

# The concept of mindfulness

Psychology, Child Development



## MINDFULNESS

### Introduction

“ Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” – Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn (1991). The concept of mindfulness had originated from eastern ground of Buddhism. In Buddhist conventions, “ mindfulness” has a relation with term “ sati” in Pali form or “ smrti” in Sanskrit (which means present-moment awareness). In Buddhist lessons, “ mindfulness” is used to create self-learning and insight, to develop enlightenment of the self and liberation from miseries. According to Lau, Grabovac & Willett, 2011), Buddhism recognizes two particular components of mindfulness i. e. concentration (which means samatha in Pali) and insight (i. e. vipassana in Pali). Samatha method includes focusing ones attention to an object and excluding everything else. On the other hand, in “ vipassana” the three characteristics i. e. impermanence, suffering and attainment of egoless self is primary focus of attention.

Mindfulness denotes to the concepts of living in highly aware state of mind, where the individual is aware of his surroundings, thoughts, emotions, soul and his bodily sensations in a sense that he or she can live in a self-aware manner acting as an observer, by being non-attached to the events of life thereby to maximize the functionality of human body and its senses.

Mindfulness as an act allows the individual to act as an observer (drasthi matr) to the events that are occurring outside as well as inside and the impact that it is creating within the person, without having a judgmental perspective.

In Indian act of mediation and Samadhi the individual enter a state where they become the drastha (the observer) and without disturbing the process experience the whole process of bliss and attain a neutral state of being , where he /she is not affected by the emotional reactions of the situations. With mindfulness training, individual accepts this universal reality that events will happen and will carry both positive and negative emotions with it, but with mindfulness individual learns to separate those event from self and identify as a neutral observer to those events. According to studies, Most of the individuals are just abruptly acting to the events and situation without analyzing or observing the impact these events create. Individual feel helpless in controlling their reactions to unfavorable situations. Mindfulness trains the wandering mind and create harmony which allows the individual to be attentive internally without being distracted.

Mindfulness has been defined differently by different individuals, some of the Basic definitions of mindfulness include “ moment-by-moment awareness” (Germer et al., 2005), “ keeping one’s consciousness alive to the present reality”(Hanh, 1976), “ attentional control” (Teasdale, Segal, & Williams, 1995), “ a form of self-regulation of attention” (Hassed, 2013), “ paying attention with purpose, nonjudgmentally, and while in the present moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, 2005), “ the bringing of one’s awareness to current experiences through observing and attending to the changing field of thoughts, feelings, and sensations from moment to moment”(Bishop et al., 2004), and “ complete attention to one’s experience on a moment-tomoment basis” (Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999).

All these definitions highlights three themes that is living in present, being an observer of one's own thoughts, emotion, anxieties and intentionally bringing the attention of wandering mind to the present awareness, which is dwelling in past and thinking for future endeavors in a purposeful and non-judgmental manner. Instead of going into thoughts, feelings and sensations, individual basically watch them emerge and let them pass away without being drawn into them. The act of not taking an interest engages a person to see that the results of the mind are temporary, unavoidable parts of oneself, but rather are basically short lived events that arise and go. In mindfulness the individual learn to act as an observer and not ne influenced by the anxieties, tension and stress (Dukh , sukh, moh , maya) aroused and let them pass away by maintaining a non-judgmental attitude and not being impacted by them negatively as well positively. The individual has to remain " sam" (despite whatever atrocities occur). As opposed to following the mind where it needs to go, individual just return to doing what one initially expected to do, focusing on what is going on here and now. Mindfulness enable individual to act intentionally, not being driven aimlessly by the motivations of the mind and reestablishes one's capacity to pick when and how to react. Handberg and Muhr analyzed the key theorems that lie beneath conventional mindfulness teachings (e. g., the discrepancies among mind-body as well as subject-object).

### Mindfulness Vs Mindlessness

Ellen Langer explained about the notion of " mindlessness" i. e. the opposite of " mindfulness". Langer (2006), has defined mindlessness as a state of

consciousness marked by little or no awareness of what is going around in the present environment. Mindlessness contribute to attributional errors or biases that individual make in reacting to situations. Mindlessness is a state which is governed by routine and habituated responses. For example reading a book, but thinking of something else and not being attending to the content. Mindlessness is parallel to some notions like automatic information processing, habit and functional fixedness (Langer, 1992). The concept of mindless acts are illustrated by a whole or partial lack of attention and conscious awareness of new and novel details (Piper and Langer, 1987). When individuals are mindless, they are confined by a rigid perception, people behave like machines, dominated by their past and guided by rules and habits.

#### Mindfulness as a Trait or State

Mindfulness has been broadly explored and has been studied as a state, trait as well as both. According to Chiesa, (2012), most scholars consider mindfulness as a trait that can be attained by training. Mindfulness has been studied as a single faced trait as well as a multifaceted trait by some investigators and there is still no agreement over this. Brown and Cordon (2009) posited that trait mindfulness is the nature of a person's everyday experiences and that state mindfulness is the stimulated state of mind that occurs during and immediately after meditation. Treadway and Lazar (2010) described trait mindfulness as a change that occurs slowly over a period of time with continued mindfulness practice. They also concluded that trait mindfulness is a result of changes in the brains & activity and structure.

Various mindfulness questionnaires like FFMQ (Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006), MAAS (Mindful Attention Awareness Scale; Brown & Ryan, 2003), CAMSR (Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale- Revised; Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, Laurenceau, 2007), etc. measure mindfulness as a trait. Lau, Bishop, Segal, Buis, Anderson, Carlson and Devins (2006) put forth that mindfulness can also be described as a mode, or state-like quality, that is maintained only when attention to experience is intentionally cultivated with an open, non-judgmental orientation to experience. Lau et al. (2006) developed a mindfulness questionnaire called the Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS) which is the only existing scale which measures mindfulness as a state. The thesis aims to study mindfulness as a trait as well as a state and see how they both change over the sessions of various mindfulness and related practices.

