

Mindfulness – What is it? – *By Dr. Vibeke Møller*

In the last 40 -50 years the concept mindfulness has been spread in most of the Western world as a tool to get peace and happiness, a way to get out of the doing mode that often creates stress and to enter the being mode. It has been so well marketed, made eatable and sold in packages that people, organizations, business leaders and churches have accepted it without looking at the root and the philosophy behind it. Mindfulness has invaded the health sector and many psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists and doctors Christian as none Christian are prescribing mindfulness in different ways because it claims that it can relieve, stress, anxiety and depression. It has also had its entrance in the schools where it is sold as a way of relaxation and children are taught the mindfulness techniques. You find mindfulness classes in the churches, at the evening schools, at the university and at the different new age centers just to mention a few. Mindfulness is sold as non-religious and non-spiritual and as a totally secular technique and is asserted scientifically proven for mental health problems. People today are multitasking and need peace in their life and relaxation in this stressed and hyperactive world where everything is happening on a very high speed. But where to find the peace and relaxation? The researcher will come back to this question.

There is a big discussion going on between the Christians about mindfulness. Is Christianity compatible with Buddhism? Are the Buddhist techniques of mindfulness compatible with Christianity? Can a Christian use the different mindfulness techniques or not? What does the Bible say about mindfulness? Can you use the technique as a help in your personal devotion, worship, Bible reading etc.? There are many questions to be answered and the answer given positive or negative is often depending on to which church denomination you belong.

In fact, mindfulness has its origin in Hinduism and Buddhism. It is the word sati (that means right mindfulness – no-mind (A catholic Guide to mindfulness p.9)) which is the Seven step of **The Noble Eightfold Path which again**

is the Four of The Noble Truth taught by Buddha) that is translated into English as mindfulness.

Let us look at mindfulness and Buddhism.

The Definition of Mindfulness:

- Mindfulness is what arises when you pay attention on purpose in the present moment, non-judgmentally and as if your life depended on it
- It is a state of active open attention on the present by which you observe your thoughts and feelings as if from a distance without judging them good or bad (A Catholic Guide to Mindfulness p.1)

Jon Kabat-Zinn is one of the most famous in the mindfulness business and one of the founders of the western form of mindfulness (sati). He was a biomedical scientist that developed MBSR – Mindfulness-Based-Stress-Reduction. In 1964-1974 he had his training in molecular biology at MIT.

He met and was inspired by a popular Zen missionary Philip Kaplau at a meeting. After this meeting he began to meditate daily. He is a member of the faculty of the Biological Department at Brandies University, USA – teaching molecular genetics (A Catholic Guide to Mindfulness by Susan Brinkmann page 22).

Marcia Montenegro (www.christiananswerstothenewage.org) says in her article...:

“mindfulness is an outlook on life and reality that ideally results from a type of meditation designed to cultivate detachment. Detachment in Buddhism is necessary because attachments to this world, to your thinking, to your identity as an individual self, and other attachments such as desire keep you in the cycle of rebirths”

“Mindfulness is grounded in common sense. This is an oxymoron because there is no real mind in Buddhism. You must achieve no-mind. So how come the word mindfulness when Buddhism teaches this?”

Jon Kabat-Zinn says in his book Mindfulness for Beginners p.22:

“It is fair to say historically speaking that the most refined and developed articulations of mindfulness and how to cultivate it stems from the Buddhist tradition, and Buddhist texts and teachings constitute an invaluable resource for deepening and appreciation of mindfulness and the subtleties of its cultivation.”

To make it eatable for the western world Jon Kabat-Zinn has expressed this:

“Why not develop an American vocabulary that spoke to the heart of the matter and did not focus on the cultural aspects of tradition out of which dharma (teaching) emerged – not because they were not ultimately important but because they would cause unnecessary impediments for people who were basically dealing with suffering and seeking some kind of release”.

Jon Kabat - Zinn established The Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness and mixed together what he had learned from the Zen monk – Thich Nhat Hanh.

There are different mindfulness techniques:

1. Body Scan: to bring awareness to each part of the body to see how it is today
2. Movement Scan: a kind of yoga and qigong. It is a body mind exercise. The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh has written a book about this called Mindful Movements: 10 exercises for Well-Being – simple deep motions based upon yoga and tai-chi
3. Breathing space meditation
4. Expanding awareness meditation – meditation 10-30 minutes a day
5. Sitting and walking mindfulness = the practice of Buddha’s teaching = Dharma

There are different levels of intensity in mindfulness meditation (A Catholic Guide to Mindfulness, loc 87):

1. The lowest level of intensity is simple practices of awareness
2. The moderate level of intensity - daily practices about 40 minutes per day. This the form is used in therapy
3. The most intensive level of mindfulness – a retreat where the participants meditates for hours during a week or more. The goal is to achieve a state of powerful concentration in order to reach awakening through meditative attainments called jhanas or absorption which are states of deep mental unification which results from centering of the mind upon a single object with such power of attention that total immersion in the object is taken place.

