Mindfulness Practice
A Brief Manual

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Photos by Dr. Dean Ducas where indicated
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There is a kind of secret to alleviating the emotional suffering that everyone is vulnerable to because of the realities of illness, loss, the lack of control over the world we find ourselves in, and the certainty of aging and death. We call this suffering various things such as stress, trauma, anxiety, fear, depression, emptiness.

The method that can assist us in alleviating much of this suffering seems simple, and most people reject solutions that seem simple because their problems feel so complex. Most of us, in the West, have also grown up in a culture that encourages action, fixing problems, mastering, conquering, so if a method encourages you to “do nothing”, “be nothing”, it seems strange and unconvincing. When this method is also associated with Eastern wisdom and is seen to flow from Buddhist thought and tradition, this can close many people off due to perception and misperceptions... “Eastern religion, Buddhism, monks and nuns with shaved heads, worshiping statues of Buddha, sitting in meditation for years”.
In spite of what appears to be so foreign, increasing numbers of people in the West are looking to Mindfulness and even Buddhist practice for some way to think about life and themselves, because, even though very few of us struggle just to find food and shelter, we are faced with a life which has become ever more difficult to understand.

A life in which it is easy to feel lost, overwhelmed, frightened, unimportant. While we try to cope with our personal experiences of insecurity, loss, abuse, injustice, loneliness and despair, we are bombarded with images of the ideal life we should have, one of fame and fortune. This leads to feelings of inadequacy and a kind of inner poverty. At the same time, we are presented with images of a world in chaos with political instability, unrest, war, threats of global economic crisis, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, fires, global warming, nuclear meltdowns, AIDS, mass starvation juxtaposed to our own obesity crisis, loss of faith in religion as pedophile scandals in many churches continue, corrupt and sexually promiscuous politicians, corporate greed and dishonesty.
Our response to this overwhelming life is largely to shut down, stop feeling and thinking, and fall into consumerism and escapism, where we try to make ourselves feel a little better by buying things, or having things, by identifying with something outside of ourselves like a sports team or “American Idol”. Many people, find they need something to directly blunt or alter their feelings and so turn to prescription medication, alcohol and drug abuse. These cravings can also be seen with younger people and the desire for constant stimulation, as though sitting still is painful. So we have video games with increasing violence, partying with crystal meth, ecstasy, sex as entertainment.
Even if we do not seek out the extreme forms of blunting or altering our experience, many people live day to day life caught up coping with tasks, dealing with difficulties and trying to find security and some form of happiness. We fail to realize how conditioned we have become, how we respond repetitively and unthinkingly to situations. We sleepwalk through routines and fail to see the things we see, fail to taste the food we eat or be present with others even when they are right in front of us. We become disconnected. Our experience becomes fragmented and much less vivid.
Mindfulness practice seeks to restore wholeness through opening to awareness of our moment to moment experience of life as it is; the pain, joy and sorrow; the vibrancy of life regardless of what it brings, and to deal with it directly, without reactions of anxiety or depression. We do this by developing our inherent ability to simply know directly what we see, hear, touch and think; by developing the power of observation, to be “mindful”.

This sounds too simple a solution to our complex problems, and you are right in a way, mindfulness does not solve our problems, but it changes how we experience our “problems”. We come to be able to see through our problems, and the problem changes, and how we feel changes. It is a path to understanding and wisdom, but most importantly, we feel less suffering and develop or redevelop our capacity to feel joy in simply living.

Mindfulness becomes the firm ground upon which we can stand securely in the chaos of the world. It becomes the bedrock, the foundation, the island, the vantage point from which we can see with clarity and calm.
Purpose of this Manual

The purpose of this manual is to provide readers and listeners with a taste of mindfulness practice. It is not intended to be a course or an exhaustive introduction. Hopefully it stimulates interest to you may want to learn more about these practices.

If you have a copy of this manual but not the audio portion containing guided meditations, please email me at: wnadler@live.com
Mindfulness Defined

Satipatthana is a Pali word suggesting a path or way to cultivate mindful presence, attending to immediate experience with care and discernment, living with our whole being.

A modern definition is: an awareness that arises through intentionally attending in an open, accepting, and discerning way to whatever is arising in the present moment. The mind *illuminates* everything that arises moment to moment.

