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## MtM MEDITATION -- INTRODUCTORY SESSION

### Overview

- The MtM meditation series is led by two coaches, Mike Foley and Bill Treadwell.
- Topics: the brain and body physiology, and fundamental techniques that will assist you in accomplishing moment-to-moment meditation.
- What is reviewed today as MtM mediation will be the core meditation procedure that will be used in the continuing MtM meditation series of meetings.
- The program is based on findings in scientific neuroscience research.
- The MtM session use secular meditation techniques – non-religious, non-political, genderless, and no guru.
- The overall goal is to increase awareness of one’s capacity to relax and reduce stress, with the possibility of manifesting other health benefits:  
*“Both basic and clinical research indicates that cultivating a more mindful way of being is associated with less emotional distress, more positive states of mind, and better quality of life. In addition, mindfulness practice can influence the brain, the autonomic nervous system, stress hormones, the immune system, and health behaviors, including eating, sleeping and substance use, in salutary ways.”<sup>1</sup>*
- There are no hard set techniques; participants evolve doing what works best for them after trying-out and testing various techniques.
- Any physical body position can be used: laying down, sitting in a chair, sitting on cushion cross-legged, kneeling, standing still & walking.
- Rest in a non-doing manner and minimize engagement with the outside world

Meditation is an individual experience—there is no need to compare your “self” with others. Work at your own pace, with no need to over exert yourself.

Individual success totally depends upon one’s dedication of time and effort to cultivate a mindfulness-based orientation<sup>2</sup>. The goal is to free the body from the effects of the busy mind. While attending to the breath, the body is momentarily freed from the effects of thought, because your mind cannot be doing two things at once.

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<sup>1</sup> Greeson, Jeffrey M. (2009) *Mindfulness Research Update: 2008*. Complement Health Practice Review. 14(1): 10–18. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2679512/>

<sup>2</sup> The LEAFS MtM Meditation Program does not provide medical advice. MtM participants need to consult with their physicians to seek medical advice.

## The Brain

- Video (17 minutes) – TED talk with Dr. Joe Dispenza – “Thinking to Doing to Being – three brains each with their own physiology”<sup>3</sup> Neurons that fire together, stay together.

## Physiology

- The body maintains regulatory response, balancing – homeostasis & allostasis (tight ranges for immediate survival versus wider ranges, respectively) feedback loops preserving dynamic internal balance – keeping the corresponding fluctuations of the human body within certain limits.
- **Physiological body response:** The body has primarily two directives that we live within: (1) the “**relaxation response**” being at peace, comfortable and relaxed or (2) be stressed, tense and fearful even to the extreme experience of “**fight or flight**” response. Physiologically the body reacts differently under these directives. The body cannot do both directives at the same time. Either the bodies’ physiology is tending towards relaxation or stress. When an experience creates a fight or flight response, the body undergoes several changes: your visceral body (internal organs) tightens and squeezes the blood out to the muscular system; the neocortex is also squeezed of blood and the lower “animal” brain becomes activated (thinking is diminished); since you are in an emergency situation the immune system is not needed and shuts down to supply more energy into the fight/flight response. Of course we are not always activated into the extreme of fight/flight, but continuous forms of life stress begins to accumulate similar fight/flight physiological responses. In time you become worn out, tired and more open to disease infestation because your immune system is not being optimized.

## Meditation

The foundation of Moment-to-Moment meditation has four orientations that you bring together: (1) relaxing body muscle tension, (2) body positioning, (3) using breath, and (4) treatment of thoughts.

### 1. *Stretch to release muscle tension*

- **Deep breathing** triggers relaxation. The relaxation that accompanies a deep breath reduces constriction of the blood vessels and reduces blood pressure.
- **Also** the movement of your lungs, diaphragm and rib cage act as primary pumps propelling lymph fluids in the body.