Buddhism:

The Root of Buddhism:

Buddhism has risen out of Hinduism and that is why you find much of the same content both in Hinduism and Buddhism. Both teach about reincarnation and meditation. Hinduism existed for about 2000 years before Buddhism that was founded about 500 B.C. The first Buddha was a prince Siddharta Gautama. He was kept away from the sufferings of the world. When was 29 years old he left his family and became a monk and began to meditate to get enlightenment. He sat under the Bodhi tree and meditated and became awaken. He was then Buddha (that means the awaken one). Buddha traveled around in India and taught how to get the enlightenment by The Four Noble truth and the Noble Eightfold Path (**A Catholic Guide to Mindfulness p.9-16**).

As the researcher has mentioned before Mindfulness – sati is a part of the Noble Eightfold Path of

The Four Noble Truth:

- Life is suffering – Dukkha- that is difficult to bear
- The cause of suffering is desire - grasping, clinging, aversion
- To be free from desire we must detach from desire. If we detach from suffering, then we will have Nirvana = the state of being free from grasping and controlling. It is known as supreme Bodhi or awakening to the true nature of reality and our own true nature.
- Desire can be extinguished through following the “The Nobel Eightfold Path”.

The Noble Eightfold Path:

1. Right understanding
2. Right Thought
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effect
7. Right mindfulness (Sati)
8. Right concentration

The fifth century Theravada monk Buddhaghosa suggested that mindfulness was intended to remove one from the external world. His teaching is largely anti relational for relationships bring attachment and attachment brings suffering.

“He says: Relatives are no more closely united than travelers who for a while meet at an inn, and then depart again, losing sight of each other. This world is by nature split up into disjointed parts, no one really belongs to anyone else. It is held together by cause and effect as loose sand by a clenched fist” (A Catholic Guide to Mindfulness, loc 71).

The goal of Buddhist meditation according to Buddhaghosa is to become entirely self-focused and free from the joys and attachments of relationships so that one can escape from pain and the mercy of reincarnation (**A Catholic Guide to Mindfulness, Loc 71**). Christianity views relationships not as problematic but as a requirement of how to grow in charity and love (Heb.10:24).

To meditate one should shun familiarity with others, as if they were thorn in the flesh.

Buddhas last words:

“ Behold o monks, this is my last advice to you. All components of things in the world are impermanent. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation” (A Catholic Guide to Mindfulness, loc 87)

Mindfulness contain different forms of meditation techniques. It is said that mindfulness can change the brain. Andrew Newberg in his book (How God Changes Your Brain) write that all forms of meditation can alter the brain.

The great leader and guru in mindfulness today is the monk Thich Nanh Naht says that the teaching of mindfulness has its basis in conscious breathing and of being fully aware of the present moment like Buddha.

He taught:

“that the only way to develop peace in oneself and the world is by living in the present moment through the practice of mindfulness.”

He has written in his book – Being Peace:

“Meditation is what is going on in your body, feelings, mind and world (Location 92).”

“If in our daily life we can smile, if we can be peaceful and happy, not only we but everyone will profit of it – this is the most basic peace work (Location 100).”

“Smiling means that we are ourselves that we have sovereignty over ourselves that we are not drowned in forgetfulness. This kind of smile can be seen on the faces of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (Location 100).”

“Buddha nature: This capacity to wake up of being aware of what is going on in your feelings, in your body, in your perception, in the world. To smile is peace (Location 157).”

“We are all Buddhas” (Location 187).

“I take refuge in the Buddha – people are expressing trust in their own capacity of understanding, of becoming awake (Location 187)”.

“I go back and rely on the buddha in me (Location187)”.

“Knowledge is regarded as an obstacle to understanding. The Buddhist’s way of understanding is always letting go of our views and knowledge in order to be transient (Location480)”.

“In Buddhism there is no such thing as an individual – empty of a separate self (Location 512)”.

Marcia Montenegro writes in her article about the monkey mind

(www.christiananswerstothenewage.org):

“The thinking mind is targeted as a” chattering monkey”. Thoughts are chatter and meditation is to control and tame this monkey mind so that it can become Buddha mind.”

