

## **PRACTICING MINDFULNESS: AN INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION**

- Mindfulness is the skill of being deliberately attentive to one's experience as it unfolds-without the superimposition of our usual commentary and conceptualizing.
- The foundational technique for cultivating mindfulness is the practice of meditation.
- Mindfulness is the skill of opening ourselves to reality without judgment.
- Practicing mindfulness over time reveals and develops the qualities of wisdom and compassion, the twin virtues of the discipline.
- Wisdom means seeing clearly into the fundamental nature of reality.
- Through meditative practice, we can deeply recognize the eternal arising and passing away of all phenomena and see the unsatisfactory quality of ordinary human experience that derives from the illusion of the self as an entity separate from the rest of reality.
- Mindfulness techniques are skills that anyone can develop and apply to the simplest aspects of living: breathing, sensing, feeling, eating, walking, speaking and even driving.
- More challenging things such as cultivating compassion for ourselves and others; developing a life of generosity; accepting our mortality; and coping with physical pain, grief, and anger.
  - Compassion – the desire to alleviate suffering – is an essential component of our nature as human beings.
  - Finding compassion for ourselves is more challenging for many of us, particularly the perfectionists among us.
  - Mindfulness also offers powerful means to work with physical discomfort – through understanding the crucial distinction between pain and suffering – as it directly affects our perceptions.
- Reflecting on the universality of loss, we can look at the notion of impermanence. By learning to embrace life's transience and to center our focus in the present moment, we are able to experience loss and even grief without fear or aversion.
- We can examine the ways in which our culture conditions us to avoid and deny death and learn meditations that deepen both the awareness of life's transience and our ability to live freely.

## **MINDFULNESS: THE DEFAULT SETTING**

- Most of the time our minds generate a constant swirl of remarks and judgments that create a barrier that separate us from our own lives.
- This mental condition of “mindlessness” makes it difficult to be attentive to the experiences of our lives.
- Through meditation and “mindfulness” our lives can be redirected in ways that will be conducive to our happiness and that of others.
- We basically think of ourselves as in control of our own thought processes; however, most of us simply have not taken the time to observe the operation of our mind.
- Your thoughts most likely alternate between past and future and will tend to avoid the present as much as possible. If you pay attention to your ordinary thought processes, you will discover that you probably spend very little time living in the present.
- Even when we find ourselves attending to the present, we may discover that what our minds churn out is fairly worthless! Most of us are constantly making instantaneous judgments about what we experience that do not have any real substance...
- So, despite what we may think, we're not ordinarily in control of our minds; rather our minds seem to control us:
  - We can't turn them off
  - We can't always make them do what we want
  - Judgments, thoughts, and emotions arise unbidden and often unwelcome
- Mindlessness comes at a high cost: causes us and others to suffer greatly; far more than we realize.
- The Buddha put it this way: “Whatever an enemy might do to an enemy, or a foe to a foe, the ill-directed mind can do to you even worse.”
- Is it any wonder we so often try to silence or alter our minds with drugs, alcohol, amusements or other forms of distraction?
  - Fortunately, most of us don't reach a mind-driven point of despair
  - We nonetheless endure the consequences of an immensely powerful but unruly mind

- We entertain thoughts that serve no wholesome value
- We make snap judgments about people on the most trivial evidence
- We spin falsehoods that we ourselves come to believe
- We constantly compare ourselves to others; a practice that can only lead to pain
- All this drives us to lead frenzied lives, on the verge of misery
- This sense of dissatisfaction impels us to find something to bring relief. Unfortunately, our minds are conditioned to seek solutions in the most unhelpful ways
- Perhaps we are born with certain dispositions to act and think in particular ways
- Karma suggests that the way we are now is the consequence of the ways we have thought and acted up to this point. We have been conditioned by ourselves and others
- But our minds are malleable; they can be reshaped in ways that we chose:
  - We have a small but extremely important ability to redirect our mind that allows us to recondition it
  - We have a modicum of free will; it must be exercised and developed
- This course is for people whose minds are overstimulated and need a respite from too much thinking:
  - Think of your mind not as the center of your personality but as a tool for your happiness
  - Learn how to use it properly and practice until it becomes second nature
  - Meditation and practicing mindfulness are the tools

