

Lesson 1-1

Introduction to



MINDFULNESS

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“WANDERING MIND”

A research project presented by psychologists Matthew A. Killingsworth and Daniel T. Gilbert of Harvard University, was described in the journal “Science” published on November 12, 2010.

“A human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind,” Killingsworth and Gilbert write regarding their research results. “The ability to think about what is not happening is a cognitive achievement that comes at an emotional cost.”

Humans, unlike animals, spend a lot of their time ruminating about past events, worrying about what might occur in the future, or even contemplating events that may never occur. Mind-wandering, thinking about what is not going on around them, indeed appears to be the default mode of operation of the human brain.

Their research study followed 2,250 volunteers, contacting them at random intervals. They were asked what they were doing, and if they were thinking only about their present activity or something else. When all responses were averaged the reports showed that their minds were wandering 46.9% of the time. It was also reported that at least 30% of the time their mind was wandering regardless of their current activity, with the exception of making love. “Mind-wandering appears ubiquitous across all activities,” says Killingsworth, “This study shows that our mental lives are pervaded, to a remarkable degree, by the non-present.”

The questions asked included the level of happiness they were feeling at that moment. If they were not focused on their current activity, they were asked if they were thinking about something pleasant, natural, or unpleasant. Analyses of the research indicates that their subjects mind-wandering was usually the cause of their unhappiness.

“Many philosophical traditions teach that happiness is to be found by living in the moment, and practitioners are trained to resist mind wandering and to ‘be here now,’” Killingsworth and Gilbert note in Science. “These traditions suggest that a wandering mind is an unhappy mind.” This new research, the authors say, reinforce that these traditions are right.

“Mind-wandering is an excellent predictor of people’s happiness,” Killingsworth says. “In fact, how often our minds leave the present and where they tend to go is a better predictor of our happiness than the activities in which we are engaged.”

After basic survival needs are met, it turns out that Mindfulness is the single most important determining factor in whether or not your life will be a happy one.

Stated simply, the more mindful you are the happier you are.

“AUTO-PILOT”

Wandering Mind, or Mindlessness could equate to the concept of going through the actions of life on “Auto-Pilot”.

When was the last time you drove or were a passenger - and only after arriving at your destination, realized that you didn't remember most of what occurred during the trip?

Have you ever sat down with a snack and looked down to find you had nothing left except an empty container; with little memory of eating it, without even tasting it? Most of us have.

In fact, these examples of mindlessness (as shown by the research mentioned above) are our most common state of awareness about 47% of the time.

As busy and interconnected as the world we live in has become, it is easy to understand why we give ourselves over to autopilot so much of our time. We tend to get lost in the struggle of “doing”, “getting things done”, and/or “accomplishing” in autopilot - instead of really “living”.

Whenever we give our control over to autopilot, our attention is focused in our wandering minds - therefore we are not truly “present” in our own lives. When we live our lives this way it is common to miss seeing the beauty of life - and even fail to notice the messages our bodies are sending to us.

When we're on autopilot our attention is being swept along by a never ending current of thought processes - often getting stuck in automatic conditioned ways of thinking and living that could even be harmful to ourselves or others.

Mindlessness could be compared to habit and automatic (vs. controlled) processing. These functionally fixed processes can cause rigid, unvarying behavior that may occur with little or no conscious awareness. In this state of mind, a person relies on categories and distinctions that were formed in the past in similar contexts. When information is viewed as absolute (vs. conditional) the mind finds no need to critically examine the information therefore fails to recognize alternative aspects of the situation. As a result, alternative meanings or uses of that information are not even considered.

The automatic processes can result from repeated exposure of context-dependent information but can also be formed by a single exposure of information that is accepted as absolute fact.

Mindfulness is the opposite of “wandering mind”; “autopilot”; or mindlessness.

It means that a person wakes up and “takes control of the steering wheel” of their attention again.

MINDFULNESS DEFINED

The practice of mindfulness is maintaining a moment-to-moment awareness of our experiences without judgement. It is the moment by moment awareness of what we are thinking, emotions we are feeling, physical sensations we are experiencing, along with what is occurring in our surrounding environment.

Jon Kabat Zinn, PhD. is founding Executive Director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He teaches mindfulness and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in various venues around the world.

Jon Kabat Zinn defines mindfulness as:

*“Paying attention;
On purpose,
in the present moment, and
non-judgmentally.”*

Paying attention: Wake up; *step out of the current of automatic thoughts and behaviors.* Notice, focus on, and be aware of your surroundings, thoughts, feelings, sensations and actions.

