

Mindfulness and Awareness

A **LIGHT** presentation by Douglas Staley on October 6, 2015.

- The concept of mindfulness, once the central core of traditional spiritual teachings, has now entered the academic and cultural mainstream.
- Today we find mindfulness employed in medicine, integrated into many psychotherapies, researched in academic institutions and part of the latest theories of leading edge business consultants.
- Is mindfulness a powerful and effective tool for increasing self-understanding and facilitating change or only an example of the latest fad in 'new age' thinking?
- Although mindfulness has ancient historical roots -- dating back at least 2500 years to the teaching of the Buddha -- in essence it is a method of self-study and integrated living transcending time and culture.
- Mindfulness as both a theoretical construct and a practical methodology is congruent with contemporary psychological understanding, especially within the framework of cognitive behavioural therapy.

"Therapies that have maturation and growth as their goals encourage patients to distance themselves from thoughts and feelings in order to acquire choice and increase autonomy in the face of cognitive and emotional reactions. Many purely cognitive techniques, such as writing down self-critical thoughts and systematically evaluating them, can be understood as strengthening the observing self, extracting it from processes in which it tends to be sub-merged."

Arthur Deikman

- Current research suggests that mindfulness is an effective psychotherapeutic intervention for many types of psychological problems including anxiety, depression and substance abuse/addictive behaviours.
- However, mental health researchers and practitioners caution that mindfulness may not be an appropriate form of treatment for individuals with certain types of mental disorders, such as schizophrenia, psychosis and other forms of thought disorder.

DIAGRAM

<u>Domain</u>	(-)	<u>Process</u>	(+)
Education	Ignorance	Learning	Knowledge
Medicine	Disease	Treatment	Health
Mental Health	Psychopathology	Psychotherapy	Psychological Well Being
Spiritual Transformation	Unrealized Potential	Self-knowledge	Enlightenment

DIAGRAM

'Know Thyself'
Socrates

Mindfulness leads to	Self-Study and Self-Observation
Insight leads to	Self-Knowledge and Self-Understanding
Wisdom	Self-Realization and Enlightenment

Self-Knowledge and Understanding

- The path of self-knowledge and self-understanding begins with the study of oneself and 'learning how to learn.'
- Self-knowledge requires a new perspective of 'seeing ourselves with eyes other than our own' and understanding how our body-mind reacts to the experiences of life.
- Our reactions to the everyday situations of life provide constant opportunities for self-knowledge and insight:

"Observe without judgment or analysis the way in which you react physically, emotionally and mentally in the different conditions of everyday life."

- In order to understand others and the world itself it is first necessary to understand ourselves. Yet most human beings habitually direct their attention outward, ignoring that which is closest.

"We give no time to the thorough reading of our own book, our reactions, resistances, tensions, emotional states, physical stresses and so on. This reading requires no system or specially allotted time spent in introspection. It involves only facing oneself during the day without the habitual identification with an individual center of reference, an I-image, a personality, a propagator of viewpoints."

Jean Klein

Self-Observation

- Simply observing our physical, emotional and mental functioning is the first stage of self-study and precedes any attempt at analysis or interpretation.
- Self-observation should be an objective, non-judgmental activity, conducted as impartially as possible.
- It is important just to observe and not make any attempts to change our behaviour or expect any results

- The very process of self-observation is itself transformative, modifying habitual conditioned patterns of behaviour.

"In observing himself a man notices that self-observation itself brings about certain changes in his inner processes. He begins to understand that self-observation is an instrument of self-change, a means of awakening. By observing himself he throws, as it were, a ray of light into his inner processes which have hitherto worked in complete darkness. And under the influence of this light the processes themselves begin to change."

P.D. Ouspensky

Mindfulness Defined

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

Jon Kabat-Zinn

"Mindfulness is a process of self-discovery, a participatory investigation in which you observe your own experiences while participating in them."

Bhante Gunaratana

"To be mindful is to observe without being caught in our experience . . . to direct our attention to notice what is going on inside us, and study how our mind and experience operate."

Jack Kornfield

Curiosity and a Sense of Exploration

- By questioning all our most basic assumptions about who and what we are we embark on an inner journey that has no precedent as the specific forms of our personal history and conditioning are uniquely our own.