## **MINDFULNESS: THE POWER OF AWARENESS**

- Mindfulness is a particular kind of awareness:
  - A deliberate way of paying attention to what is occurring within oneself as it is happening
  - However, it is without judgment or evaluation
- Most of the time we exist in mindlessness, governed by habit and inattention:
  - Mindfulness is a process of attentively observing our experiences as they unfold
  - With sustained practice we become more attentive to our experiences and less captive to the whims that drive our minds around
- Because we're not judging our experiences as right or wrong, mindfulness is also characterized by a high degree of openness, receptivity, and inquisitiveness.
- We've all had experiences very close to mindfulness:
  - When our lives are endangered our minds become focused
  - When we practice mindfulness, we are doing so deliberately
- We learn in the mindfulness discipline that there is a lot in the world over which we have no control:
  - At the same time mindfulness teaches us that what we can change is the operation of our own mind
  - We tend to act out of habit-without much thought; unaware that we can be more deliberate about the way we allow events beyond our power to affect us
  - Mindfulness helps us work with difficult emotional states (e.g., anger, greed, and fear) to act in ways that are beneficial rather than damaging
  - Medical science has proven that mindfulness has a salutary effect on health
  - While it can't stave off the inevitable demise of our bodies, mindfulness can reveal to us that life is ephemeral and denying that only causes great suffering and unhappiness
  - Mindfulness can help us see the truth and empower us to act on the fact that only by relinquishing our attachment to everything we think will make us happy, can we actually be happy

## **MINDFULNESS: EXPECTATIONS- RELINQUISHING PRECONCEPTIONS**

- The principal instrument for strengthening our capacity for mindfulness is a practice known as meditation:
  - Meditation usually suggests a form of deep thinking
  - Not all forms of meditation, however, intend to cultivate mindfulness:
    - Some are oriented toward generating transcendent experiences, achieving a trance state
    - For mindfulness practice this type of meditation is to make us more mindful:
      - The tradition on which mindfulness practice is founded does not use the term “meditation” but rather the Buddhist term “bhavana” which means “cultivation”
      - bhavana does not mean deep thinking but rather the awareness and discipline to shape the mind in ways conducive to happiness and well-being
      - Mindfulness is not about having unusual or transcendent experiences although they may be experienced...
  - It's not easy of fast:
    - Many people meditate to reduce stress and become more relaxed
    - For the vast majority of practitioners, tranquility is often not realized early in the practice
    - In the early stages it may also be difficult, uncomfortable, and being alone with your thoughts can be terrifying
    - Conventional ideas of success and failure may need to be abandoned when you take up meditation:
      - When you're unable to follow the instructions exactly, you may judge yourself a failure – but that would be a mistake
      - You fail only when you do not pay attention – but even failing to pay attention is not a failure if you realize you're not paying attention
    - Meditation is not an escape from reality, but rather an escape into reality:

- Meditation begins to awaken our empathy and helps develop our compassion
- To be wise is to see things clearly – without delusion. Wisdom thus means to recognize the interdependence of our lives with others
- Meditation that produces only self-satisfaction is not a genuine mindfulness practice...

## **MINDFULNESS: TAKING MORAL INVENTORY**

- All mindfulness perspective recognizes that meditation must be practiced within the wider context of one's life; the dimensions of the human experience we call "ethical":
  - A disordered ethical life with disrupt our efforts to practice meditation
  - The mindfulness approach to matters of personal ethics differs from the moral perspectives that are governed by rules
  - In fact, most of them are included in almost all ethical perspectives – religious and secular
  - What distinguishes the Buddhist articulation is the way they are presented as aspirations rather than as commands or laws
  - This way of approaching ethical conduct invites acting morally, not to avoid punishment, but for the positive purpose of refining one's character and promoting the well-being of the world
  - The Buddha's Five Ethical Aspirations:
    - I will endeavor not to harm sentient beings
    - I will endeavor not to steal (today this includes intellectual)
    - I will endeavor not to misuse sexuality (today that means sexual harassment)
    - I will endeavor not to use false speech
    - I will endeavor not to consume toxins (today that includes false information)

## **MINDFULNESS: WHERE TO BE FOR MEDITATION**

- Because our minds are conditioned to be easily distracted, it is essential to set aside a special place and time to allow the mind to learn and concentrate.
- Three key elements:
  - Deciding the best time is the most individual of all decisions
    - About 20-45 minutes per day
    - The times your body are most conducive to practice
    - At first, it will probably be difficult to devote 20-45 minutes, so 5 minutes is fine as long as you commit to a regular schedule
    - As the benefits become apparent, you'll probably begin to protect those times with great zeal
    - Use a timer to help you keep committed to fulfilling that intention
  - Creating the most congenial location for your practice:
    - Needs to be conducive to the facilitation of moment-to-moment awareness
    - May find it helpful to use the same place each time you practice so you don't need to become familiar with a new setting
    - Your space should be relative free of visual as well as other distractions, especially noise, and should be safe and uncluttered
  - Learning to put the body in a proper position for meditation:
    - The body posture is governed by the aim of crafting a calm and alert mind
    - To create these conditions, it is helpful, at least initially, to bring the body into a still and stable position:
      - The classic position for meditating is sitting:
        - With practice, the body can be trained to sit directly on the ground, on the floor, or on a thin cushion:
          - If you choose a cushion, find one that will elevate your body at least five to six inches from the floor
          - This elevation allows you to cross your legs comfortably and permits circulation

