



# Partners in Mindful Living

Robyn Norman, LCPC, CADAC, BCC

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September, 2012

To: Attendees of the Demystifying Meditation and Mindfulness Workshop

It is my pleasure to either introduce you to meditation and mindfulness, or to review the foundations with you. My hope for the day is that you leave wanting to know more and that you will apply some of the suggestions from the presentation and from the tool kit I've provided here.

The attached Toolkit includes a list of website and book resources, as well as exercises for your use or for you to practice with your clients. The 'Mindful Speech' activity can be particularly helpful as a handout for clients who struggle with impulsive or ineffective communication. I've also included two short articles on mindfulness from my Seedlings blog. Enjoy!"

If you're interested in checking out my website or following my blog, Seedlings, please go to [www.partnersinmindfulliving.com](http://www.partnersinmindfulliving.com) where you can subscribe.

Or if you have questions about anything discussed in the presentation or in the Toolkit feel free to email, text or call me at [robyn@partnersinmindfulliving.com](mailto:robyn@partnersinmindfulliving.com), or 630-220-9223. I love talking about this stuff and I'll always respond.

Hope to hear from you!

All my best,

*Robyn*



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## RESOURCES

### Websites:

<http://www.investigatinghealthyminds.org/>

Go here for the science. This is a research center located at the University of Wisconsin-Madison dedicated to promoting healthy qualities of mind.

<http://www.getsomeheadspace.com/>

They make meditation simple and accessible.

<http://susanpiver.com/>

You can sign up for her Open Heart Project. There are two kinds of memberships: Basic (for beginners)—you'll receive two videos/week along with talks about mindfulness and meditation.

Practitioner (if you know you want to become a meditator and want to learn more about a formal meditation path).

### Books:

8 Minute Meditation: Quiet Your Mind. Change Your Life. By Victor Davich

Many of my clients start with this. It offers 8 weeks of 8 different approaches to meditation, each of which takes a time investment of 8 minutes a day. My clients tell me that it's one of the most practical approaches they've come across.

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, Shunryu Suzuki. A classic introduction to meditation.

Nothing Special, Everyday Zen, Charlotte Joko Beck. The first book I read about mindfulness.

Shambhala, The Sacred Path of the Warrior, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Turning The Mind Into An Ally, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

### Anything by:

Jon Kabat-Zinn, The developer of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction.

Thich Nhat Hahn, A Vietnamese Buddhist monk who has worked tirelessly to make meditation and mindfulness understandable and accessible.



## Seedlings

...whispers of very young ideas and morning thoughts...

### Why Meditate?

August 28, 2012

I talk and write about meditation and mindfulness, yet I don't think I've ever defined them in a Seedlings post. So before I talk about why, here's my attempt to define 'what'.

I'll start with a basic factoid: Meditation and mindfulness are about the placement of attention.

Here are definitions that work for me:

**Meditation is: the formalized practice of meeting present moment experience with openness, willingness and curiosity.** In other words, paying attention to what's happening, right now, in this moment, without judgment. That's as glamorous as it gets.

**Mindfulness is: meditation in action—taking that non-judgmental, present moment awareness from the pillow (or chair) and applying it in your day to day life.**

Our attention is always on something. The trick is to notice where our attention is so that we can decide if it's serving us to keep it there.

For example: each time I write a blog, and before I push send, I think of all the reasons it'll be a bust—bad grammar, stupid typo, boring content, I'll offend someone—and in the space of seconds my brain dumps a bunch of stress hormones and my body gets all jacked up on cortisol and adrenaline with nowhere to discharge it.

And then I remember to breathe. The kind of belly breath I talked about in an earlier post. And because I've been practicing that way of breathing for a while even when I don't need it, when I DO need it, it comes pretty easily. Before I know it I'm back on planet earth where the fate of my world doesn't rest on one blog.

That is the mind that we're dealing with. A mind that makes up stories about everything. That's why I meditate and why I work at being mindful throughout my day.

The primary thing that's changed for me with the practice of mindfulness is an increasing awareness of just how nuts many of my thoughts are. I've learned that when I really see them for what they are, I just don't believe 'em or take them as seriously as I used to. Which means I don't act out of them and create as many problems for myself.

People have lots of ideas about what meditation is and why to do it—a way to get blissed out, or enlightened, or more healthy, reduce stress or blood pressure, or become nicer, more loving or peaceful, or all of the above. And all of those things may or may not be true for you guys if you have, or start, a practice.

For me, it was simpler than that. I wanted to find a way to make the most of what seemed to me a very, very short life span, and to find an answer to 'what the hell am I doing with my life'? It's about managing my mind so that I can more fully enjoy my life.