Photo by D Ducas
Why Practice Mindfulness

Physical and Emotional Pain is *Inevitable* in life but *Suffering* occurs when we get caught up with beliefs and attitudes that do not allow us to let go, accept, or take rational action.

We work hard to feel in control of our lives, but are caught in learned patterns, invisible to us. We walk in a fog without really knowing where we are or where we are going. We suffer but do not understand the true source of our suffering.

Photo by D Ducas
The Sources of Suffering

- **Ignorance**: unexamined beliefs, attitudes, thoughts & prior conditionings; we act without thinking, automatically according to prior learnings, feeling and thinking the same things in what appears to be the same situation; we do not realize how repetitive and rigid we have become; how we do not see what is new or create new solutions.

- **Grasping**: desiring, wanting, having, craving, possessing, taking, hanging on; we want things, people, situations to go our way; we want things to never change when they are good; we hang on and suffer as everything changes; there is nothing to hang onto; it all slips away.

- **Avoiding**: denying, escaping, ignoring, distracting, blunting; we want to escape pain, never lose things or have to endure difficulties, disasters or even the inconveniences of everyday life; we want to deny loss and death; deny our lack of control.

Photo by D Ducas
Beliefs, Thoughts & Attitudes of Suffering

- **My Past is My Self** (believing that past events are what you are; that you have become tainted; allowing without realizing to let bad memories become your present and future; living Then in the Now)

- **Expecting It All** (feeling like a failure when things are not perfect; comparing yourself and your life to the “Stars” of our culture and feeling a sense of failure, jealousy and inner poverty)

- **Material Display** (having things, acquiring, showing to other people what you have obtained, build up self-image through presenting your “self”)

- **Small Mind** (gossiping, focus on the lives of others, their faults and problems as a way to make yourself feel less bad)

- **Catastrophizing** (whatever it is, it is the worst, or will be the worst)

- **Controlling** (wanting to be in control of uncontrollable situations, events, relationships)

- **What I Want Should Be** (things SHOULD be the way I would like; people MUST do things as I think they should; the world SHOULD recognize my feelings, wishes, thoughts)
Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness is the practice of deliberately directing our attention to what occurs in our own mind, moment by moment. It is a practice of realizing our conditioning, how we are moved by urges and desires to obtain pleasure and avoid pain, how what we think of our “self” changes constantly and efforts to maintain an identity lead to suffering and the need to distort reality to fit our conceptions.

Mindfulness is creating a bit of space in which we can find some freedom and peace.*

Please listen to the collection of Mindfulness Practices included with this manual

Photo by D Ducas
Practice

Basics:

Sit in a comfortable position on the floor or on a chair. Position is important for ease of breathing and alertness. If on the floor (use a cushion), try full lotus or half lotus. On a chair, sit on the outer third of the seat. In any position, keep the back straight, as though pulled upwards from the centre of the top of the head towards the sky and let the chest rise, chin slightly tucked in (see examples). Either close eyes or arrange to be facing a blank wall.
Practice

How to Place the Hands:
Dhyani Mudra
The back of the right hand rests on the palm of the other in such a way that the tips of the thumbs lightly touch one another. The hands rest in the lap. The right hand, resting on top, symbolizes the state of enlightenment; the other hand, resting below, the world of appearance. This gesture expresses overcoming the world of appearance through enlightenment.

Photo by D Ducas


Practice

Samatha – development of attention and deepening of peacefulness: Assume one of the positions discussed, and begin with 20 minutes practice, extending to 30 or 45 minutes.

• To begin, let your attention go to the sensations of your breathing; the rise and fall of the chest, the movement of the diaphragm, the air moving through nostrils or mouth. Breathing the sky around you. Notice where the sensations are strongest. Notice the very first sensation as you begin to inhale and then exhale. Notice any other sensations from the body, sensations of seeing, hearing, smelling, and notice thoughts, images and feelings as they arise. Notice how all these moments of experience rise and fall away.