- With practice, the body can be trained to sit in the classic “lotus position” where you place the right foot on top of the left thigh and the left foot on top of the right thigh:
  - The lotus position can be quite difficult and painful for the novice and the urgency of getting to mindfulness practice outweighs the need to learn the position
- In the “Burmese style” you simply cross your legs at the ankles without having to place your feet on the opposite thighs
- A position called “seiza” involves sitting on the calves with your knees, shins, and feet resting on the ground
- You can use a chair:
  - Keep both feet flat on the floor without crossing them
  - Do not use the back of the chair for support. Sit away from the back of the chair to avoid leaning on it
- All forms of sitting are designed to prevent the back from resting against an external object in order to encourage mental alertness and the smooth flow of breathing:
  - Keep your back straight but not rigid
  - You may find it helpful to roll your hips forward a bit as you elongate your back
  - It may be useful to imagine a string attached to the crown of your skull that is pulling it upward toward the ceiling:
    - This visualization helps lengthen the backbone while drawing down the shoulders and keeping head in the proper position
- Your hands:
  - You may put your hands in your lap, one on top of the other

- Another approach is to place the hands on the knees either palms down or up
- You can meditate with your eyes open or shut:
  - Closed helps eliminate external visual distractions, but eyes closed for an extended time may make you drowsy or lead to rather amazing internal distractions
  - Open-eye practice, though, promotes alertness and works against drowsiness. With open eyes you should direct your vision to a point on the ground in front of you about six feet away from your body
- Just as one can be mindful anywhere, one can meditate in any position, including standing, lying down, or walking
- Wear loose-fitting comfortable clothes
- Remove your shoes because they can restrict the flow of circulation in your legs

## MINDFULNESS: FINDING A FOCUS FOR ATTENTION

- Imagine your mind in a usual state as a bottle of muddy water:
  - Your thoughts are swirling and chaotic; it's not easy to think clearly
  - However, if you set the jar down and refrain from stirring it up, the dirt will settle down and the water will become clear
  - When the mind is given a chance, it will naturally settle and become clear and serene
- To allow your mind to settle, you need a focus or an anchor:
  - A fixed place to direct our attention while the mind calms itself
  - Like the jar of muddy water, it simply helps to keep it from stirring things up
- As you begin your practice of meditation, try to read while sitting in one of the meditative postures:
  - This could help condition your body to the proper position and prepare you to follow instructions
  - Take a few deep breaths to help you settle in
- As your sitting meditation proceeds, it is perfectly fine to readjust a part of your body:
  - Your goal is to attain some reasonable stability that allows you to focus on developing your awareness
  - It's a good idea to occasionally check your posture to ensure your body is in the best position possible
  - The only rule is that you make adjustments during your practice with complete mindfulness
- When the body is where it needs to be, we turn our attention to our mind:
  - We take a moment to acknowledge our intention to practice mindfulness
  - As we deepen our practice, we will discover how critical it is to set proper intentions; they can have an amazing capacity to be realized, if we do
- The anchor, or focal point, varies from tradition to tradition:
  - Some practitioners use a "**mantra**", which is usually a short saying or set of syllables that the meditator repeats to themselves

- Virtually anything, an object, a sound, or a bodily sensation, can become the focus of meditative practice
- Attending to the breath:
  - In basic mindfulness exercises we use the breath as the anchor for our attention; it's a good place to start
  - For one thing, the breath is always present, to which we can always return, no matter where we are
  - When our minds begin to wander, as they inevitably will, the breath can always bring us back; a fact that is essential to strengthening our powers of concentration
  - The rhythm of inhaling and exhaling also brings profound calmness to our body
  - Observing the breath calms and focus' our awareness
  - One way to watch your breath is to focus on the sensation of the air flowing through your nostrils
  - A second way is to attend to the abdomen or chest as either expands or contracts with each breath
  - Guide your awareness to the place where you most prominently sense the rhythms of your inhalations and exhalations
  - Let your breathing be as effortless as possible. Just let it be what it will be
  - Your task is merely to watch what happens. If you can do this, you are being mindful. Pay attention, but refrain from making judgments or evaluating your experience
  - Try to notice the things you usually ignore. Observe the start of your inhalation; observe when the inhaled breath has come to an end. Try to remain merely observant, and stay attentive to your breath for as long as you can
- No matter how hard we try, at the beginning of this discipline, it's difficult to stay concentrated:
  - Attention begins to wander
  - A torrent of thoughts and judgments flood the brain:
    - Simply observe the fact that it has strayed, and then, ever so gently, return your attention to the breath