"Be the explorer of your body, your feelings and desires, your moods and psychic states. Drop all ideas about what you are. Live without knowing anything, like an explorer, for the adventure of discovery, from moment to moment. In this exploration you will see that you really don't observe, that you project your fears and desires and superimpose these onto the world. So all you see is your own conditioning, not the world as it really is."

Jean Klein

- For insight to develop we need a spirit of open inquiry and honest questioning as we investigate how our body, mind and heart actually operate.

"For this self-exploration, we need no special knowledge: only the interest and curiosity to question our patterns and to be receptive to our inner responses. Each discovery invites new questions, further steps in a direct communication with our mind. The only help we need is a patient mind willing to look objectively and reflect on its own experience."

Tarthang Tulku

Objective and 'Scientific'

- The analogy of a scientist objectively observing the myriad phenomena of the natural world captures the spirit of unbiased, detached self-study.

"To face ourselves scientifically we must accept the facts as they are without agreement, disagreement or conclusion. It is not a mental acceptance, an acceptance of ideas, but is completely practical, functional. It requires only alertness . . . We remain in the scientific process free from judgment, interpretation and evaluation, only looking in different moments of the day at our psychological, intellectual and physical ground and our level of vitality. There is no motive, no interference from a 'me,' no desire to change, grow or become."

Jean Klein

Non-judgmental and Compassionate Inquiry

- An essential characteristic of mindfulness practice is an attitude of non-judgmental acceptance, without evaluation, like or dislike, of whatever arises in our experience.
- With an immediate and non-conceptual insight "one begins to see directly and concretely how the mind actually functions, its mechanics and reflexes, moment to moment."
- Seeing and acknowledging our own negative patterns, without blame or guilt, is profoundly liberating.
- The practice of mindfulness is a compassionate inquiry into our various states of mind built on a foundation of unconditional acceptance and loving-kindness.
- We are encouraged to have an impartial feeling of calm acceptance to what arises in our consciousness much as we would watch the actors in a play performing their parts.

- A dispassionate and detached attitude is essential as identification with certain aspects of the mind and rejection of others inevitably creates a sense of conflict and tension."

Identification with Reactive Patterns

- We are habitually caught in a repetitive pattern of thoughts and emotions which reinforce our subjective formulation of ourselves and the world.
- It is possible to disengage from reactive patterns when the conditioning that underlies these patterns is clearly seen, acknowledged and then dismantled or attenuated.

"This process of mindfulness is really quite different from what we usually do. We usually do not look into what is actually there in front of us. We see life through a screen of thoughts and concepts, and we mistake those mental objects for reality. We get so caught up in this endless thought-stream that reality flows by unnoticed. We spend our time engrossed in activity, caught up in an eternal pursuit of pleasure and gratification and eternal flight from pain and unpleasantness. Meanwhile the world of real experience flows by untouched and untasted."

Bhante Gunaratana

Incompatibility of Mindfulness and Conditioning

- To change reactive conditioned patterns we need to cultivate attention and mindfulness. This alters our relationship with the restrictive patterns that govern so much of our lives.

"The practice of attention and the operation of habituated patterns are incompatible. As we practice attention, we see the conditioning that runs our lives more and more clearly. We see how our reactions and conditioned behaviours create difficulties and suffering for everyone, including us."

Ken McLeod

- By viewing ourselves as 'observers of our experience' we create a separation or space from conditioned patterns.

"Pay close attention to those times when your mind is lost in thought, creating whole dramas through the process of identification. Then notice those times when mindfulness is quite keen, and you simply see the thoughts come and go. There is quite a difference between these two inner worldviews and the contraction or spaciousness they create in our consciousness. In the moment of natural awareness, seeing the arising and passing of phenomena, there is no identification, no self."

Joseph Goldstein

Recognizing Reactive Patterns

- Reactive patterns can be recognized by their mechanical nature: "See the pattern as a process that operates independently of your attention. It is triggered by resonance with a situation, it runs until its energy has been degraded, and then it collapses, leaving you wondering what has happened."
- Certain indications suggest the operation of underlying patterns of reactive conditioning:
 - sudden shifts in physical or emotional states
 - a repeated chain or sequence of reactive emotions
 - familiar automatic behaviours -- physical, verbal or Mental

Transforming Conditioning

- The cultivation of mindfulness and attention is the tool by which we can discover the many layers of conditioning which constitute and colour much of our experience of life.
- Although conditioned patterns seem fixed and persistent, in reality they are self-created and not solid or substantial. They can be changed.
- When you see a pattern as a mechanical process, your relationship with it changes. You no longer identify with it and can take it as an object of conscious attention.

