



# Mindfulness as an Art of Being

Living life with equanimity & kindness



## 1) Definition: Mindfulness means being kindly aware of what is going on without judging.

- The opposite is the "autopilot" in which we spend most of the day.
- This friendly, relaxed **attitude of acceptance** can be helpful, especially in cases of anxiety, depression, physical pain, restlessness, tiredness or lack of concentration.
- mindful attention is like a spotlight that illuminates everything with a warm light.
- You can always feel this attitude in your face as a friendly look with a light smile: **"You only see well with your heart"**.
- It is an art that needs daily practice: "Mindfulness is very simple, but not easy".
- A light inner smile of **self-compassion** helps. You can practise, but never fail: "Failure" is an unnecessary judgement that can be recognised with mindfulness and overcome with a smile.
- **"Let thoughts go, let feelings come"** as a rule of thumb:

## 2) Do not believe everything you think: equanimity in dealing with thoughts

- Thoughts usually come automatically and are often not helpful. This is normal.
- Practice consciously directing my attention: Where is it right now and where do I want it?
- More interesting than worries & brooding is the question, which feelings are behind the thoughts?

## 3) Emotions are not dangerous: kindness in dealing with feelings

- Allow unpleasant experiences: Feelings are like waves and do not last forever. Although sometimes it really doesn't feel that way, feelings are not enemies that I have to fight or avoid, but more like children for whom I have full responsibility as an adult: **Can I learn to deal with feelings the same way a loving parent deals with a fearful/sad/crying child?**
- The more friendly I take care of my feelings, the more competent I feel. This fosters self-confidence and self-acceptance.

## 4) Friendly Equanimity is a skill that can be trained: Example of a daily mindfulness exercise

- Feel and enjoy how the breath flows in and out. Your attention will naturally drift off again and again. No problem, the flow of thoughts doesn't have to be stopped. It is only a matter of getting out of the stream again and again and watching it from the shore.
- Notice whether there are feelings below rumination & worries: sense and allow your feelings, breathe, smile. Notice thoughts, but don't follow them and return to breathing with the emotions.
- So the exercise is not to force yourself to stick to your breath and get angry if it doesn't work - but to be happy that you (sometimes) notice that your thoughts are wandering off, and then to get your attention back to your breath **as patiently and kindly as possible, with a light smile**, again and again: That's mindfulness.
- And when feelings come up, practice welcoming them without feeling threatened – because there is nothing you have to do with them except to feel them and to breathe.

## Common misunderstandings: what is mindfulness all about?

What mindfulness is <u>not</u> : only wanting certain experiences & judging "it has (not) worked"	What it is all about: Allowing all experiences, not wanting a different one & practicing kindness without judgement
1. Not freedom of thoughts Not wanting to "switch off"	⇒ practicing to notice thoughts without holding on to them to not get entangled in a story
2. Not freedom of feelings not avoiding feelings	⇒ Become more and more competent in allowing feelings. Making peace with feelings & oneself
3. Not "just breathing away" what's unpleasant	⇒ Learning to accept that unpleasant things are part of life, to fight less & avoid less
4. Not undistracted, deep concentration without external disturbances	⇒ Welcome disturbances & lack of concentration as an exercise in friendly equanimity
5. Not necessarily pleasant relaxation	⇒ Finding peace with unpleasant experiences relaxes even more in the long term than a relaxation exercise
6. Not indifference to unpleasant things (e. g. pain, worries, fears, ...)	⇒ dealing with ones own experience & struggles like an adult (e.g. responsibly, attentively, friendly, serene)
7. not trying to do everything correctly in order to have a positive experiences (and get angry if it doesn't work).	⇒ smiling friendly when a not-so-grown-up inner part tries really hard to have a different experience than the present one.

## The famous serenity motto

May I have the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and wisdom to know the difference.

## Examples of mindfulness in everyday life

An informal daily mindfulness practice helps to remember friendly equanimity in everyday life:

1. **Falling asleep:** Instead of worrying about tomorrow, think about what was nice today & practice gratitude. Enjoying that you have mastered the day and that there is now nothing more to do. Relax into your body, smile friendly. Maybe even relief that you now have time for your feelings?
2. **Brushing your teeth:** To start and finish the day with playing catch with your thoughts, smiling in the mirror and realising that you are lovable despite all your problems.
3. **Waiting (never again!):** Enjoy the breath and enjoy that there is nothing to do right now.
4. **Eating:** Consciously taste the first bite of a meal and be happy that you always have enough to eat & take good care of yourself by eating regularly and healthily (= love for oneself in action).
5. **Automatic thoughts:** Recognising when the words "I have to..." triggers compulsion and pressure, although the thought is not necessary at all, because there are always alternatives. To be happy when you notice the thought results in feeling freer, more self-determined and less as a victim of circumstances.

## Further tips

- **Mobile apps with guided meditations:** *Insight Timer* with numerous free guided meditations. Other good apps are *Headspace* & *7mind* but only have limited free content.
- **CD with guided exercises with booklet:** Jack Kornfield. *Meditation for beginners*.