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<sup>3</sup> Thinking to Doing to Being – three brains each with their own physiology  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W81CHn4I4AM>

- **Exercise** - While sitting comfortably, take a deep breath. Did the deep breathing require you to change your position?
- **Isometrics** - A recent study<sup>4</sup> has shown that isometric exercises may also help lower your blood pressure. However, if you have high blood pressure, exercise at a lower level of intensity. Exercising at a higher level of intensity can cause a dramatic increase in your blood pressure during the activity. **Check with your doctor** before beginning isometric exercises if you have high blood pressure or any heart problems. Avoid holding your breath and straining during any exercise, as this may cause a dangerous rise in blood pressure.
- **Example --Dave Hubbard's 90 second isometric workout<sup>5</sup>** – If you do exercises while the video is running, please do so with caution...especially if you have joint or muscle issues (discomfort).
- **Let's do some simple stretch exercises** – (1) Take a deep breath and lift your body from the seat with arms (hanging will stretch the vertebrae over your center of gravity) ; (2) next take a deep breath as you lift your arms up into the air, turning your fingers facing each other with palms facing the sky; (3) Take a deep breath, lift shoulders hold up and hold, letting out your breath drop shoulders; (4) Take another deep breath and gently close your fist, holding your breath, tighten your fist, and release your fist while releasing your breath.

## 2. Your Body Position

- You will be doing sitting meditation in this class. Settle yourself into a comfortable position. Taking a deep breath will tell you whether or not you can fully use your diaphragm. Allow your hands to settle comfortably. Your hands can be on your knees face up or down, in your lap folded in some manner that feels comfortable. Close your eyes.

## 3. Basic Breathing Technique

- Breath brings energy into the body.
- Breath is life, from your first breath in as a new born child until your last breath out. We are always breathing; yet, rarely place our attention on our breathing. Breathing, more often than not, is a background activity while we pro-actively attend to other things. Breathing is the one thing we continually do throughout our life, while our internal organs function automatically using the oxygen provided our breath.
- **Abdominal breathing** is the natural breathing pattern of the new born baby. Adjust your posture so that your lungs, as well as your abdomen and chest can freely expand. Slowly breathe in through your nose expanding your abdomen area and

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/expert-answers/isometric-exercises/faq-20058186>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kA78Dtu2-q4>

then expand your chest. Slowly breathe out through your nose. Notice the rising and falling of your abdomen with each breath cycle. Abdominal breathing can help you to drift into relaxing. On exhalation, you may consciously (mindfully) allow yourself to relax.

- You can do abdominal breathing at any time during the day. It does not need to be followed by further meditation. You can use periodic abdominal breathing as a way to energize and re-focus throughout the day.
- First breath last breath – all time is marked with breath - past, future, and this moment; breath is always here and now – in the present – breath is not yesterday nor tomorrow. As you breathe, accept your life fully in this moment's breath.
- **Exercise** – Let's explore the full cycle of breath. For example while inhaling...is there any pause while inhaling? What happens at the peak of your inhalation and changing to exhaling? What about at the bottom of exhaling...are you pausing or immediately inhaling again? At your own pace, let's now take three deep breaths
- **Q&A**

#### 4. *Handling thoughts*

- Sitting in meditation is really about looking deeply into the chatter of the mind and becoming more aware of its patterns.
- Work at not thinking, not thinking about yesterday or tomorrow rather just be here and now – be present to the moment.
- If your mind begins to follow a thought, work at letting the thought go and return to sensing and following your breath.
- Thoughts do not need to be judged or evaluated as good or bad; they only momentarily exist, given you let it go and not grow the thought into a full blown story.
- You might consider using your imagination where thoughts are treated like clouds drifting across the sky, or thoughts flowing off on a river, or as the scuba diver bubbles rising up in the water to surface and burst.
- When thoughts continue to be in your mind, it's alright—don't beat yourself up; you are who you are. Allow time and practice to become stronger - patience is a virtue. Gently return to your sense of breathing.
- The point is not to stop thought, rather be aware of the thought, then let the thought go; it takes practice, practice, practice returning to your breath.
- You might begin to experience a gap of time between thoughts; grow the time between thoughts by being aware your breathing.
- Be aware that you caught yourself in thought and return to your breath is another step closer in becoming more mindful.

- As the neuroscientist Wolf Singer<sup>6</sup> famously said, “The brain is like an orchestra without a conductor.”

***Excercise - Introduction Moment to Moment Meditation - 5 minutes***

- Realize that there’s no place to go. There’s nothing to do – just asking yourself to sit and know that you are sitting.
- Mindfulness or insight meditation is simple to describe. There is only one focus. You want to sustain a single point of awareness. This focus is usually the sensation of the breath as it passes in and out of your body.
- When your mind is attracted to a passing thought, return your focus to your breath.
- The goal is to free the body from the effects of the busy mind.
- Accept your life fully in this moment, just as it is, whatever the particulars. For the moment at least, what is happening is what is happening. The future is unknown and what happened in the past is already over.