Non-conditioned Choices and Responses

- We often experience instances of 'spontaneous attention' when we respond to a situation in a way that is different from how we usually react.
- When we don't automatically react to situations based on our programming and conditioning, new avenues of action and behaviour open up.

- For instance, a person attacks you verbally, but instead of automatically reacting, you see how upset and angry they are, and you respond appropriately, perhaps by simply asking them what is upsetting them.

"At first we are not able to change our behaviour, but continued work in cultivating attention eventually opens up the possibility of acting differently. One day, instead of reacting to a situation, we see another possibility and do it. Everything changes. We realize that we can live and function in the world without relying on conditioned behaviours and the self-images underlying them. We can live in attention. Now, as soon as we are aware that habituated patterns are operating, we use attention to cut through them and then do what the situation requires."

Ken Mcleod

- One of the goals of mindfulness is to nurture a healthy adaptable response to whatever arises in our experience.
- Instead of being caught by our thoughts and feelings, we can be liberated from their power to control our lives by the application of mindfulness and attention.
- With practice we can watch conditioned patterns arise, play themselves out, and subside. There is no need to express or suppress the pattern, it is simply watched as the process unfolds.
- With mindfulness we can spot reactive patterns more quickly and gradually the space between the impulse and reaction lengthens and we become free to choose how to respond.

"With practice, we can become aware of our conditioned responses before acting on them. The moment a thought or desire pops up, we can choose to respond in a way that is different from our habitual, self-serving response. Mindfulness allows us to seize the moment between the impulse to act and the action itself. We can choose to respond in a new and creative way."

Model of the Four Functions

	<u>Element</u>	<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Function</u>
'fine' subtle 	Fire	Spirit	Higher Consciousness
	Air	Mind	Thinking
	Water	Emotions	Feeling
dense 'coarse'	Earth	Body	Sensation

Observing the Body

- The observation of the habits, postures and movements of the body is an important aspect of self-study and self-knowledge.
- The body is a simple and obvious object of attention, much easier to observe than the world of more subtle and rapidly changing thoughts and emotions.
- If we remember to bring attention back to the body during difficult situations and circumstances, we can learn to relax into the moment and regain a measure of presence and mindfulness.
- One of the most important and useful mindfulness practices is watching the inhalation and exhalation of the breath.
- Breathing is an involuntary physiological process which is always available as an object of attention throughout the course of our life.
- Calmly observing the breath has a relaxing effect which activates the parasympathetic autonomic nervous system and helps integrate the body and mind.

- Our body stores and reflects the experiences we undergo in life in the form of conditioned physical patterns.
- When we closely observe the physical body throughout the day we quickly discover areas of unnecessary tension which deplete the system of energy and vitality.
- The practice of mindfulness provides a tool for transforming physical tension, fatigue or pain: "Generally we tend to evade or direct pain in some way, but then we are involved in it through an effort of will. When we simply observe and the pain is allowed to express itself, the energy fixed as pain becomes fluid."

Observing Thoughts

Repetitive Transitory Nature

- Although most people believe that they know their minds, in actuality they have little awareness of the content and direction of their thoughts.
- When we closely observe the workings of our mind we see that it is an ever-changing stream of ideas, images, opinions and judgments, sometimes meaningfully connected but more often than not random and disconnected.
- Thoughts arise and pass away, leaving only a trace in our memory. Yet they continue to exert a powerful conditioning effect on how we experience reality.
- Much of our thinking is involuntary, automatic and repetitive, shaped by our personal history and mental habits.

"As you begin to see thoughts as formations and observe them, you see that they're quite mechanical. They are extraordinarily repetitive. We go over the same old conversations again and again, keep inventing new ones that will never happen. We have well-worn ruts in our brains. They're conditioned by our culture and our personal history."

