

**Introduction to Mindfulness**  
**Gilda's Club Chicago**  
**Class 1 Notes (9/12/20)**

Thank you all for your participation and practice in class #1!  
I hope it was beneficial to you. I've already learned so much from the opportunity to share mindfulness today and I thank you.

Following are some notes from what we explored in class #1.  
I've included links to Tara Brach's website where she has extensive information to support 'beginners' beginning a mindfulness practice. I included a link to 'pandemic care resources' at both Tara's and Jack Kornfield's websites (they are the two primary teachers of my two year MMTCP program) where you can find talks and meditations on topics like "transforming your relationship with anxiety" and more).

Many thanks and sending best wishes to each of you,  
Stephanie G.  
Taos, NM

What is Mindfulness?

Jon Kabat Zinn (MBSR founder) definition:

"Mindfulness is the *awareness* that arises from paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, moment-by-moment, and non-judgmentally."

So the "practicing paying attention" in these particular ways = *mindfulness meditation practice*.

Mindfulness has two parts:

1. "A nonjudgmental, caring attention, here and now"
2. Wise response

Mindfulness is not passive. It involves a clear seeing of what is here that informs our response.

**What is meditation?**

There are many kinds of meditation.

We will be exploring **concentrative** meditations (as Kabat Zinn says above, we will be "practicing paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally") and we will explore some **heart-state** meditations.

Neuroplasticity:

We can change our brains.

What we practice grows.

Neurogenesis: "Meditation actually promotes the growth of new brain tissue in areas of the frontal cortex that trauma often damages, areas responsible for self-awareness, thoughtful judgment, and compassion." (p. 41, *The Transformation*, James Gordon 2019).

**What mindfulness is not** (from Wolf & Serna):

A relaxation exercise;

A quick fix;

A technique;

A religion.

I'd also add that mindfulness meditation is not about 'making our minds stop thinking.' We can influence our mental habits/mind states by practicing meditation regularly (neuroplasticity) and the mind can become more quiet and attention more stable with practice, but we are changing our relationship to the thoughts rather than stopping them per se.

### **Why practice mindfulness meditation?**

Life involves joys and sorrows.  
Reactivity to experiences increases suffering.

### **Home practice for week 1:**

5 minutes of mindfulness of the body or breath using an anchor

**Attitudes to practice** when you meditate (and to practice all the time frankly!) to 'cultivate'/grow mindfulness. (I didn't cover all of these yet but will do so regularly as we practice):

Curiosity  
Kindness  
Gratitude and generosity  
Acceptance  
Nonjudging  
Nonstriving  
Letting go (or letting be)  
Patience

How to get started and bring more mindfulness into your life

1. Practice (sit) daily
2. Give yourself a 'back door'--do something even if it's not the length that you'd aspired to (5 min, 10 min, 30 minute etc); commit to doing some 'formal' practice even if it is a pause before bed, feeling your body on the bed/chair.
3. If you miss a day, be kind to yourself and recommit the next day.
4. Remember what matters. You might do this as a gift to yourself to bring more calm peace in your life, to be more present and awake in your life, have more balance and centeredness with life's challenges (finding the 'eye of the storm' even in a hurricane).
5. Try sitting at a regular time
6. Practice pausing -- for example, you might pause at the top of the hour; set a bell to pause; when the phone rings, while the tea kettle heats, etc.
7. Practice being present with something you do regularly: Taking a shower, brushing your teeth, petting your dog/cat, eating, etc.
8. Keep a journal after you sit. Note patterns you notice, questions you have that you might bring to class.

Sources:

1. *A Clinician's Guide to Teaching Mindfulness (2015)*, Christiane Wolf MD, Ph.D. and Greg Serpa, Ph.D.
2. *How to Meditate FAQ*, Tara Brach, Ph.D. (see link below)
3. *The Transformation (2019)*, James Gordon, MD.

Resources:

Tara Brach, "How to Meditate FAQ"  
<https://www.tarabrach.com/faq-for-meditation2/>

Tara Brach "New to Meditation" resources including talks for beginners and guided meditations)

<https://www.tarabrach.com/new-to-meditation/>

Pandemic care resources (transforming your relationship with anxiety and other meditations/talks)

<https://www.tarabrach.com/pandemic/>

<https://jackkornfield.com/pandemic-resources/>