living.

Mindfulness will be a core component of this course. It is our ability to attend to the present moment, with curiosity and without judgment. It is being present with **whatever is** – because **that's what is!**

Mindfulness is both a practice (e.g., seated meditation) **and** a way of living (e.g., bringing your full attention to your current task.) We'll start diving into the *practice* of mindfulness in the first week of the course. For now, I'm sharing this bonus guide with you that outlines what Jon Kabat-Zinn (the "guru" of secular mindfulness in the West) calls the **Attitudinal Foundations of Mindfulness**. These mindsets can sometimes be difficult for us to embrace, but they are an important part of living mindfully.

Additionally, you'll find the first lesson from my course Brilliant Mindful YOU in this download – it's a succinct introduction to mindfulness.

As you prepare for the start of the course, take a moment to read through Kabat-Zinn's words (in the quotes) and my commentary. **Which of these attitudes are easy for you to adopt? Which ones might be a challenge? Why?**

If you'd like, **choose one of these seven attitudes to focus on** in the time before our class begins. See if you notice any changes. See if you notice any resistance.

Just notice.

Mindfully Yours,

Sarah

The Attitudinal Foundations of Mindfulness Practice

From *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn

1. Non-judging

"Mindfulness is cultivated by paying close attention to your moment-to-moment experience while, as best you can, not getting caught up in your ideas and opinions, likes and dislikes.... [This] requires that you become aware of the constant stream of judging and reacting to the inner and outer experiences that we are all normally caught up in, and learn to step back from it." {JKZ}

Mindfulness teaches us to be aware of this tendency of our mind – without judging! It's not about **stopping** or shaming the judging mind (no judging the judging!), but simply **noticing** it, with kindness and compassion.

2. Patience

"We cultivate patience toward our own minds and bodies when practicing mindfulness. We intentionally remind ourselves that there is no need to be impatient with ourselves because we find the mind judging all the time, or because we are tense or agitated or frustrated, or because we have been practicing for some time and nothing positive seems to have happened. We give ourselves room to have these experiences. Why? Because we are having them anyway!" {JKZ}

Mindfulness is not about doing it perfectly. It is a practice. It is a journey. I am still practicing and learning. Be patient with yourself and honor yourself for the deep good you are doing for your body and mind.



3. Beginner's Mind

The beginner's mind is *"a mind that is willing to see everything as if for the first time."* Mindfulness is about setting aside our striving and our expectations. And the beginner's mind is a lovely way to go through our day:

“Are you able to see the sky, the stars, the trees, the water, and the rocks as they are right now, with a clear and uncluttered mind? Or are you actually seeing them only through the veil of your own thoughts, opinions, and emotions?” {JKZ}

4. Trust

Honor your own feelings and intuition – if a particular mindfulness practice doesn't feel right to you, feel free to modify it or not do it at all. While it helps to have a teacher, we don't need to imitate their practice if it doesn't align with who we are.

“It is impossible to become like somebody else. Your only hope is to become more fully yourself. That is the reason for practicing meditation in the first place.” {JKZ}



5. Non-striving

“Meditation is different from all other human activities. Although it takes a lot of work and energy of a certain kind, ultimately meditation is a non-doing. It has no other goal than for you to be yourself. The irony is that you already are.” {JKZ}

You may find that practicing mindfulness is relaxing, but that isn't the “goal.” One day it may be relaxing. The next day it may be boring. The next day your back may hurt. The next day you may hate it. And then the next time, you love it. Just notice whatever is happening – if you hate it, notice that you are hating it. If you are tense, notice your feelings of tension. If you think you are terrible at practicing mindfulness, notice that you are thinking you are terrible at mindfulness! Approach your practice without preconceived expectations of how it's supposed to look or feel or be.

6. Acceptance, or Allowing

Mindfulness can be thought of as *learning to be with the present moment, whatever it may contain*. We spend a lot of our day trying to make things different from the way they are, and this often increases our agitation. But we can always choose an attitude of acceptance, allowing the present moment to simply be what it is. This isn't passivity. We can always work for change, but even creating change means acknowledging what is real in the present.

"Acceptance as we are speaking of it simply means, sooner or later, you have to come around to a willingness to see things as they are." {JKZ}



7. Letting Go, or Non-Attachment

"In meditation practice, we intentionally put aside the tendency to elevate some aspects of our experience and reject others."

