



# PSYCHOENERGETICS

A BODY-MIND APPROACH TO DEPTH WORK AND PROCESS FACILITATION

## **Mindfulness as a Spiritual Practice & a Way of Life**

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*"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change"*

Carl Rogers

As I am sitting at Philadelphia Airport, waiting for my flight to Spain, I am wondering what I would have to say about a practice of mindfulness, which has been part of my life for over 30 years.

My thoughts wander back in time, when the adventure of diving into mindfulness began for me. In the early 1980's I followed an internal calling for a journey, which did not have any clear destiny, other than to know myself. My journey led me to a Buddhist monastery in Southern Thailand, in the midst of rainforest, where it all began, in spite of myself.

The journey into my own interior began with the ordinariness of mosquito bites, scorpions, snakes, the sounds of the rainforest, burning fire in my body and a raging mind.

My first mindfulness retreat was nothing like a blissful experience. I awoke to an aching body and a mind out of control. However, as the days passed by, slowly and silently I started to have less need to change the burning in my knees, the waves of grief and rage, the terror which I could hardly identify, a mind so utterly out of control that it became painful to having to bear the returning thoughts.

A journey began, which would never leave me. Since then, I sat through many retreats, burnt many times, argued many times, and something underneath slowly and steadily became increasingly silent.

For many of us, the beginnings of a meditation practice are humbling, yet even so, we might still be expecting a sudden grace to descend upon us and awaken us.



Mindfulness is an essential aspect of Buddhist meditation practice. Mindfulness in essence is the willingness to be with what is. Ken McLeod says: *“Life is tough, but when you see and accept what is actually happening, even if it is very difficult or painful, mind and body relax.”*

In this sense, Mindfulness helps us relax into the experience in the moment, without having to argue with it or resist it. There is a quality of peace, that comes with it.

Mindfulness, however, requires patience and persistence and the willingness to face the ordinariness of our experience, as it unfolds moment to moment.

When we slow down we first come to realize how much our minds are out of control. We are busy analyzing, judging and resisting our actual experience, in an attempt to hold on to our definition of who we think we are.

We are so busy thinking and not being present that we forget to make space for the deeper play within us.

We live in a time of great distraction. We often seek to numb ourselves in the midst of the comfort and busyness of our modern lives. However, in spite of all the overflow and waste of material goods, we find ourselves deprived of something essential and meaningful.

This deeper sense of reality reveals itself when we slow down, when we create space between the doing. It is in the space between things, the space between actions, the space between words, the space between the breath, where new realizations most easily emerge.



When I was still very young, I had the opportunity to come across an extraordinary teacher, Krishnamurti. As I sat in a huge tent, together with another two or three thousand people, I witnessed something, which I would never forget.

In the midst of the noise of many people talking, children shrieking, a deep silence suddenly came upon us, when a skinny, tiny, old man appeared on the stage. That silence happened to me by surprise, as I had not been prepared for this encounter. Then his voice began to speak, as if it was created moment to moment out of empty space. The voice spoke nothing but present moment experience, hard to grasp for those young and inexperienced ears of mine, touching something, which I could not point to, yet.

If someone asked me later, what the lecture was about, honestly speaking I have no clue, I just know that it was deeply meaningful and it somehow changed the course of my life, so much I am sure of.

*How do we awaken?* Is it something that simply happens to us, something, which we fall into? For some gifted individuals, this might well be the case, however for most of us, we are on a journey towards *a gradual* awakening. We both recognize the need to grow and change, while tapping into something larger and unchanging.

As we make space inside, we realize that we are not as solid as we believe. We start to appreciate each breath as a welcoming of a new moment, a new possibility. We start to accept reality simply, as it is.

As we stop identifying so tightly with the content of our experience, we have more space to see what is actually there, instead of thinking what is there. We stop reenacting the same script over and over.

Mindfulness is a way of making space for what is, without having to exclude any aspect of our experience.

Francisco Varela says :” *the goal is to be mindful of the mind as it takes its own course. By letting go of the mind, the natural activity of the mind to be alert and observant becomes apparent.*”

Mindfulness is considered as part of the basic nature of the mind; it is the natural state of mind that has been temporarily obscured by habitual patterns of grasping and delusion.

How do we become mindful? How do we stop the endless, mindless chatter? In the Theravadan Buddhist tradition, as it is practiced in Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, there are two aspects to mindfulness meditation.

- The first aspect is *shamata*, or concentration. We need to have a certain degree of concentration to be able to tolerate the open-ended practice of mindfulness.

*Achan Buddhadaso*, a teacher of mine from Thailand, used to say, “*you need just enough concentration, not too much and not too little*” for practicing mindfulness.

Concentration is a practice of taking hold of a certain object of mind, like the breath and to stay there. It is the returning to the breath over and over until our awareness becomes steady.

The purpose of calming and steadying the mind is not to be absorbed in a blissful state (Jana), but to render the mind able to be present with the flow of experience as it occurs.

- The second aspect of the practice is *vipashyana*, which can be translated as *insight* or *wisdom*.

When we are present with the flow of experience, we notice that our experience is always changing and perhaps less personal, than what we thought. We learn to take a step back from the steady stream of thoughts, feelings, emotions, sensations, while being deeply engaged with the experience.