Thoughts and thinking are dangerous to spiritual enlightenment in mindfulness.

There several words in Buddhism that sounds like Christian words. Compassion(karuna) in Buddhism means to free all sentient beings from the cycle of rebirths. In Buddhism too, you have compassionate killing. Normally you must not kill but it is allowed if it is for the good of many people.

In Buddhism meditation is not used to calm anxiety but to bypass the mind and reach a no-mind and no thought state.

Are there any side effects of mindfulness meditation?

Well it is known that that varieties of meditation and contemplation can affect the person so that they can experience sensitivity to light, panic, insomnia, involuntarily movements, dizziness, depersonalization, detached from one's body, psychosis, delusions, anxiety, low appetite.

Guided breathing: Higher risk for false memories.

Discarding of positive thoughts because one learns to separate one's thoughts – then discarding all thoughts.

Avoidance of critical thinking.

Christian meditation is to understand the why and how of the Christian life and respond to what the Lord is asking. Non-Christian Eastern meditation is a purely mental exercise, a way to manage thoughts and induce altered state of consciousness where one can achieve personal enlightenment and self-discovery.

Father Thomas Dubay (The buddha Pill):

Our communion with the living God is completely interpersonal, intensely so we adore, love, praise and thirst for our triune Beloved.

For the Buddhist it is extremely impersonal and not at all a relationship between persons, let alone an intimate friend. Buddhist meditation extinguish the belief in the self and cease to exist.

For the Christian we die to ourselves but do not cease to exist

Christian meditation engages the whole man – thought, imagination, emotion and desire in prayer.

Christianity is fueled by divine grace, mindfulness is fueled by our weak human efforts.

Mindfulness: Escape from anxiety. Christianity offers a solution to anxiety. Mindfulness: momentary improvement. Christianity offers a permanent transformation

Mindfulness is a quick fix. Christianity is a long-term opportunity for personal growth toward the ultimate goal – union with God

Buddhist centered mental practices leads to self-enlightenment. Christianity – a loving union with God. The Christians never need to rely on other religion for spiritual growth.

Mindful Meditation Myths (The Buddha Pill p.205):

Meditation was primarily designed not to make us happier but destroy our sense of individual self – who we feel and think we are most of the time- is often overlooked in the science and media stories.

Myth 1:

Meditation produces a unique state of consciousness that can be measured scientifically.

Facts:

Meditation produces states of consciousness that we indeed can measure using various instruments. These states are not physiologically unique. Different kind of meditations may have diverse effects on consciousness (and on the brain), there is yet no scientific consensus about what these effects are.

Myth 2:

If everyone meditated, the world would be a much better place. TM (transcendental meditation) and Buddhist-based mindfulness tradition have claimed that meditation can reduce aggression and increase compassionate feelings and behaviors.

Facts:

All world religion shares the belief that following their particular practices and ideals will make us better individuals. So far there is no scientific evidence that meditation is more effective in making us more compassionate or less aggressive than other spiritual or psychological practices. Research on this topic has serious methodological and theoretical limitations and biases. Most of the studies have no control groups.

Myth 3:

If you are seeking personal change and growth, meditating is as or more efficient than having therapy – MBSR, MBCT.

Facts:

Very little evidence that an eight-week mindfulness-based program has the same benefits as those of being in conventional psychological therapy.

Myth 4:

Meditation can benefit everyone. Meditation, including mindfulness is popular presented and endorsed as a technique for improved wellbeing, inner peace and happiness that works for everyone. Panacea.

Facts:

The idea that meditation is a cure-all – and for all lacks scientific basis

Arnold Lazarus wrote: One man's meat is another man's poison (The Buddha Pill p.146). There is a growing awareness that meditation works differently for everyone.

Myth 5:

Meditation has no adverse or negative effect. It will change you for the better (and only the better). There is this expectation that that meditation leads to self-discovery and healing or even produces a highly moral compassionate character and has no ill effects.

Facts:

On the surface of things, it is easy to see why this myth might become known. After all, sitting in silence, focusing on your breathing would seem like an innocent activity with little potential harm. The dark side of meditation. Swami Ambikanada (The Buddha Pill p.177) The way I like to explain it. When you cook the scum arises to the surface. Meditation can be associated with stress, negative effects, mental health problems and violence.

Myth 6:

Science have unequivocally shown how meditation can change us and why.

Facts:

Meta analyses show that there is moderate evidence that meditation affects us in various ways such as increasing positive emotions and reducing anxiety. However, it is less clear how powerful and long-lasting these changes are. What is the active ingredient in MBCT?