• Then, begin to count breaths. At first count in-breath “1”, out-breath “2”, and go on like this silently counting until you reach 10 and then start over. When you lose count, as thoughts, images, feelings or sensations draw your attention, just notice that your attention has wavered and let the thought, feeling, image or sensation go, and return your attention to the breathing, beginning again at 1.
Practice

• Shift from counting each inhalation and exhalation separately and now count “1” for each complete breath (in and out), and count each breath until 10 and then start again.*

• It is expected that thoughts, images, feelings, strong bodily sensations such as pains or itches will arise as you attend to your breathing, and for a moment your mind will float away with these. Practice means to notice these driftings, over and over, and let them go by returning to attending to the breath sensations.

• When you feel that you are able to follow the breath sensations and notice the rising and falling of thoughts, feelings, images or other provoking sensations, and then you can let these go and return to the breath, all with a sense of effortlessness, then let go of the counting and just attend to the sensations of the breath and notice whatever else arises.

* Listen to guided meditations included on the CD
Practice

What You Notice During Basic Practice:

• Attending to the feelings, thoughts, images, body sensations and urges flowing through consciousness at this very moment

• The flow of phenomena is noticed; how certain ideas return again and again; how there are reactions to ideas and sensations, that is, the desire to have or avoid (very important)

• The arising and falling away of ideas, feelings and sensations is mindfully followed with an attitude of patient acceptance (accepting whatever arises, whether you find it pleasant or unpleasant is very important)

• Sensations associated with the breath are the backdrop against which thoughts, feelings, images and sensations stand out as they arise and fall.
Practice

Vipassana – Is taking practice further. Samatha leads to some awareness of how our mind works, but the main focus is on the breath and this produces in itself a deepening calm as it blocks ruminating about the future, dwelling on the past, and fragmenting in the present. Feelings of peacefulness result.

Vipassana deliberately focuses on how the mind works; on what it is doing moment to moment; how thoughts and images arise together and instantly give rise to responses such as desire, aversion or indifference; we notice themes emerge in what arises, and the sequence of thoughts and feelings.

Impermanence – thoughts, images, feelings and sensations are very fleeting; they arise and fall away rapidly no matter how you try to grasp them. It requires a kind of effort to bring an idea or feeling back moment after moment as when we ruminate, make ourselves anxious or depressed. We begin to see how we cling to ideas and objects, which leads to suffering, as even when we grab hold of something we want, it begins to lose its shine.
Practice

Impermanence (cont) – Everything changes, decays, falls away and there is always something new arising. We become stuck seeing the world in terms of our ideas about it; language makes things seem concrete. We believe that things and feelings, people and relationships are enduring, whereas the reality is that everything changes. There is nothing to cling to, and the act of clinging makes us ill, bit by bit or dramatically (as in denial of loss).

Not-self – the ideas and images we form of our self may seem substantial; may seem as though they refer to real, enduring things, such as “personality”, or a collection of traits, values, attitudes, styles.

When these are noticed during practice, they are seen to arise and fall like any other type of idea, feeling, image. We notice that we change how we feel about things; what we want changes constantly; attitudes, and values change; our view of who we are changes. We have contradictory feelings and beliefs.

We notice that we tell ourselves stories, involving the people in our lives, the situations we find ourselves in; we dream about the future and lament the past; or fear the future and idealize the past. We have arguments with people who are not here now, or who are deceased. All in the name of trying to “find” ourselves, or to “be something”. There is no something to find or anything to be, other than what you are.
As we practice, we begin to see suffering arise in an instant, and we learn that this same suffering will also fade or fall away if we do not propagate it by engaging in our usual reactions. Mindfulness helps to give distance between the stream of thoughts and self-related issues and our response to them. It is the beginning of a bit of freedom.

Practice

Reactivity - leads to suffering – just as we have a stream of thoughts, images and feelings as we engage in trying to grasp or avoid things, or trying to build up our self-image, we have reactions to all of these mental states. We have negative, positive or indifferent responses. We experience longing, anger, desire, envy, irritation, anxiety or boredom. As we practice, we begin to see that we respond so automatically and thoughtlessly that we experience all these forms of suffering and then wonder why. Even things that are positive and bring joy can then lead to fear about losing the source of the joy, actions to prevent the loss and anguish when joy fades.
Practice

*Mentalization* as a developing capacity - Practice, over time, leads to the experience of thoughts and feelings as “mental events” rather than as true, accurate versions of reality.