In our PSEN mindfulness meditation practice, we start with paying attention to the breath, as a way of bringing focus to the here and now. Gradually, as our ability to stay present increases, we include more aspects of the body/mind, such as body sensations,

hearing, smelling, tasting, feelings, states of mind, emotions and thoughts, and we eventually include awareness itself.

In this way we open to reality as an unfolding process in the now.

We shift our sense of identity from the content of our repeating thought patterns, to a larger, more spacious aspect of our experience. We come to realize that we are not separate entities, merely living in our heads. Rather, we are participating in an unfolding universe.

We experience life through our sensate experience. Our body sensations and breath are our most immediate and spontaneous reaction to our internal and external environment.

Our senses are like the raw material, the unstructured ingredients to our experience. Often times, when I ask my clients, “what do you feel”, I get an answer like “I am feeling worthless, I am feeling unloved”.

We do not realize that we are very quick with giving words and meanings to our experience, according to our basic life script. This prevents us to tap into the deeper and more unconscious play underneath the surface of our experience.

When we start getting curious about the feeling of worthlessness and how it lives inside of us, we notice something simple. We notice that this feeling initiates with a contraction in the body. When we go back to this original contraction in the body, we can open ourselves to the deeper story beneath, and eventually to the awakening of something intangible, unchanging, in the midst of the ever changing interplay of sensations.

According to Buddhist psychology, sensations give rise to feelings. There are essentially three core feelings, which arise in the mind, which are *pleasant, unpleasant and neutral*.

Feelings give rise to grasping and rejecting and to the more sophisticated expressions of emotions, such as joy, sadness, anger, fear.

Our grasping at what is pleasurable and rejecting what does not feel good, together with what is often called “*ignorance*” or our failure to see through the illusion of our conditioned sense of self, are considered the root causes of human suffering from a Buddhist point of view.

As you start paying attention to your breath as well as your body sensation, you will start to witness a constant interplay of desire, aversion and ignorance. One moment you will be completely present and open, the next moment you will start to grasp the experience, wanting more. Then your mind will start to tell you how well you do in meditation, then you will notice how distracted you have become and you will start to judge your experience, and so forth.



*How can we make peace with the paradox of Self and no self?*

On one hand, the more closely we look into the nature of Self and the world, the less we find anything or anyone solid. We awaken to what in Buddhist terms is called emptiness or clear sky. On the other hand, we do not cease to look for meaning and purpose in our lives.

On one hand, we need our desire as a fuel to move us forward in life, to find meaning. On the other hand, we tend to get lost in the satisfaction of desire itself, not remembering its purpose.

Experiencing the vast open sky in the depth of our being, we still hold this one question; *What makes this dreamlike, ever changing life worth living? What is a life well lived?*

This question points us towards what we call psyche or soul. Whereas Mindfulness aims at understanding the empty nature of this changing world and points towards the vastness of the empty sky, what we call psyche or soul calls us to awaken our uniqueness and pulls us towards service in our unique way.

In PSEN work, we consider that the journey of awakening is a threefold one and that we need to respect and integrate every aspect of it, in order to embrace the richness of our human potential; our spiritual nature, our soul nature and our psychological make up.

We notice that our character or ego needs to grow up, to change and to expand its way of being, for us to find more peace and happiness in our lives.



Mindfulness is an essential ingredient in our PSEN work.

Mindfulness means having a full heart, a heart that is spacious and inclusive. Mindfulness helps us to slow down and not to take our experience so seriously. Mindfulness helps us to embrace ambiguity and uncertainty.

With a steady mindfulness practice we are more able to tolerate the undoing of our fixed reality and to step into a larger way of being.

John Wellwood says :*"Mindfulness provides a shortcut to non-dual awareness. A rousing gap opens when we stop acting in accord with habit. We become empty space or a kind of no-thing-ness.*

*There is the pause between action and reaction, where compulsion ends and freedom begins. We realize: "I am the space in which I sit. I am the space from which everything arises and into which everything sets."*

In PSEN work we are mindful of the unfolding process. The process often begins with a diffuse kind of receptive attention to the whole felt sense of a situation, underneath one's thoughts and ideas about it.

We learn to speak from a felt sense rather than having thoughts about it. It is from this diffuse state that something new can arise. We have to let ourselves not know before we can discover anything new.

As we speak about a certain situation, which troubles us in our lives, we may suddenly feel a pressure in our chest. We then pay attention to the pressure, simply as it is, with a sense of curiosity. We may feel the texture and the atmosphere of that sensation and open to its deeper meaning.

We can ask ourselves: What feels so heavy about this situation? And then again we pay attention to what arises in our body/mind and stay with it, until something else emerges. In this way we can track experience until we get to the crux of things and a felt shift naturally occurs.

We shift back and forth between connecting to a felt sense of an experience and articulating its meaning, as well as the non-dual space in the background.

- *What is important is the dynamic movement of the unfolding, not its content.*

This process requires a tapping into a larger, undifferentiated space beyond words. It is a moving from silence into words and back to silence. The words emerge out of the center of silence.

The process of paying attention to client's unfolding process requires the relaxing into uncertainty.

Wherever we are, there is always this one breath to come back to, this one moment to relax into, available to us now.

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