### Theories of Mindfulness

Bodhi, (2003) said that Mindfulness as a contemplative practice is based on the Buddhist notions of Suffering (caused by living with illusion of permanent self), impermanence (all events and facets of life are transitory) and egolessness (there is no enduring self). However there are modern theories of mindfulness that has also been defines. Some of the theories of mindfulness that has been highlighted are A model to explain mindfulness was developed by Shapiro's (2006), which talked about three axioms or components underlying the process of mindfulness. i. e. intention, attention and attitude. According to the model all these components work in collaboration and coincide with each other. The model highlight that to

achieve mindfulness (being in present moment). The individual intentionally attend to the external and internal experience by maintaining a compassionate and non-judgmental attitude, which is purposeful.

According to Shapiro's model attention involves focusing on being in a highly aware state by using the skills of sustained attention, willful attention and cognitive inhibition. The component of intention talks about why one is practicing as there has to be a person vision around practicing. And lastly attitude which needs to be compassionate and non-judgmental for effective mindfulness practice which helps the individual not to cling to both pleasure as well as pain (S. L. Shapiro et al., 2006). According to Shapiro (2006), the result of intentional attending lead to change in perspective i. e. "reperceiving", which is becoming an observer to events around and be aware of contents of the consciousness ( i. e. meta awareness). Reperceiving helps in self-regulation, values clarification and cognitive flexibility, which is attained after the extinction of mindless reactivity to stimulus.

Hozlel et al. (2010), came with another model to explain the mechanisms underlying mindfulness. He included two concepts other than Shapiro i. e. of "enhanced self-regulation" and "self-compassion". He said that practicing mindfulness help an individual to develop prolonged attention capacity which help them to notice when their mind wanders from the focused intent and redirecting it back, i. e. they develop "attention regulation". Author said that by developing attention regulation, i. e. sustaining ones attention on internal and intrinsic experiences, individual increases body awareness. Further he said that mindfulness help an individual to develop emotional regulation i. e.

focusing one's attention on the present task and the ability to suppress the inappropriate behavior, emotion, and thought that arise during the process. As per the model (Hozlel, 2010) emotional regulation is achieved through “exposure” (in exposure the individual lets the thoughts, emotion, or any feelings to arise without suppressing them or getting involved in them), “consolidation” and “extinction” (Hozlel said that through meditation, individual achieves a relaxed state which overtakes the earlier feared stage and extinguishes the pattern of reactivity that individual used earlier).

According to Hozlel, by getting involved in the above process, individual's usual pattern of reactivity to outside and inside experiences are changed, it helps the meditator to have a shift in perspective of self and realize that all the thoughts, emotions, and feelings are transitory in nature. This helps an individual to distinguish between normal consciousness and content of consciousness (Hozlel, 2010) i. e. they develop meta-awareness. With development of meta-awareness through mindfulness, there is a shift from “Jeev bhav” to “Dristhi bhav”, person changes from a participator (identifying with all internal happenings) to observer (witnessing all the distress that's happening without being impacted by them), thereby enhancing their self-regulation. Another concept Hozlel talked about was of “self-compassion” in creating mindfulness. He said that “self-compassion” i. e. by generating feeling of kindness towards oneself rather than abrupt reactivity to internal and external situation, one can bring a change in self-perspective. However Baer (2003) criticized that both self-compassion and emotional regulation are outcomes of mindfulness and not necessary stages to create it.



Baer (2006) came up with a five factor model to assess mindfulness, which included that includes “ non-reactivity to inner experience; observation of experience; awareness of actions; describing/labelling experience with words; and nonjudging of experience. They found a significant positive correlation between all of these facets and self-compassion (as measured by the Self-Compassion Scale; Neff, 2003a)”. According to this model self-compassion and non-reactivity to inner experiences correlated the most and self-compassion came out as a key outcome of mindfulness. Baer (2006) highlighted that when there is a decrease in reactions to inappropriate situation, a change in individual’s self-identity is observed which is very well manifested by mindfulness and self-compassion plays a very important role in this. It tells the individual to kindly and compassionately react to oneself and not be harsh on oneself.

The De-contextualization model of mindfulness (DMM) utilized the components of Power’s model (1973) & Wegner and Vallacher (1985) model to demonstrate a description of how exactly the mind is formed psychologically and how mindfulness practices might work therein to create a state of mindfulness. The DMM describes how attention goes around hierarchically connected feedback loops to increase “ awareness to meta-awareness” where the contents of the mind stop being part of the person’s self as the individual dis-identify with these contents. The DMM also illuminates how attention to attitudes and intentions produces hierarchically connected feedback loops which provides contents of the mind that are contributing to mindfulness rehearsals. Furthermore, the DMM give attention to “ self-compassion”, and describes that it may perhaps work as a unique

sort of hierarchical procedure that directs the attitude to the self in a manner which expands psychological well-being, for which the self-concept has great connotations for. The DMM has also been studied in case of depression and how information process style of people with depression might work.

Another Mindfulness theory proposed by Langer and her colleagues adopted a cognitive dual information-processing model centered on contrary mental states of mindfulness or mindlessness (Moscardo, Moldoveanu & Langer 2000, 2008). This model reflects that a mindful person is more attentive to what they are doing and learning, while a mindless person responds in an automatic manner and does not discriminate novel stimuli as willingly. Hence, improving the mindfulness quality of an interpretative material expands its efficiency. Concludingly, all the models of mindfulness highlights the mechanism underlying mindfulness and outcomes that mindful training leads to.