- Try not to make judgments about what happened; simply observe and move on
- This is the fundamental process of developing concentration:
  - Concentration is the capacity to stay attentive to a single thing
  - Hindu yogis call this ability “ekagrata”, or one-pointedness
  - To train the mind to attain one-pointedness, we must become aware of when it wanders from its anchor, and bring it back to its focal point
  - In learning to concentrate, we’ll repeat the process over and over and return to the breath
  - We’re doing more than learning to concentrate; we’re sharpening our awareness
  - The real challenge is to be attentive to the mind when it drifts.
  - Because we are conditioned to be mindless, we’re usually not aware when we lose focus
  - Even if it takes 15 minutes before you realize it, just return your awareness to the breath. Don’t criticize yourself; that only agitates the mind and thwarts the very serenity you’re trying to attain
- The problem of boredom:
  - Modern people have become accustomed to being constantly stimulated:
    - The idea of paying attention to our breath for 15, or even 5 minutes, makes many of us recoil in horror
    - A great deal of money and time is spent trying to avoid being bored
  - Most of us think boredom is caused by our circumstances:
    - The antidote to boredom is paying complete attention
    - Rather, most are inclined to seek out mental stimulants to keep their minds occupied with trivialities
    - Mindfulness encourages us to relinquish the cravings for stimulation and simply be attentive to what is
    - Boredom itself can be interesting if you simply observe it patiently without judgment
    - When you can relinquish your fear of being bored, and can be wholly engaged with the pleasure of breathing, you’ll find yourself with a refined sense of completeness in that moment

## **MINDFULNESS: STEPPING STONES TO MINDFULNESS**

- Meditation is a microcosm of the rest of our life:
  - Often, our approach to life's difficulties is avoidance rather than confrontation
  - There are certain difficulties associated with meditation that are qualitatively no different than issues in our lives:
    - Almost everyone suffers from the physical discomfort of meditation
    - There are certain discomforts that cannot be removed by altering our circumstances
    - However, meditation practice shows us that many of these discomforts can be mitigated by mindfulness:
      - Pain is inevitable
      - Suffering, as it's understood in mindfulness practice, is a mental and emotional response. It's possible to suffer without pain and vice-versa
    - Our minds may go through any number of conditioned reactions; unfairness, fear, panic:
      - Underlying all these forms of resistance is the same belief: pain shouldn't be happening to us
      - That belief is a great source of our suffering: it can condition anger, fear, panic, and disillusionment
    - One way to reduce our suffering is to align our minds with reality:
      - Believing that pain shouldn't happen to us is delusional
      - It is inconsistent with the nature of the world
      - Rather than resist, we can be open to pain; respond with compassionate mindfulness
    - Dealing with pain:
      - Allow the pain to become the object of your attention
      - Simply let the sensation provide the anchor for your awareness and become mindful of the pain as you would your breath
      - Try to relax any tension or contraction of muscles surrounding the painful sensation

- Observe the sensation with curiosity
- Try to narrow your focus on the pain
- If your focus is sharp enough, you can perceive the impermanent nature of pain
- If you cannot stay focused on the sensation itself, direct your attention to how you're reacting to it
- As you study your pain, you may find your resistance to it diminishing
- It may continue to hurt but you may suffer less because you are struggling less against it:
  - In the early stages it is unrealistic to expect this technique to work on severe pain but even that kind of pain can be ameliorated with mindfulness over time
  - Begin your work on a minor discomfort, such as an itch:
    - Don't scratch it
    - Instead observe it
    - Draw your attention to it
    - Notice its qualities and its impermanence
    - After a few minutes you may be able to watch it dissolve; if it doesn't, it's OK to scratch it. If you do, just make sure you do so with complete mindfulness
- As you meditate, you may feel odd sensations such as tingling in the arms, hands, legs, and feet; feeling the entire body becoming lighter, even to the extent of floating; and feeling the body, or parts of it, such as the hands, becoming larger:
  - Unusual feelings can also involve vision and sound
  - With your eyes closed, you may become distracted by the displays of lights on the insides of your eyelids
  - With your eyes open, you might see odd patterns on the floor
  - If it is extremely quiet, you might find the silence deafening
  - If one of these strange sensations arises, observe it and watch your reaction to it