This creates “space” between perception and response that enables a practitioner to have a reflective — rather than a reflexive or reactive — response to situations, which in turn reduces vulnerability to psychological processes that contribute to emotional suffering.

Photo by D Ducas
Daily Mindfulness Practice

• **Ritualize**
  Dedicated time and area
  Quiet
  Appropriate seating
  Posture (position, legs, hands, head, eyes)

• **Right Thinking**
  Alert; notice what arises
  Open & Receptive; accept without judgment, resistance or grasping

• **Natural Presence**
  Experience of this present moment
  Being open to all that arises; body sensations, thoughts, images, feelings & reactions, states of mind, and awareness itself

Photo by D Ducas
Benefits of Mindful Living

- Attention
- Awareness
- Awakening
- Responsibility
- Discernment
- Wisdom
- Peacefulness
- Health

Photo by D Ducas
The Method

In order to move from sitting practice to spontaneous daily, walking about, living your life as it unfolds moment to moment practice, form the intention to notice when you are not being mindful and when you notice that you are not being mindful, bring your attention to your breath and open to all the senses, and be mindful of thinking, feelings, images, sounds, smells. When you encounter strong negative experiences, practice the following method.

Pause
Breathe
Be Mindful (situation, problem, your response, how it is unfolding)
Discern
Open/Accept/Release/Live Through/Act  (specific means to be mindful and move through difficult moments, weaken conditioned patterns, although states to complete themselves)
Opening

• Focus attention on the “problem” (anxiety, thought, urge, images, bodily pain)

• Then open around it by also noticing sensations in your body right Now.

• Notice your breathing Now, sensations in chest, diaphragm, feet, legs, hands, face Now; and also notice sounds Now and what you are seeing Now

• Stay with this until calm and the problem is placed in the context of your entire experience now.
Accepting

Many aspects of this life are unavoidable, accepting them leads to a form of peacefulness in spite of the difficulty or circumstance, and even in spite of pain that arises.

- Discomfort
- Obstacles
- Inconveniences
- Limitations
- Aging
- Loss
- Change
- Challenge to self-image

Photo by D Ducas
Living Through

We are capable of self-healing if given the opportunity. We will reach a new balance if we allow ourselves to just experience things, fully and completely, with the belief that we will be okay. Rather than avoid or try to change how we feel, let it flow and transformation will occur.

- **Be Flexible**
- Allow the feelings to flow through you
- Neither grasp or avoid
- Stay with whatever emerges while maintaining mindfulness
- Grief
- Fear
- Hurt

Photo by D Ducas
Releasing

Similar to accepting, but deeper, more encompassing. Letting yourself come to terms with the reality of how life is, how things are; that there is illness, death, lack of justice, unfairness, and at times, there is nothing we can do about it.

- Emotional closure
- Accepting finality
- Let go of grasping or avoidance
- Allowing a reorganization of the self (e.g. identity, esteem, direction, relationships)
- Letting go of desire to have something or someone return, recapture, redo, erase, get even, punish
Acting

Being Mindful of a situation, event, issue allows a more grounded, holistic, encompassing and informed decision to be made concerning whether an action is required and what will occur if this or that is done.

- Intuitive vs. Impulsive
- Whole vs. Parts
- Knowing when to act
- Standing still
- Fear of acting
- Responsibility (for what?)
- Skillful vs. Unskillful
- Values
Mindfulness Practices

Guided Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness is one element to cultivate on the path to understanding, wisdom and freedom from suffering when practiced within one of the Buddhist traditions. The guided mindfulness practices included here are meant to “whet one’s thirst” to learn more and possibly pursue more formal study. There is though, merit in practicing with these guided experiences to gain for yourself a first-hand sense of what mindfulness practice is and what it may offer to you.

In each case, it is recommended to listen to the guided mindfulness practice a number of times and then go through the practice yourself without the guide in order to deepen your learning and the benefits.
Mindfulness Practices

Packaged as part of this manual the following practices are offered to assist in the experience of mindfulness in a variety of ways.

1. **Mindfulness of breath**
2. **Mindfulness of body sensations**
3. **Mindfulness of thoughts & feelings** (noticing how we react to every thought, in mind and body)
4. **Single Pointedness** (to develop concentration and deeper sense of peacefulness)
5. **Bare Attention** (reinforces the basic instructions for mindfulness practice)