I suppose that in some ways I remain as neurotic as I've ever been. Meditation hasn't made me into someone else, someone better. What's different is that I'm much more aware when I'm being neurotic and can make better decisions than I used to make.

Seeing our thoughts gives us the freedom to choose how we'll respond to them. Ideally, we respond based on our values, not on blind acceptance of some random thought that is a hangover from a comment that was planted by our third grade teacher who was having a bad day and told us we were stupid, or not creative, or selfish...

Love the idea of walking down the street and everyone I pass has a word bubble over their head, including me, that outs everything we're thinking. Then maybe we'd stop taking our thoughts so seriously!

Would love to hear about what meditation or mindfulness practices you're using in your day-to-day life, so please do leave a comment.

Have a wonderful day!

*Robyn*



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...whispers of very young ideas and morning thoughts...

### One Thing at a Time...

August 6, 2012

Two weekends ago I did a mini, at-home, mindfulness thing. I made Saturday, from first arising to early evening, my **'do one thing at a time, thoroughly, to completion'** day. I turned off all electronics—TV, computer, I-phone, Kindle—and didn't plan to answer the door or respond to any outside distractions. (I did plan to respond to my smoke alarm.)

It was a unique experience. And not at all what I imagined or envisioned. I was pulled, over and over and over, by one shiny idea after another to stop what I was doing and do something else—ten times, twenty times, in one 5 minute period—for around 13 hours. Just being with how it felt to bring myself back to the present without following the cravings—to pick up, wash, graze, straighten, turn on, call, check, paint (my nails)—was an epiphany.

I get it! I no longer wonder why I feel overwhelmed and muddy and confused sometimes. I have spent tremendous blocks of time chasing my life, or my tail, or someone else's tail. When I become a human doing without any awareness that I've left myself, the human being is lost...lost.

I completed lots and lots of small projects. Probably accomplished more, with less effort, than I've ever accomplished in my life. So it wasn't a day of observing my navel. Purged books and clothes and cleaned and removed 'stuff' that had no meaning or purpose in my life. I did meditate, both sitting and walking, once each. That was it. The rest of the day was one project, one meal, one experience after another.

By the end of the day i felt CLEAR...and somehow COMPLETE. I'm not kidding myself. I know I won't live out all my future days in blissful presence. Only a robot or a mechanical object can replicate or repeat the same experience over and over. What I am putting my attention on is the idea of getting better at doing one thing at a time more often. I've put a couple things in place to support that intention and help me remember.

From my experiment I think I'm a tad better at being present with whatever shows up—thoughts, sensations, cravings, longings, frustrations, resentments—without responding to them as though they're my masters or all-knowing guides or even calls to action. They're simply information that my mind is a thought machine to which my heart and body respond. It's up to me to be present enough to notice if the thoughts or feelings or sensations are something I choose to act upon. (I know you're not supposed to end with a preposition but switching it around sounded stuffy.)

Would love to hear if any of you have had the same experiences with a mind that resembles mine. A mind that has led you around by the nose for years, without you ever really knowing that you could do something about it, or possibly use it to serve you better.

Have a wonderful day!

Robyn



## SITTING INSTRUCTIONS

The instructions will guide you in how to direct your attention to your body/posture, your breath and your thoughts (mind).

1. First, relax. Find your 'seat'. Relax your shoulders—drop them down. Make a commitment to being fully present to your meditation experience. Tell yourself that this is your time, everything else can wait.
2. Eyes soft, half-lidded, looking down about 6 feet in front of you.
3. Hands resting on your thighs, palm down, a little above your knees or midway on your thighs.
4. Legs are crossed loosely in front of you, of if you're in a chair, your feet are flat on the floor. Scooch forward on the chair so that your back isn't leaning against the chair.
5. Back is straight. Not rigid, like you've been bad, but straight and strong, like the trunk of a tree, sort of regal. Your sit bones are planted firmly on your chair or cushion. Picture your lower body planted firmly in the ground like the roots of a tree. Your upper body, like the trunk and limbs, gently reaching toward the sky—if it helps, you can think of it as joining heaven and earth.
6. While the back body is strong, the front body is very soft and open. Soft belly, soft chest, soft jaw. Mouth is closed with the teeth parted if that feels comfortable. So you have soft front body, open heart, and strong back, supporting each other. It's hard to tell where one leaves off and the other begins. You notice you really can't have one without the other.
7. Chin is tucked under slightly, so that the back of the neck is long.
8. Now put your attention on your breath. Notice the breath flowing in and out at the tip of your nose. Gently ride the surface of your breath. Follow the outbreath all the way to the end, like a wave flowing back into the ocean. Watch the inbreath gathering and gently follow it all the way in. Notice the end of the outbreath and the beginning of the inbreath, and see if you can notice a space between the two.
9. No need to breathe a certain way. Breathing is good, however you do it.