- If it's unpleasant, view it without aversion
  - If it's pleasant, view it without desire or attachment
- Focusing attention on the breath and returning to it when the mind wanders is the fundamental exercise for developing concentration and refining mindfulness:
  - If you're finding it hard to stay focused:
    - First consider whether the difficulty might derive from experiences apart from meditation:
      - Drowsiness is a potential threat to concentration
      - The ups and downs of a typical day can take their toll on the mind's capacity to remain attentive
      - Not giving enough attention to breathing can destroy your focus
    - Try breathing more deeply and forcibly than usual
    - Another concentrative practice involves counting your breathing inhalations, in and out
- Dealing with discouragement:
  - Often comes when we meet with little success in coping with physical discomfort, weird sensations, and the inability to concentrate
  - Discouragement can lead us to want to quit:
    - Remind yourself the only way to fail is not to meditate
    - Remind yourself the struggles are "part of the process"
    - Examine your experiences of being disheartened:
      - Where does it come from?
      - How have you overcome it in the past?
      - What one thing could help you succeed?
    - Just do it!
      - Just sit down
      - No argument, no excuses
      - If this fails, remind yourself of the many benefits to be gained by developing your mindfulness...

- Once you settle in you can begin to explore the source of your aversion
- You'll probably discover some sort of fear lurking underneath your resistance which you can meet with courage

## **MINDFULNESS: ATTENDING TO OUR PHYSICAL NATURES**

- The body scan:
  - Mindfulness is not the only form of meditation in this tradition
  - Some instructors, in fact, use the body scan as the foundational practice for teaching mindfulness
  - We take the same skill of directing attention to the breath and use it to focus awareness on various aspects of the body:
    - This process is similar to shining a flashlight to illuminate an object in the dark
    - The light brings the object into focus while what surrounds it remains darkened
  - The body scan fosters awareness of our bodies by allowing us to feel sensations on a part-by-part basis
  - The body scan also has the benefit of promoting relaxation, perhaps even greater than sitting meditation
  - Like meditation on breathing, the body scan can be practiced alone, but it is helpful to be guided through it in a step-by-step format. Once you have been through the exercise, you can conduct it on your own any time
  - The body scan can be practiced in either a sitting or lying position:
    - You will need about 20 minutes for the entire body scan meditation exercise
    - You will need access to a quiet place free from distractions and interruptions
    - Many people find the lying posture easier (i.e., the “corpse” pose)
      - You’ll need loose fitting clothes
      - Cushioning since you’ll be lying on the floor
      - A lightly padded but firm surface is best
      - A thin pillow to cushion your head
      - Place a pillow or blanket under your knees to elevate them slightly

- As you engage in this practice try to allow any tightness you may feel to dissolve, and relax these parts of your body as you breathe out; be aware of the quality of the sensation:
  - Try to feel the sensation in that area of the body as it is
  - You may feel sensations in your internal organs as they function to keep you alive
  - You may feel tightness, tingling, pressure, stiffness, or nothing in particular
  - If there is no sensation, just notice; try to be fully attentive to your experience
  - Whatever the sensation, just permit it to be what it is, without judgment
  - Don't struggle with what you feel; simply have a caring interest in what is happening
  - Let go of the sensations in this part of the body and continue to breathe naturally
- Allow your shoulders, middle back, lower back, and hips to settle into the surface on which you're lying
- Allow your hands to be open, palms up
- Let your feet fall open, away from each other
- Focus on your breathing with the rising and falling of the abdomen
- With each exhalation, feel your body become heavier and more relaxed
- Now, direct your attention to your feet: Let go of any tension you may feel, and allow your feet to relax as you breathe out
- Pay attention to your legs: Release any tension you may feel in this area of your body, and let your legs relax as you breathe out
- Be aware of your arms and hands: If you feel any tension, let it go; allow you arms and hands to relax as you breathe out
- Direct your awareness to your abdomen, chest, and back: Let go of any tension you may feel, and relax this area as you breathe out