Larry Rosenberg

Identification with Thoughts

- When unattended, our thinking runs our lives without our even knowing it. We overvalue our thoughts and are enslaved by them, letting them exert a powerful, though often unrecognized influence over us.
- Much of our thinking process is coloured by deeply rooted cultural assumptions, beliefs and preconceptions.
- We also tend to be deeply attached to our thoughts. The core of our self-image is created and sustained by our thinking process.

Understanding the Thinking Process

- The object of mindfulness is not to suppress or pursue our thoughts but to consciously see and recognize them. "It is normal for the mind to produce thoughts. Be aware of your thoughts without getting lost in them. And if you get lost, notice that, too."
- The practice of watching our thoughts from moment to moment can be profoundly illuminating and liberating.
- Discrimination allows us to see when thoughts and ideas are helpful, skillful and necessary and when they are not.
- Bringing attention to the thinking process allows us to uncover habitual patterns of thinking and step out of conditioned ways of viewing ourselves and the world.

"Simply observe the coming and going of thoughts. Neither refuse them nor encourage them. In no way direct them. Remain impersonally alert. You will soon feel that thoughts, feelings and sensations appear in this directionless alertness . . . At first you will find that you keep interfering with your thoughts, suppressing them or being taken by them. But when you are free from the mental habits of activity and passivity you will find yourself in your natural quiet attention."

Jean Klein

Observing Emotions

Power of Emotional Patterns

- Entrenched emotional patterns distort our perception of the world, shaping and conditioning our responses to the endless experiences of life.
- Negative emotions such as worry, loneliness and feelings of worthlessness are often linked together, locked in a cyclical self-reinforcing pattern.
- The power of emotions are reflected in the body (tension), breath (shallow, uneven) and mind (agitated)

"An emotion usually represents an amplified and energized thought pattern, and because of its often overpowering energetic charge, it is not easy initially to stay present enough to be able to watch it. It wants to take you over, and it usually succeeds -- unless there is enough presence in you. If you are pulled into unconscious identification with the emotion through lack of presence, which is normal, the emotion temporarily becomes 'you'."

Eckhart Tolle

- The tenacity of conditioned emotional patterns is rooted in our sense of personal identity.

"Looking deeply into this emotional tension, we may discover a strange paradox: although we do not want to suffer, we seem unable to give up our unhappiness. We either cannot or will not change. We hold onto emotional responses, even the negative ones, because our emotional needs and attachments are very strong; they form a major part of our identity. Letting go of them can be very frightening and confusing, for without these familiar feelings we may no longer be sure who we are."

Tarhang Tulku

Separating from Emotions

- Instead of suppressing or denying our emotions we need to understand them by observing our emotional states without attachment or judgment.
- Suppressing emotions is a form of denial and aversion which deadens our life, while expressing all our emotions and acting them out simply reinforces their frequently dysfunctional patterns.
- When we non-judgmentally observe our emotional states rather than identifying with them we separate ourselves from the projected world of the emotion

"Strong reactive emotions dominate significant portions of our lives -- anger, neediness, or depression, for example. Whenever you recognize that you are caught up in a reactive emotion, say, "The trouble is that I believe my feelings." The phrase reminds you that both the feeling and your current perception of the world are the products of reactive patterns and conditioning. The shift temporarily breaks the obsession. In the gap, the feeling and the projected world are experienced as objects of attention, not as the way things are."

Ken McLeod

Learning Healthy Emotional Responses

- Through mindfulness we can develop the ability to skillfully work with powerful emotions and transform negative emotional patterns, bringing the mind to a state of greater insight and freedom.

"The more you take responsibility for your feelings and emotions, and work with them moment by moment, the more balanced and healthy you will feel. Eventually, when an emotion arises it will last only a short time, and you will wake up almost immediately. You become like

a dancer who has practiced for many years: although she may stumble and fall, she can regain her balance so quickly that every movement appears an integral part of the dance."

Tarthang Tulku

Observing the Inner Self

- Certain habits of mind and conditioned reactions to unfamiliar stimuli mask and prevent the perception of a deeper and more subtle level of inner communication.
- Intuitions, intimations and messages from the inner self are frequently ignored or disregarded because the nature and form of the signal is unexpected.
- This inner voice communicates in a way that is unfamiliar and qualitatively different from that of the normal five senses.
- When the surface mind is quiet and relaxed it becomes receptive to the perception of finer, more subtle states of consciousness and awareness.