Myth 7:

We can practice mindful meditation as a purely scientific technique with no religious or spiritual learnings

Facts:

Research shows that meditation leads us to become more spiritual and that increase in spirituality is for the practice's positive effects. So even if we set out to ignore the spiritual roots those roots may nonetheless envelop us to a greater or lesser degree. Overall, it is unclear whether secular models of mindfulness are fully secular.

As the researcher is a Christian the researcher wants first to go to the Bible and discover the places where the word mindful is written and see how different Bible translation have translated the word mindful.

The Greek word for mindful are **mnaomai**, - be mindful, remember, to recall, bring to mind.

mimnesko, mnemoneuo mean the same. The Hebrew word is **zakar** with the same meaning.

Nowhere in the different Bible translation is the word mindful translated with awareness. And the researcher cannot find the word mindfulness. The word mindful is translated remember.

The researcher thinks it is very important as a Christian to look at what does the Bible say about peace, anxiety, happiness, soul, mind, compassion, meditation prayer.

There is a great risk and danger of being affected by the Buddhist teaching and practices. Often it is not told that the techniques are rooted very heavily in Buddhism. This is very unethical. The Bible warns us against seeking peace, prosperity, happiness in other religions. The danger is syncretism.

Jeremiah says:

- Jer. 2:13 My people have committed two sins. They have forsaken me the spring of living water and have dug their own cisterns that cannot hold water. **God is the spring of living water**

- Jer. 2: 18 Now why go to Egypt to drink water from Shihor's. Why do we have to go to other source than God and the word of God?

Paulus says:

- Col.3: 1-2 set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated. Set your minds on things above
- Rom: 8: 5-8 The mind controlled by the spirit is life and peace
- Rom. 12: 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind
- Col. 2: Christ has nailed our karma (our bad and good deeds) to the cross. We are saved by grace
- 2. Cor. 3: 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness
- Col 2: 23 false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body
- Col. 3. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts
- 1. Tess. 5. 23-24
- Phil 4: 8 Whatever is true, whatever is noble. Whatever is right, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things
- 2. Cor. 10: 5 Take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ

Jesus says:

- Mat. 11: 28 Come to me all you who are weary and burdened. and I will give you rest

The Author of The Letters to the Hebrews says:

- Heb. 9: 27 just as man is destined to die and after that to face judgment

The Psalmist says:

- Psalm 23: 2 he makes me lie down in green pastures he leads me beside quiet waters
- Psalm 46: 10 Be still and know that I am God

God is called the great physician.

- Jehova Raphe
- The Lord your healer: Deut. 32:39, 2. King 20:5, 2. Chr. 7:14, Ps. 41:4, Isa. 57: 19, Jer. 3: 22, 14: 17, Jer. 33:6, Hos. 6:1, 14:4

God is peace. Jesus is called the prince of peace

- Peace: shalom from salam/ salem, shulam
- The root meaning of shalom is to be whole or sound and this leads to the translation:
- To be safe, sound, healthy, perfect, complete 1. King 7: 51, Neh. 6: 18
- Signifies a sense of wellbeing, safety, soundness, and harmony both within and without
- Completeness, wholeness, peace, health, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, fullness, rest, harmony, the absence of agitation or discord,
- A state of calmness without anxiety and stress
- Vigor and vitality in all dimensions of life
- Shalom is holistic health – spirit, soul, body (1 Tess. 5: 23)
- Shalom – the abundant life Jesus promises in John 10:10
- Wholeness and harmony in relationship with God
- Peace is the deepest desire of the human heart
- Shalom is pictured as prosperity
- Peace is the fruit of righteousness and a specific blessing from God
- Jesus said: Peace be with you John 14:27
- Benediction: Go in peace
- Peace is the absence of military conflict
- Jesus is the Prince of peace Isa. 9:6

You do not need to have a special body position to receive the peace of God. Neither do you have to pronounce a certain " holy/sacred word" to receive the peace of God. You are not asked to meditate 20 minutes/ per day to be filled with the peace of God.

Jesus says: ask and it will be given to you (Matthew 7). God wants us to have and receive his shalom to our spirit, soul and body

We first received the peace of God when we made peace with God – conversion

Tess. 5: 22-23 May the peace of God

Do we need to go to other religion`s practices to get peace, happiness, to be free from anxiety, to have eternal life? We are forgiven by the grace of God and Christ`s death on the cross and resurrection. God and his words can transform our mind so that it will become more and more like the mind of Christ.

In my opinion we can replace all the mindfulness techniques with powerful peace, with shalom because shalom contains everything that mindfulness promises. So, do we need mindfulness?

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