- Now that you have settled into position, allow yourself to feel your whole body as a single organism; continue to breathe naturally, letting yourself become relaxed as you do so.
- Now, focus your awareness on your scalp and the area on the top of your head; allow your attention to move systematically throughout this area
- Bring your attention to your face
  - For a few moments, focus on your forehead and temples and become aware of any sensation in this area; note the quality of those sensations and relinquish them
  - Direct your awareness to your eyes and note and accept the sensations you feel
  - Now, allow your attention to move to other parts of your face, focusing on the nose, cheeks, and mouth.
  - Then become mindful of the chin, jaw, and ears, all the while observing and accepting the sensations in these areas as they are
- Move your awareness now to the back of your head and the top of your neck:
  - Notice if there is tension, tingling, stiffness, or no sensation at all
  - Just take note of whatever you feel and let that be sufficient
  - Be aware and open to whatever you sense
- Allow your attention to move down your neck and throat and to the top of your shoulders; feel every aspect of these areas.
- Now bring attention to your arms:
  - Feel the inside and outside of your upper arms, noticing any sensations, as you move your attention down to the elbows, forearms, wrists, and then hands
  - Survey each finger, carefully trying to feel every sensation, every bit of tension or pressure, tingling, or lightness
  - Examine if the area feels warm or cool, or has no sensation at all

- Relinquish your attention to your arms and hands, and direct to the top of your chest; follow the ribs to the upper back and the shoulder blades:
  - The sensations may be pleasurable, unpleasurable, or simply absent
  - Accept what is there with gentleness and compassion
- Allow your awareness to move to your hips and groin:
  - Sense the physical impressions in this area and note their qualities
  - If your mind has begun to shift, gently refocus your attention to this part of the body
- Next, let your attention move down the spine to your lower back, and then to your abdomen:
  - Take a moment to feel yourself breathe, as your belly and lower back expand contract with each inhalation exhalation
  - Feel the subtle movements of the breath, noticing the slight pressure of your clothing
- Bring your attention to your upper legs:
  - First observe the way the muscles and skin of your inner thighs feel
  - Next do the same for the muscles and skin of your outer thighs
  - Slowly scan downward to your knees; feel each and every sensation
  - Continue to move your awareness down your legs, shifting attention to your shins and then your calves, noticing any tension or tingling; any unpleasant feelings
  - Be mindful as you give attention to your ankles and heels, to the tops and soles of your feet, and finally to your toes
  - Try to bring attention to each of your toes, feeling whatever sensation might be perceptible

- Now, allow your awareness to encompass your entire body as a whole:
  - Take time to feel the sensation of being alive in the moment
  - You may feel deeply relaxed and suffused with a sense of well-being and peacefulness; you can return to this peacefulness at anytime
- When you are ready to end the meditation:
  - Slowly move your fingers and toes, and then your arms and legs
  - Open your eyes and gently move the other parts of your body
  - Then very carefully roll over to one side and use your arms and hands to bring yourself to a sitting position
- Variations on the body scan:
  - Feel free to vary the practice in ways you find more beneficial
  - The scan can be performed in a sitting or standing pose
  - You can conduct the practice at a faster or slower pace
  - You can scan your body from toes to head or right to left

## **MINDFULNESS: WORKING WITH THOUGHTS**

- We may not be able to control particular thoughts, but we can influence the conditioned mind that gives rise to particular thoughts:
  - Increases wholesome, skillful ideas
  - Decreases distracting ones
- The mind is a double-edged sword:
  - Doing us great benefit
  - Doing us great injury
- Though thoughts may seem like they come from out of the blue, they are conditioned by previous patterns of thought; shaped by the mind's history of thinking.
  - Neuroscientific research shows that routine pattern of thoughts makes incremental but substantial changes in the way the mind is structured and functions
  - These structural changes make the brain more effective at doing what it is asked to do
- If we habitually think in certain ways, the mind becomes adept at those patterns of thought, i.e., what we focus on, we become:
  - Wholesome patterns of thought create wholesome thoughts
  - Unwholesome thoughts predispose the mind to produce unwholesome thoughts
- We can use the dynamic to our advantage:
  - Meditation practice shows us we can choose which thoughts to entertain and develop and which to observe and release
  - In this manner, we can influence the kinds of thoughts we are likely to produce in the future
  - So far, we've been indiscriminate in the types of thoughts to release during our meditative practice:
    - We've been training our minds to drop any thought as soon as we become aware of it, without regard to its content or quality
    - Our purpose, going forward, is to reinforce our ability to focus and be attentive, i.e., enable us to manage our thinking more consciously