*"To be, just **be**, is important. You need not ask anything, nor do anything. It means that for the time being you are free from the obsession with 'what next.' When the mind is free from anxieties, it becomes quiet and in the silence something may be heard which is ordinarily too fine and subtle for perception. The mind must be open and quiet to see."*

Nisargadatta Maharaj

Obstacles to Mindfulness

Power of Conditioned and Reactive Patterns

- One of the consequences of mindfulness practice is that we begin to experience aspects of ourselves that we have suppressed, avoided, ignored or overlooked.
- When this happens deeply ingrained reactive patterns are triggered and "rise up strongly to undermine the attention that is bringing us into a deeper relationship with what we are and what we experience."
- When habitual patterns are interrupted through the focus of attention they often intensify.
- The power of attention is always potentially present but is unable to function if conditioned patterns are too deeply entrenched.

"Mindfulness requires effort and discipline for the simple reason that the forces that work against our being mindful, namely our habitual unawareness and automaticity, are exceedingly tenacious. They are so strong and so much out of our consciousness that an inner commitment and a certain kind of work are necessary just to keep up our attempts to capture our moments in awareness and sustain mindfulness."

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Patience and Effort

- As we practice mindfulness we become increasingly aware of the many ways we fall out of attention and presence.
- The essence of mindfulness is to patiently return again and again to the state of natural awareness that is always present, but obscured by patterns that are tenacious and persistent.

- As mindfulness develops and the strength of attention grows, we begin to catch and interrupt ourselves more quickly when falling into habitual patterns and reactions.

Positive Change and Transformation

Reactivity or Free Choice

- We ultimately have the freedom to cultivate wholesome qualities of mind through honest self-observation rather than being bound by patterns of conditioning.

"Change by choice becomes possible only when we have free attention, a level of attention that is not completely absorbed by conditioning. The ability to act and respond (rather than react) depends on the ability to maintain such a level of attention."

Ken McLeod

- By relaxing the hold of reactive tendencies we become receptive to new learning and are able to meet each situation in life with a more awakened quality of mind.

"This attitude gives us space to observe the scope of our situation more clearly and to discover more effective ways of responding. When we begin to free ourselves from the need to react, even unexpected or unwelcomed situations can stimulate a new clarity and depth of vision that invite new insights and creative actions."

Tarhang Tulku

Attention Dismantles Conditioning

- The essence of transformation is the ability to maintain attention in the face of habitual reactions and not be consumed by them.

"Attention is an ability that can be developed, just as physical stamina or flexibility can. Attention is cultivated by repeatedly exercising it, just as flexibility is developed by repeated stretching."

Ken McLeod

- Cultivating attention is the primary tool of transformation, leading to the dismantling of habituated patterns that prevent us from leading lives of freedom and fulfillment.

"We change the way we are by bringing attention to bear on the operation of a pattern. The pattern is disturbed by the energy of attention, just as the crystalline structure of ice is disturbed by the energy of heat. When attention penetrates deeply enough, the pattern cannot hold together and falls apart."

Ken McLeod

Process of Self-discovery

- The development of self-knowledge and wisdom is an ongoing process of discovery that unfolds when we live with full awareness in each moment.

"When we look at our own mind, we can notice the mental states that predominate. We may find resentment, fear, anger, worry, doubt, envy, or agitation. We can notice how often they arise and how attached we are to their point of view. We can also notice the healthy states in our most free and open-hearted periods. We can notice how love, generosity, flexibility, ease, and simplicity are natural to us. They give us trust in our original goodness."

Jack Kornfield

Direct Experience of Life

- By directly engaging with the present moment it is possible to fully enter our experience.
- Life is what we experience. It is ultimately a mystery as we do not know what the next moment of experience will be.
- In order to be fully present in our lives we need to let go and dwell in a state of natural awareness. "You will find yourself observing things exactly as they are -- flowing and changing from moment to moment."

"This natural awareness is simple and direct, open and responsive. It is immediate and spontaneous, without obscuration: there is no fear or guilt, no problem or desire to escape or be any other way. 'Natural' means 'unfixed,' to have no expectations, no compulsions, no interpretations, or predetermined plans."