Throughout your day, you may experience moments of joy and beauty that you want to grasp and cling to. You may experience moments of unhappiness and judgment that you want to push away. Can you live in the beautiful moment without holding it so hard you crush it? Can you notice the negative thoughts and choose not to pursue them?

"If we keep our attention focused on the present, we can be sure of one thing, namely, that whatever we are attending to in this moment will change, giving us the opportunity to practice accepting whatever it is that will emerge in the next moment. Clearly there is wisdom in cultivating acceptance." {Jon Kabat-Zinn}

An Introduction to Mindfulness

Mindfulness is our ability to attend to the present moment, with curiosity and without judgment. It's a simple concept, but not necessarily easy to do! And that's why we'll be learning several practices that can help us train our attention.

What Mindfulness is NOT

Mindfulness is not thinking of nothing, it's **being aware of our thoughts**. It's not being happy all the time, it's **being with whatever we are experiencing in the present moment**. It also doesn't mean we're so caught up in the present that we cannot plan for the future — it simply means **we bring our awareness to any activity we engage in**, including planning.

Mindfulness is also not religious, or “New Age woo-woo.” Mindfulness has its origins in contemplative and religious traditions, but it can also be a completely secular practice. Since my background is in public education, my “style” of teaching mindfulness is very practical, down-to-earth, and not at all religious.

Finally, mindfulness is not zoning out — it's **zoning in**. It's not necessarily **relaxation**, either! You very likely will find that mindfulness practices leave you feeling calm and

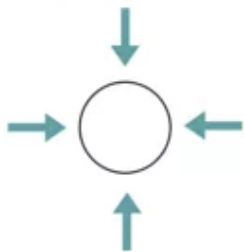


peaceful, but it's important **not to bring any expectations to our practice**. Some days our practice will be amazing. Some days we will be restless and irritated. Mindfulness means **we allow the practice to be what it is**. It will be different each and every time!

What is Mindful Awareness?

Mindfulness teacher Shinzen Young describes mindfulness as three attentional skills working together:

Concentration Power



the ability to focus on what you want, when you want

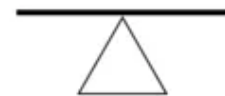
credit: Shinzen Young

Sensory Clarity



the ability to detect sensory events, and untangle all the elements of sensory events

Equanimity



the ability to let sensory experience come and go without push and pull

These are the skills we will work on cultivating throughout this course, especially our sensory clarity, as we learn to detect the signals of the body.

Mindfulness? Meditation? What's the difference??

We will be using both of these terms in this course, so let's get clear right from the start on what they mean!

We can think of **mindfulness** very broadly. It is both a **practice** (such as formal seated sessions where we observe the breath), and a **way of being** (such as bringing your full attention to playing with your kids or pausing to observe your reaction to an event with openness and curiosity).

Mindfulness meditation is a very specific form of meditation. **Meditation** can mean lots of things, and it can be practiced for a variety of purposes (for calming down, for engaging

in prayer, or for attaining nirvana and liberation). **Mindfulness meditation** is typically performed as seated meditation, though you could also be lying down, standing, or walking. (Byron Katie says that there are really only four basic postures — *sitting, standing, lying down, and walking*. The rest is story.) In **mindfulness meditation**, we train our attention to focus either on a **single object** (what we call an **anchor**, which we'll learn more about in the course, such as the breath or the body), or we focus on **whatever happens to come into our awareness**.

I will use the word “mindfulness” broadly, to refer to both the formal practices as well as the manner in which we live every moment of our day. When I use the word “meditation,” I will be referring specifically to seated practice.

You will find a lot of resources that provide suggestions for how we can bring mindful awareness to activities throughout the day — washing dishes, folding laundry, or driving to work. We'll learn to be more attentive to the body and its signals. These are all wonderful practices!

I strongly believe, however, that in addition to those mindful moments, we should have a formal seated practice. It's in moments of intentional stillness and silence that we can truly begin to **observe the habits of our mind**. It's in formal practice that we develop **insight into the fleeting nature of our thoughts and emotions** (observing what is often called “the monkey mind.”) In fact, this form of mindfulness practice is referred to as *vipassana*, or “insight” meditation. “Insight” doesn't mean nirvana or an epiphany — it's simply insight into the workings of the mind.

We'll be diving deeper into all of this – and so much more – when the course begins! See you soon!