- Not only to become aware of thoughts as they arise, but also to identify the kinds of thoughts we are having and make conscious choices about how to handle them
- Because of our previous conditioning, the great majority of our thoughts have not been conducive to our well-being:
  - In the mindless state, our thoughts can be highly critical of ourselves and of others
  - When we attend carefully to the quality of our thoughts, we might easily conclude that most of them serve little constructive purpose
  - Because of our overproduction of unwholesome thoughts, it is to our great benefit to be able to respond appropriately and immediately when such thoughts arise
  - This requires sharp attention and the capacity to discern wholesome from unwholesome thoughts:
    - Unwholesome thoughts are not conducive to freedom and happiness
    - Conversely, wholesome thoughts diminish suffering and foster happiness and freedom
    - Unwholesome thoughts are connected to selfish desire, hatred, or delusion:
      - Unwholesome thoughts are predicated on our voracious appetite for pleasure
      - May prompt us to act or speak in a way that provides us with momentary gratification
      - Thoughts associated with hatred repel us from people or situations we think will cause us pain or make us feel uncomfortable
      - Deluded thoughts are at odds with reality and result from our failure to see ourselves and the worlds as they really are
      - On the basis of delusion, we can generate grandiose thoughts about our own importance or our own worthlessness or somehow come to believe we are immune to the vicissitudes to which everyone else is subject

- It requires skill, or course, to recognize these unskillful thoughts, and ultimately knowing ourselves very well, with ruthless honesty and dispassionate observation
- The great danger of entertaining any thought that arises from selfish desire, hatred, and delusion is its eventual effects on the shape of our minds
- The thoughts that remain confined to the interior of our skulls can proliferate, generating habits of thought that form our personality and character
- Mindfulness tradition offers practical ways to disempower unwholesome thoughts and relax their corrosive effects on the mind:
  - Replacement:
    - Simplest and most effective method of disarming a harmful thought
    - Immediately supplant it with a wholesome thought, e.g., thoughts grounded in hatred can be replaced with notions of friendliness and compassion
    - Even when it doesn't feel authentic, these actions will eventually begin to feel and be real and genuine
  - Reflecting on Results:
    - We can contemplate the consequences of the unwholesome thought by reflecting on the results
    - We think about the effects of holding the unwise notion, i.e., consider the kind of person you become when you foster an unwholesome thought
    - Reflect on the consequences of acting on these thoughts
  - Redirecting:
    - Diverting attention away from the unwholesome thought to something more beneficial
    - In sitting meditation, when the mind has been distracted by thought, we escort the attention back to the breath

- Redirecting attention helps us to accept the impermanence of the world and use the fact to our benefit:
  - Thoughts like everything else, pass away
  - To maintain a thought, we have to renew it; of course, if we renew the unwholesome thought, it will arise again, and we will need to redirect our attention elsewhere again
  - Eventually, by redirecting attention, the unwholesome thought will eventually lose its power and fade
  - Redirecting attention need not use the breath as its anchor; any wholesome thought or activity can suffice
- Reconstructing:
  - Reconstructing involves analyzing the formation of the unskillful thought, i.e., the antecedents that have given rise to the unwholesome notion
  - We begin to examine the assumptions supporting a particular belief
  - Unwholesome thoughts can be rooted in untenable assumptions we make about things that will make us happy and we can examine those assumptions more rationally
  - We come to recognize peculiar patterns of unskillful thinking that most of us routinely practice; manners of thought strongly encouraged by our competitive culture
  - It's the insidious habit of seeing how we measure ourselves to other people; our culture is obsessed with this and in a sense, thrives on it
  - The foremost disadvantage of "comparing mind" is the suffering it causes; we not only feel bad about ourselves, but often begin to wish ill upon the person we envy, sometimes to the point where we take steps to realize those wishes

- Whether we judge ourselves favorably or unfavorably, the practice of comparing mind is unwholesome; it causes us harm, expends our precious mental energy, and erodes our relationships with others
- Although, it is generally unskillful, there are times when comparing mind can be used skillfully, but doing so is an advanced practice that requires great wisdom; for most of us it is a habit that is best acknowledged and then relinquished

## **MINDFULNESS: MINDFULNESS WHILE MOVING**

- Most of us give little consideration to the activity of walking:
  - Walking meditation shares the same goals as all practices in this tradition, that of gaining deeper awareness:
    - It approaches that objective in a different and complementary way from techniques that involve physical stillness
    - Many practitioners have come to prefer walking mindfulness because it can be more versatile than sitting
    - It doesn't require a particular setting or equipment, such as a chair or cushion
  - Before you try this form of meditation, it's a good idea to get some experience in a special setting that is free from distractions and hazards:
    - Walking has a number of variations that you can explore to help you design the practice that is best for you
    - Experiment to determine which environment might sharpen your awareness
  - To begin you must first find a suitable location:
    - You can walk within the privacy of your own home, backyard, or any other space free of dangers and distractions
    - The fresh air of outdoors, of course, has much to recommend it
  - The space for walking doesn't need to be large, but you will be walking back and forth on this space:
    - You'll start at one end, walk to the other end, turn around, and walk back the other way, repeating this many times
    - The space doesn't need to be demarcated in any way; you can simply set the boundaries in your imagination
    - The surface needs to be level and stable
    - If you walk barefoot, which is a very pleasant thing to do, just make sure it will not endanger your feet
  - Like sitting meditation, there is no single best time:
    - If you are able to do so, however, walking just before or just after sitting meditation is beneficial