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10. If you happen to notice that sometimes your attention has moved to your mind, to a thought, or a picture, or a story, that's not a problem in any way. When you notice it, simply bring your attention back to your breath. As many times as your attention wanders to your thoughts, that's how many times you bring it back to your breath, whether it's 10 times or 100 times.
11. And it doesn't matter what kind of thoughts you have—if you have ugly thoughts, or beautiful thoughts or thoughts that you're bored, or can't do this, or that you're a brilliant meditator and better than everyone else at I, the thoughts are all the same. They're just a bunch of words strung together and the only meaning they have is the meaning you give them. As soon as you notice them, bring your attention back to your breath. Over and over and over...
12. You can't do it wrong. If you notice even one time during the meditation that your attention has wandered to your thoughts, and you bring it back to your breath, you're doing it right, and you can give yourself an A.
13. Take a few moments and simply breathe with no instructions.
14. Bring your attention back to the room and to the sounds and sensations you experience in this moment. When you're ready raise your eyes and see if you can bring this sense of mindfulness with you into the rest of your day.



## BREATHING TECHNIQUE FOR RELAXATION

From: Andrew Weil, Natural Health, Natural Medicine

Breathing strongly influences mind, body and moods. By simply putting your attention on your breathing, without even doing anything to change it, you move in the direction of relaxation. There are many worse places to have your attention—on your thoughts, for one, since thoughts are the source of much of our anxiety, guilt, and unhappiness. Get in the habit of shifting your awareness to your breath whenever you find yourself dwelling on upsetting thoughts.

The single most effective relaxation technique I know is conscious regulation of breath. I will teach you a yogic breathing exercise I give to most of my patients. It is utterly simple, takes almost no time, requires no equipment, and can be done anywhere.

Although you can do the exercise in almost any position, to learn it I suggest you do it seated with your back straight. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this feels awkward.

**First, exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound, while you pull your belly in to get all the air out.**

**Next, close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four. As you breathe in allow your belly to expand first and then allow your lungs to expand.**

**Next, hold your breath for a count of seven.**

**Then, exhale completely through your mouth, making a quiet whoosh sound to a count of eight. This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.**





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Note that you always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time. Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.

This exercise is a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system. Its benefits are subtle at first but gains power with repetition and practice. Do it at least twice a day. You can't do it too frequently. Do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice. Later, if you wish, you can extend it to eight breaths.



## CENTERING EXERCISE

This is a guided visualization exercise you can use with your clients when they need some help focusing and coming back to the present moment..

1. Go ahead and get in a comfortable position in your chair. Sit upright with your feet flat on the floor, your arms and legs uncrossed, and your hands resting in your lap. Allow your eyes to close gently (pause 10 seconds). Take a couple of gentle breaths: in...and out...in...and out. Notice the sound and feel of your own breath as you breathe in (pause) and out (pause 10 seconds).
2. Now turn your attention to being inside this room. Notice any sounds that may occur inside the room (pause) and outside (pause 10 seconds). Notice how you are sitting in your chair (pause 10 seconds). Focus on the place where your body touches the chair. What are the sensations there? How does it feel to sit where you sit? (pause 10 seconds.) Next, notice the places where your hands touch your legs. How do you feet feel in the position that they are in? (pause 10 seconds.) What sensations can you notice in the rest of your body? If you feel any sensations in your body, just notice them and acknowledge their presence (pause 10 seconds). Also notice how they may, by themselves, change or shift from moment to moment. Do not try to change them (pause 10 seconds.)
3. Now let yourself focus on being in this room. See if you can feel the investment of you and me in this room—what we are here for (pause 10 seconds). If you are thinking this sounds weird, just notice that and come back to the sense of integrity in this room. Be aware of the value or purpose that we are serving by being here (pause 10 seconds). See if you can allow yourself to be present with anything you may be afraid of. Notice any doubts, reservations, fears and worries (pause 10 seconds). See if you can just notice them, acknowledge their presence, and make some space for them (pause 10 seconds). Now see if for just a moment you can be present with your values and commitments. Why are you here? Where do you want to go? Who do you want to be? (pause 10 seconds.)



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4. Now when you're ready, let go of those thoughts and gradually widen your attention to take in the sounds around you (pause 10 seconds) and slowly open your eyes with the intention to bring this awareness to the present moment and to the rest of your day.



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## INFORMAL MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

### Enjoying the Red Light or the Telephone

When you drive around the city and come to a red light or a stop sign, you can just sit back and make use of these twenty or thirty seconds to relax-to breathe in, breathe out, and enjoy arriving in the present moment.