So let’s start our MEDITATION...

- Close your eyes. If you feel tense, stretch and relax your muscles.
- Take two or three deep abdominal breaths. Relax on exhalation.
- Allow your breathing to return to normal rate. There is no need to control it. Let the breath be as it needs to be. Just focus your attention on the rising and lowering of your abdomen.
- When you find yourself thinking, work at disengaging your thought (analogy car transmission in neutral – there is nowhere to go). When you discover you are thinking about something, be okay with yourself and return attention to your abdominal breath. The rising and lowering of your abdomen.
- It is a very big challenge to actually live in the presence of the moment. So, work at not becoming frustrated when you become aware of yourself caught up in one of your stories (a chain of thoughts).
- You are who you are. Accept yourself, be kind, be non-judgmental and just become aware of how busy your mind is at percolating thoughts. Generating thoughts are a normal function of the mind. Once you begin to pay attention you will realize how truly busy the mind gets. Every time you catch yourself in thought and return to your breathing in the moment is one step closer to calming your mind, aka becoming more mindful of what is truly happening in the present moment.
- You might experience discomfort. If so, explore it and then work at letting the feeling go and return to your breath.

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<sup>6</sup> Wolf Singer is Director at the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research in Frankfurt and Founding Director of both the Frankfurt Institute for Advanced Studies and the Ernst Strüngmann Institute for Brain Research. His Recent research has revealed ways in which the brain effectively coordinates widely distributed and specialized activities to meet the needs of the moment.

- Q&A Debrief participant's experience

#### CLOSING

- If time allows -- Video (11 minutes) – Dr Joe Dispenza – Breaking the Habit Who You Are.<sup>7</sup>
- Q&A

### REFERENCE MATERIALS

#### Meditation Examples

- One of many Apps available on iPhone and Android tablets and mobile phones: **Insight Timer** – The free version has over 1,000 guided meditations for you to explore and experience. For example: 6:45 minute Lake Meditation by Kabot-Zinn. You can bookmark the meditations that you like for easy re-use.
- <http://mindfulness-solution.com/DownloadMeditations.html> - Online Meditations that can be played live or downloaded.
- <http://sittingtogether.com/meditations.php> - Online Meditations that can be played live or downloaded.

#### Stories of interest relating to mindfulness

- Video (17 minutes) – TED talk with Dr. Joe Dispenza – Thinking to Doing to Being – three brains each with their own physiology  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W81CHn4l4AM>
- Video (11 minutes) – Dr. Joe Dispenza – Breaking the Habit Who You Are  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lbnrRqBjgE#t=60.501>
- Bill Moyers (February 1993 documentary series of five shows), *Healing the Mind*.  
<http://billmoyers.com/series/healing-and-the-mind/>

Ancient medical science told us our minds and bodies are one. So did philosophers of old. Now modern science and new research are helping us to understand these connections.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lbnrRqBjgE#t=60.501>

In *Healing and the Mind*, Bill Moyers talks with physicians, scientists, therapists and patients – people who are taking a new look at the meaning of sickness and health. In a five-part series of provocative interviews, he discusses their search for answers to perplexing questions: How do emotions translate into chemicals in our bodies? How do thoughts and feelings influence health? How can we collaborate with our bodies to encourage healing?

- Anderson Cooper (December 2014), *Reports on what it's like to try to achieve "mindfulness."* <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mindfulness-anderson-cooper-60-minutes/> without subscribing to CBS to view the video, you can read the report script. Cooper works with Jon Kabat-Zinn plus interviews with other scientists.

### Mindful-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Program

- **Book** - Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994 National Best Seller) *Wherever You Go There You Are*.
  - **Book** - Jon Kabat-Zinn (2013 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness*.
  - Jon Kabat-Zinn's (45 minute audio recording) *Guided Body Scan Meditation* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daU-xneLA0g> Jon takes you through doing a body scan. This is a helpful way to conduct a thorough body scan, starting with your toes and slowly working up the body and ending at your head.
  - <http://www.themindfulword.org/2013/mbsr-mindfulness-courses-stress-relax/> Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindful-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) courses that help practitioners reduce stress and relax – third party summary.
- <http://www.themindfulword.org/2012/mbsr-mindfulness-based-stress-reduction/> Summary of Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindful-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) exercises – third party summary.