1) On purpose: Paying attention *mindfully* means to; *“take control of the steering wheel”* of your mind. Mindfulness is the conscious and deliberate focus on the direction of our attention. It is; *the act of placing our focus of attention where we choose the focus to be.* When we are conscious participants of our attention’s focus, we live more consciously -or in other words - *more awake.* We are more *fully ourselves* when we are *consciously aware of ourselves and our surroundings.*

2) In the present moment: Paying attention mindfully means; *that we are completely engaged in experiencing the present moment.* In the present moment equals - “in the *here and now*”. We can’t be ruminating in the past if we are focused on the now. We can’t worry about the future if we are focused on the now.

The *here and now* is what is; the *reality of the moment.* It requires that we let go of the tension we feel by wanting things to be different, or constantly wanting more. It means for that moment - we accept the “here and now” just as it is.

3) Non-Judgmentally: Paying attention mindfully means; that we are just noticing, paying attention to, and experiencing - our thoughts, feelings, or sensations. We avoid judging or labeling them in any way and without automatically believing them or taking them personally. When practicing mindfulness, we do not aim to control or stop them from arising.

By *simply observing,* we can become a watcher of our sense perceptions, emotions, and thoughts as they occur - without being swept away in their current. This decreases the likelihood that we will automatically think and act in our old habitual manners. We will find we have more freedom of choice in our lives.

THE MINDFULNESS MODULE OF DBT

The mindfulness module forms the foundation for the remaining three DBT modules. The distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness modules require a basic knowledge and understanding of the mindfulness skills for full effectiveness. Learning and incorporating mindfulness skills creates a greater awareness of our thoughts, feelings, impulses, and behaviors. Gaining this awareness gives us the power to better regulate our emotions as well as the ability to choose more effective actions.

“What” and “How” Skills

Mindfulness “What” Skills are exactly as they sound. What I do to be mindful: The three “what” skills are *observing, describing, and participating*. Practice exercises in this lesson will help to understand the effective use of these skills.

Mindfulness “How” Skills explain - “how to do the “What” skills”. The three “how” skills are: *nonjudgmentally, one-mindfully, and effectively*.

Three States of Mind

Reasonable Mind is that state of mind where a person gathers information and makes decisions based *purely on logic* -without considering any emotions involved in the situation.

Emotion Mind is the state of mind in which someone gathers information and makes decisions based *purely on their emotions* regardless of the lack of logic involved.

Wise Mind is a balance between logical mind and emotional mind. In this state of mind, a person considers things rationally while also considering their feelings. This balance makes it possible to acknowledge intense emotions from a nonjudgmental point of view while incorporating logic to make more effective and healthier behavioral choices.

Mindfulness helps one to achieve the wise mind state.

In the state of conscious awareness, we call mindfulness, a person is inherently aware of the context and content of information. It is described as; *an awareness turned inward toward a current felt experience*.

Although mindfulness is a passive state, it is at the same time alert, open, curious, and exploratory.

**Mindfulness simply seeks to be aware of what “is” -
while retaining an openness to novelty.**

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WANDERING MIND WORKSHEET

Arrange to have a of couple different, random interruptions during the week to test yourself as if you were participating in the “Killingsworth and Gilbert” study. You could set an alarm to go off later in the day, but this might not have the best results because for many they would be preoccupied thinking about when the alarm is due to ring. If possible, have someone give you a call, or send you a text message to tell you it is time to answer your questions.

I. 1) What were you doing when the reminder sounded? _____

2) What was your mood? What emotion were you feeling? _____

3) What were you thinking about at the time? _____

4) Did your mood correlate more to what you were doing, or what you were thinking? _____

II. 1) What were you doing when the reminder sounded? _____

2) What was your mood? What emotion were you feeling? _____

3) What were you thinking about at the time? _____

4) Did your mood correlate more to what you were doing, or what you were thinking? _____

“AUTO-PILOT” WORKSHEET

If you become aware that you have been on autopilot, not paying attention to what you are doing at the time, answer these questions:

I. 1) What action were you doing on autopilot? _____

2) What was your mood / emotion at the time? _____

3) What were you thinking about when you were on autopilot? _____

4) What effect do you think your thoughts had on your mood? _____

II. 1) What action were you doing on autopilot? _____

2) What was your mood / emotion at the time? _____

3) What were you thinking about when you were on autopilot? _____

4) What effect do you think your thoughts had on your mood? _____

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