



An Introduction to Mindfulness and Mindful Educating

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Mindfulness is Not...

- *A religion*- roots are in Buddhism but practiced by people from all faiths for religious and other purposes.
- *A technique*- utilizes techniques but is a way of being.
- *Focused on Relaxation or Stress Reduction*- these can result, but it embraces all emotional states, even anxiety, anger, etc.
- *About escaping*- it's about learning to be right where you are.



Mindfulness is...

**Paying attention in a particular way;
on purpose,
in the present moment, and
non-judgmentally**

- ***Paying Attention-*** from a mindful perspective, we're all ADHD: scattered and largely unaware of our immediate surroundings
- ***In the Present Moment-*** most time and energy spent thinking about the past or planning and worrying about the future. The present moment is the only moment we are alive in, yet it occupies little of our awareness.
- ***Non-judgmentally-*** accepting all feelings and thoughts (no matter how painful and unpleasant) without resistance. Recognizing thoughts as perspectives, not ontological reality. Without thought, pain is just pain. Thought (specifically, the inability to accept and experience the pain) transforms pain to suffering.
- Contrasted with living on "autopilot"

Benefits of Mindfulness

- Research has proven the efficacy of mindfulness in treating:
 - *Severe psychological issues*- depression, anxiety, psychosis, body image problems, substance abuse, trauma, exhibitionism, eating disorders, nicotine addition, and ADHD.
 - *Non-clinical psychological issues*- anxiety, negative affect, attention and memory, self-esteem, & stress.
 - *Physical issues*- psoriasis, chronic pain (herniated disk, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, migraines) and reducing pain and complications in cancer patients.
 - Interpersonal problems- empathy, marital relationships, parenting.

See Chambers, R., Gullone, E., & Allen, N.B., (2009). Mindful emotion regulation: An integrative review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29, 560-572. for a comprehensive review of this Research.

Benefits of Mindfulness in Education

Students

- Decreased test anxiety, aggression, absenteeism, suspensions
- Increased attention, academic self-efficacy, social skills, reasoning, speed of information processing, creativity, classroom community
- College students in meditation study group had significant higher GPAs after 1 year (Hall, 1999).

See Hart (2004). Opening the contemplative mind in the classroom, *Journal of Transformative Education*, Vol 2, (1).

Faculty

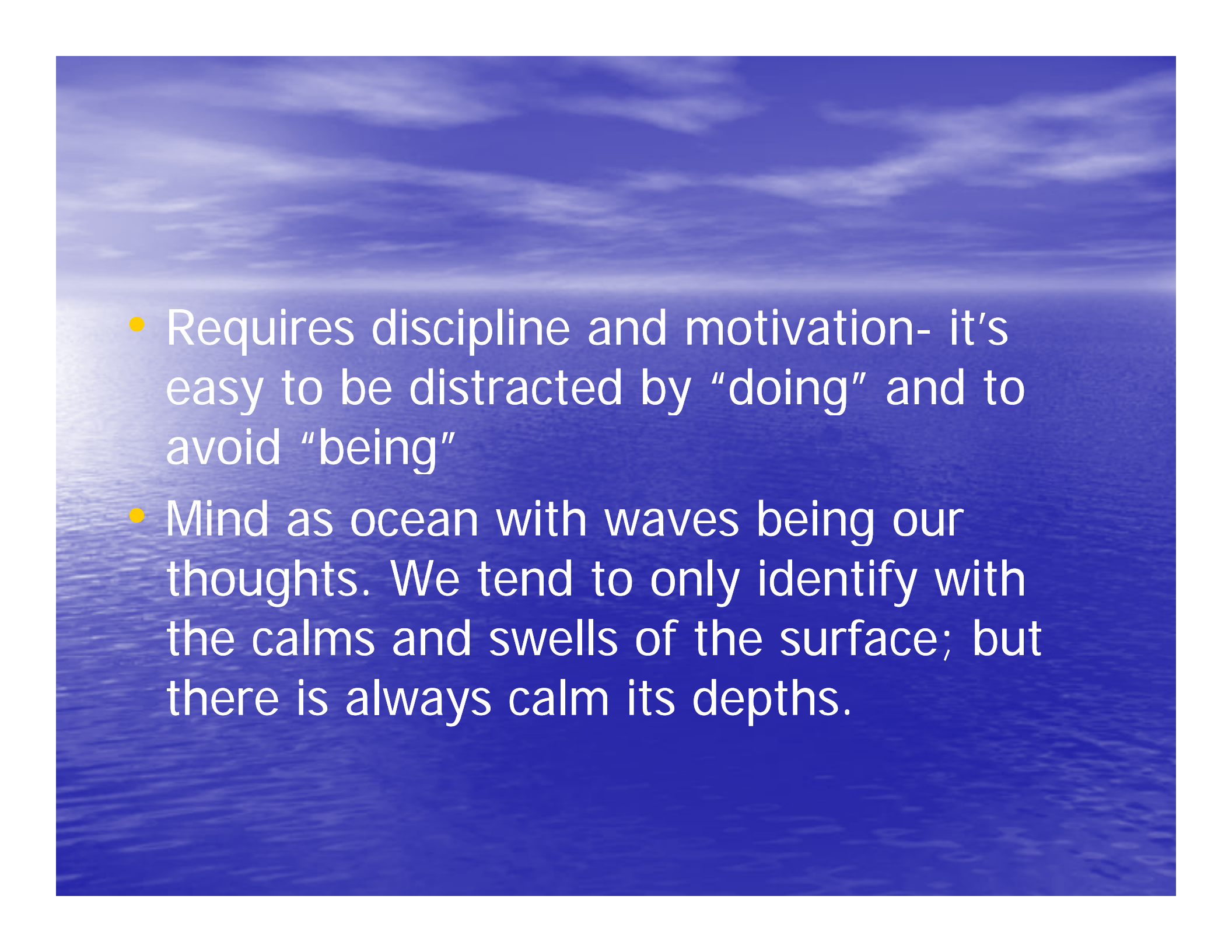
- **Teaching**- teachers who are mindful are likely to be more present, alert, compassionate, patient, reflective, creative, and less susceptible to burn-out.
- **Presenting**-reduces performance anxiety and allows free transmission of ideas.
- **Writing**- assists in the creative process by slowing and calming a noisy, outcome-based mind and allowing true "wisdom" to flow through the writer.