- Walking and sitting alternately has a synergistic effect on mindfulness
- Whereas sitting meditation after a meal can lead to drowsiness, research suggest that a gentle walk after eating can be healthy and invigorating
- Divest yourself of uncomfortable clothes, cellphones, or music players
- You may want to stretch a bit to loosen and relax your muscles
- Do whatever is necessary to maximize your sense of freedom
- When you're ready to start, take your place at one end of your walkway:
  - Stand tall with your spine upright and your shoulders relaxed
  - Let your arms hang naturally by your sides
  - Keep your chin level with the ground
  - Relax your jaw and smile slightly
  - Take a few slow, deep breaths
- Using a body scan:
  - Briefly survey the different areas of your body from the feet to the top of your head, releasing any tensions as you do
  - For a few moments, simply stand there and observe the sensations of your body
  - Take a moment to appreciate your surroundings and the feel and fragrance of the air
  - Pay special attention to the sensations at the bottom of your feet
  - If you're barefoot, allow yourself to completely feel the qualities of your walking surface; wiggle your toes a bit to let them sense the textures under your feet
  - As you prepare to walk, remind yourself of your intention to be mindful during this exercise
  - Now, focus your vision on the ground about five or six feet in front of you, but don't gaze at anything in particular; you'll keep your eyes open during the entire meditation
  - You can place your hands in front or behind you:
    - If you hold them in front, you may put one hand in the other

- If you put them behind, let one hand clasp the other and allow them to rest against the back
- You can also allow the arms to remain at your sides and swing slightly as you move
- Now, begin to walk, using small, careful steps:
  - Mindfully, lift your right foot, move it forward, and place it on the ground a few inches beyond the toes of your left foot
  - Then, allow your weight to shift onto your right leg, and mindfully lift your left foot
  - Then, move it and place it on the ground a few inches beyond the toes of your right foot
  - Shift the weight of your body forward onto your left leg and repeat
- It's basic walking, of course, except with greater attention to the experience:
  - At first it may feel awkward
  - Sometimes, practitioners may even lose balance because they're trying to be conscious of what is ordinarily an unconscious process
  - The awkwardness will dissipate as you become accustomed to the pace and deliberate style of the practice
- As you move, be sure to retain an upright posture:
  - Many people walk improperly, allowing their head and upper torso to lead their body
  - To maintain a correct carriage as your walk, imagine the rest of your body being led forward by the belly rather than by the head and chest
- Initially, you may find it helpful to coordinate your movements with your breath:
  - On the inhalation, you can lift and move the foot, and as you exhale, you can place the foot and shift your weight
  - This natural rhythm will allow your mind and body to relax

- When you sense this harmony, you can withdraw your attention from the breath
- Unlike sitting, in walking practice, we allow the breath to fade into the background and place our attention on other bodily sensations
- There are several places where you may focus your awareness:
  - Some instructors recommend attending to the legs and feet while silently labeling the three parts of each step; lifting, moving, and placing
  - An alternative method involves focusing your awareness on the sensations of your feet as they make contact with the ground; most effective when you're walking barefoot
  - If you find yourself distracted by a thought or emotion, you can gently return attention to the soles of the feet
- Completing the walk:
  - When you reach the end of your path
    - Come to a complete stop
    - Stand still and observe your whole body
    - If you wish you can do a brief body scan or simply take a few moments to enjoy the sensation of being alive
- You can walk for as long or as short as you like, but 30 minutes is a good time for beginners and experienced practitioners
- Once you've become accustomed to the basic skills you might recite a "gatha", a short verse from the Buddhist tradition that focuses the mind on a wholesome thought
- Walking practice can also be modified to emphasize our full attentiveness in the present moment:
  - One way is to bring your complete attention to the moment before taking another step
  - Doing so reminds you that life is a series of present moments
- Anytime you walk you can be mindful:

- Your pace will probably be more brisk than the formal practice
- You'll probably find it most helpful to stay aware of your entire body as it moves, rather than focusing on the feet
- Rather than thinking about your destination, stay focused on the act of walking
- Anytime is a good time to walk mindfully, but this practice is especially helpful when you get angry; it cools the fire of rage