When you hear the telephone ringing you can think of it as your mindfulness bell. You hear the first ring and you don't move, you breathe in and breathe out. Then when you hear the second ring you pick up the phone with dignity. And you know you can take your time because if the person on the other end has something important they'll wait for the third ring.

### Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick any activity that's part of your morning routine—brushing your teeth, shaving, making the bed, showering. When you do it, totally focus attention on what you're doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound, and so on. Notice what's happening with an attitude of openness and curiosity.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, and how it sounds when it hits your body and gurgles down the drain. Notice how it looks coming out of the nozzle, and as it hits your body, and flows down the drain and the steam rising up. Notice the temperature of the water, and how it feels in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down your legs. Notice the smell of the soap or the shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, and let them come and go like passing cars. Again and again, you'll get caught up in your thoughts. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge thinking, and bring your attention back to the shower.

### Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick an activity such as ironing, washing dishes, vacuuming—something mundane that you have to do to make your life work—and do it mindfully.



For example, when ironing, notice the color and shape of the clothing, the pattern made by the creases, and the new patterns as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it and bring your attention back to the task at hand. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you're doing. Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

### Mindfulness of Pleasant Activities

Pick an activity you enjoy such as cuddling with someone you love, eating lunch, stroking your cat, playing with your dog, walking in the park, listening to music, having a soothing hot bath, and so on. Do this activity mindfully. Engage in it fully, using all five of your senses, and savor every moment. If and when your attention wanders, as soon as you realize it, note what distracted you, and re-engage with whatever you're doing.

### Mindfulness of an Object

Pick an object that you have lying around. Any mundane everyday object will do...a coffee cup or a pen for example.

Get comfortable, with your feet on the floor, and close your eyes.

Hold the object in your hands and allow your attention to be fully absorbed by the object.

Observe it. Don't assess, or judge, or study it intellectually.

Just observe it for what it is.

Notice how your mind quickly releases thoughts of past or future, and how different it feels to be in the here and now.



## Simple Awareness of Breath, Thoughts, feelings

Tune into your breathing at different times during the day, feeling the belly go through one or two risings and fallings.

Become aware of your thoughts and feelings, just observing them without judging them or yourself.

At the same time, be aware of any changes in the way you are seeing things and feeling about yourself.

## Take Ten Breaths

This is a simple way to center and connected with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially if you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

Take ten slow, deep breaths, focusing on the out breath, breathing out as slowly as possible until your lungs are completely empty, and then allow them to refill by themselves.

## Drop Anchor

Another simple exercise to center yourself and connect with the world around you. Practice it throughout the day, especially when you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

Plant your feet into the floor, push them down—notice the floor beneath you, supporting you.

Notice the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down.

Notice your entire body—and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs, into your feet.

Now look around and notice what you can see and hear around you. Notice where you are and what you're doing.



## Notice Five Things

Another simple exercise to center yourself and engage with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

Pause for a moment.

Look around and notice five things that you can see.

Listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.

Notice five things that you can feel in contact with your body (for example your watch against your wrist, your clothes against your skin, the air on your face, your back against the chair).

Try to see, hear, and feel at the same time.



## Mindful Speech

Find a quiet time when you can sit down with this and read aloud to yourself the lines below. As you read, follow the instructions. Pause between each sentence.

To learn to speak mindfully is to learn to consider what I am about to say before I say it.

When I speak mindfully, I place a pause before each sentence.

This pause gives me time to make important choices.

I will decide the content of what I am about to say.

I will decide the tone of my words.

I will choose how calmly and clearly I say my words.

As I read these sentences, I will pause for several seconds at the end of each one.

I will listen carefully to the sound of that pause and the silence it creates.

At first, for practice, I will count to three during each pause.

The slight pause I insert after each sentence gives me the opportunity to consider and evaluate mindfully the content of my next thought.

When I am mindless—when I live on automatic pilot—I tend to string all my thoughts together without a mindful pause for evaluation.

This fosters thoughtless speech based on emotion, prejudice and impulse rather than careful, deliberate speaking.

My mindless speech is reactive; my mindful speech is purposeful and calm.

The truth of mindful speech rings through like a clear bell.

This is because the slight pause I place between my sentences allows me to determine if what I'm about to say is truth or opinion, is helpful or harmful, is in praise or in criticism.





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That small pause, in fact, gives me a universe of choices that I never knew were available to me before.

With that pause, I can manage my angry voice and I can find better words of kindness or compassion.

I will remember this exercise, and the next time I speak I will know to insert a pause before each sentence—a pause so small that those who hear me will not be able to tell.

But I will know. I will know that I have inserted mindfulness into my speech.