Why Is Mindfulness Helpful?

- Relaxes the sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight) believed responsible for “nerve” related health problems (e.g., blood pressure, heart disease, digestive tract, chronic pain, etc.). Slows heart rate, breathing, digestive processes.
- Research with EEG machine=increase in alpha brainwaves (focus & attention) and decrease in delta brainwaves (drowsiness)
- Increases heart/brain synchronization-alpha rhythms synchronized to heartbeat
- Meditators found to have thicker cerebral cortexes (Narr, 2007; Lazar et al., 2005), which are associated with memory, attention, intelligence.
- Improves cognitive functioning-
 - Cognitive diffusion-perceiving thoughts as simply thoughts
 - Reduction in over-generalized autobiographical memory-things were not as bad as you thought
 - Down-regulation of defensive mechanisms and actions- including repression, avoidance, sublimation, projection, etc.
 - Cognitive flexibility- allowing challenges to be addressed consciously rather than simply reacting.
 - Non-reactive awareness- allows for increased exposure to and examination of a wide range of unpleasant thoughts and feelings.

Meditation to Cultivate Mindfulness

- Meditation- from the same Sanskrit root as *medicine* – believed to mean “help bring higher or right order”. Understood most simply as attention training.
- Two forms:
 - Concentrative- focused attention on a single object or process (e.g., mantra, Mandala, meditative prayer, sound, **breathing**).
 - Mindfulness or insight (Vipassana)-focused attention on the present, including all sense perceptions, thoughts etc, while avoiding all secondary processes (e.g., labeling, judging, resisting). Not thinking, but being aware of thinking and all other senses. Reclaiming the present!

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- Requires discipline and motivation- it's easy to be distracted by "doing" and to avoid "being"
 - Mind as ocean with waves being our thoughts. We tend to only identify with the calms and swells of the surface; but there is always calm its depths.

Risks of Mindfulness Practice

- Not being present is a defense, and some defenses can be difficult to overcome.
- Risks can range from agitation to intense fear and anger as we become more aware of the human condition and thus live more authentically.

Integrating Mindfulness into the Classroom

- Ringing the Bell to Focus
- Guided meditation before exams
- Free writing exercises
- Meditations on selected readings- encourage connections of content to their lives.
- Reducing judgments- language, grading.

- Brady (2005). Mindfulness & Mathematics: Teaching as a Deep Learning Process.

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- Shapiro, Warren Brown, & Astin, Toward the integration of meditation into higher education: A review of research. <http://www.acmhe.org/MedandHigherEd.pdf>
- Shinzen Young's Website <http://www.shinzen.org/>
- Mindfulness in Education Network-- <http://www.mindfulled.org/>
- Association for the contemplative mind in higher education-- <http://www.acmhe.org/>

Getting Started

- Focus on the breath- connection between the mind, body, and spirit. Provides “anchor” for mindful meditation.
 - fall asleep,
 - become agitated and restless,
 - “fall awake”,
 - some combination.
- Mindful eating –raisin, proven to enhance attention.
 - View, feel, smell, pay attention to thoughts
 - Eat, allow to sit in mouth, chew slowly, visualize swallowing , feel one raisin heavier.