Tarthang Tulku

Mindfulness in Everyday Life

Attention to the Experiences of Life

- It is possible to mix attention with the activities of daily life.
- Opportunities abound for bringing attention to whatever is happening in our everyday lives. Our whole life can become an ongoing exercise in the cultivation of pure attention and mindfulness.
- Mindfulness opens our lives to the richness of experience as we learn to embrace and learn from whatever we may experience in life.

- It is important to note the areas of daily life in which we habitually lose attention and fall into reaction.
- The work of internal transformation comes alive as we make those areas the focus of our practice of attention during the day.
- A simple exercise to remain in touch with our experience of life is to set aside a few minutes several times each day to simply ask: "What is happening?"
- Sometimes it is easiest to exercise mindfulness by beginning with simple activities such as walking or washing the dishes, and then extending the practice to more complex activities such as conversation.
- We can cultivate attention in every aspect of our lives -- work, relationships, cleaning our house, walking in nature, even the smallest details of experience such as brushing our teeth.

"Activities such as shopping, answering the telephone, typing, working in a factory, studying in school, dealing with our parents or our children, going to a funeral, checking ourselves into the hospital -- whatever we do is sacred. The way we develop that attitude is by seeing things as they are, by paying attention to the energy of the situation, and by not expecting further entertainment from our world. It is a matter of simply being, being natural, and always being mindful of everything that takes place in our day-to-day life."

Chögyam Trungpa

Self-Discovery

- Mindfulness is immediate and direct -- like a mirror which simply reflects what is there. Like a mirror it enables us to see ourselves exactly as we are.
- Although most people think they know themselves, in actuality they really don't know many aspects of their mind, behaviour and being. "There are all sorts of undiscovered areas of our thoughts and actions. What we find in ourselves might be quite astounding."
- Sustaining mindfulness throughout the course of the day leads to greater self-knowledge and supports further self-discovery.
- One of the most immediate benefits of mindfulness practice is an increased awareness of conditioned patterns of behaviour which may have previously escaped our notice.
- In a mindfulness workshop "one woman, when she paid attention to her speech patterns, remarked that "she never shuts up!" referring to herself."

The Observing Self

- It is important to distinguish between awareness (the primary source of self-experience) and the content of awareness (thoughts, feelings, images, sensations).
- The observing self cannot itself be observed, but can be experienced directly. It has no defining qualities, no boundaries, no dimensions.
- Unlike every other aspect of experience -- thoughts, emotions, sensations, functions -- the observing self can be known but not located or "seen."
- We *are* awareness, the core of the experience of self, and like a mirror it is unaffected by the images it reflects.

- The progressive strengthening of the observing self is an essential component of many therapies.

"By dis-identifying with automatic sequences we lessen their impact and provide free space in which to choose an appropriate response. Thus, we achieve autonomy where previously we were overwhelmed and helpless. Anxiety and depression, even if not abolished, become restricted in their scope and attenuated. By identifying with the observing self, we can make a more realistic assessment of ourselves and our situation, permitting more effective and creative behaviour."

Arthur Deikman

- As the practice of self-observation ripens and matures the ability to remain aware and in the present moment strengthens and deepens.

"Through self-observation, more presence comes into your life automatically. The moment you realize that you are not present you are present. Whenever you are able to observe your mind, you are no longer trapped in it. Another factor has come in, something that is not of the mind: the witnessing presence."

Eckhart Tolle

"To become free of the ego all you need to do is to be aware of your thoughts and emotions -- as they happen. This is not really a "doing" but an alert "seeing." When that shift happens, which is the shift from thinking to awareness, an intelligence far greater than the ego's cleverness begins to operate in your life. Emotions and even thoughts become depersonalized through awareness. Their impersonal nature is recognized. There is no longer a self in them. They are just human emotions, human thoughts. Your entire personal history, which is ultimately no more than a story, a bundle of thoughts and emotions, becomes of secondary importance and no longer occupies the forefront of your consciousness. It no longer forms the basis for your sense of identity. You are the light of Presence, the awareness that is prior to and deeper than any thoughts and emotions."

Eckhart Tolle