

Applied Positive Psychology

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Week 4

Lecture 10: Mindfulness: Mechanisms, Benefits, and Practice

I welcome you all to Module 4 of the course titled *Applied Positive Psychology*. Module 4 is titled “Mindfulness and Flow.” In this module, we will discuss two major constructs of positive psychology — mindfulness and flow.

Today's lecture will specifically focus on the concept of mindfulness. We will explore its underlying mechanisms, associated benefits, and some practical aspects related to how it can be practiced. This is Lecture 10 overall and the first lecture of Module 4.

Before we begin today's topic, let me briefly recap the previous lecture — Lecture 9, which was part of Module 3. In Lecture 9, we discussed the concept of hope and how it differs from optimism. We also examined Charles Snyder’s Hope Theory in detail. We discussed the various components of Hope Theory as proposed by Charles Snyder, and how different factors influence hope in terms of goal achievement and motivation. We also examined several predictors of hope, factors that influence it, and concluded with research-based tools and interventions that can be used to cultivate and enhance hope in our daily lives. These were some of the key topics covered in the previous lecture.

In today’s lecture, we will focus on the concept of mindfulness — its origins, core components, and therapeutic effects. We will explore the benefits associated with mindfulness, discuss how we can deal with our thoughts mindfully, and understand its relationship with emotional regulation and other psychological benefits. Toward the end, we will look at some practical ways to cultivate mindfulness in our everyday lives.

So, let us begin today's lecture. The concept of mindfulness is rooted in Buddhist meditation practices. In fact, mindfulness can be understood as a particular type of meditation that emphasizes present-moment awareness and non-judgmental attention to one's experiences. It involves opening up and becoming more aware of the continuous stream of thoughts, images, emotions, and sensations that pass through the mind — without identifying oneself with them. This is a broad definition, and we will soon look at its more specific aspects. Essentially, mindfulness is a form of meditation that emphasizes openness and awareness. It is about being fully present and attentive to whatever is happening in the current moment — noticing your thoughts, images, emotions, and bodily sensations — while simply observing them without attachment or judgment. This is the kind of mental state one aims to cultivate through the practice of mindfulness. As we move forward, we will examine its different dimensions and key components.

Broadly speaking, mindfulness can be described as a meditative practice centered on awareness of the present moment. In contrast, the opposite of mindfulness is mindlessness, which refers to a state in which we are unaware, distracted, or functioning on “auto-pilot.” In this sense, when we are not mindful, we are said to be mindless. These are just a few examples. Mindfulness is about becoming more aware and conscious of the present moment and of whatever you are doing. In contrast, mindlessness refers to not being present or fully aware of your actions or surroundings. For instance, mindlessness may include situations such as walking into a room and forgetting why, rushing through tasks without paying attention, or breaking or spilling things due to carelessness or distraction. It can also involve snacking without awareness, or failing to notice changes in your environment.

These are all examples of moments when we become so absorbed in our thoughts that we lose touch with the present moment. In such cases, we are not mindful — we are functioning on “auto-pilot.” When our minds are caught up in excessive thinking or rumination, a mindless state often emerges as a result.

Now that we have a basic understanding of what mindfulness and mindlessness mean, let us look at the concept of mindfulness in greater detail. Before that, it's important to note

that mindfulness has become an extremely popular concept, both in practical applications — among communities that actively practice mindfulness — and in the field of psychological research. A large number of researchers today are actively engaged in studying mindfulness, and the field has gained considerable popularity in recent years. To understand this rise in interest, let us look at some indicators.

According to a bibliometric analysis of research publications, between 1966 and 2021, a total of 16,581 research articles focusing on mindfulness were identified. This means that over these five decades, more than sixteen thousand scholarly works have been published on the topic. Importantly, the number of publications has shown a sharp and exponential increase since around 2006. This trend suggests that mindfulness began to attract significant attention within the academic and scientific community around 2005–2006, and research output in this area has grown rapidly ever since. Notably, nearly half of these publications are from the field of psychology, while about one-fifth are related to psychiatry. Thus, most of the research on mindfulness originates from psychology and its allied disciplines, reflecting its strong connection to mental health and well-being research.

Now mindfulness has also been integrated into various clinical practices in terms of various therapies and intervention techniques. Some of these examples are here. So if you see all these therapeutic techniques where these are formally used as therapies, strategies of therapies, they all include mindfulness as a component in all these therapies. Examples include the mindfulness-based stress reduction program, which is one of the very popular programs that helps people deal with stress and other problems in their lives using mindfulness. It's a long program where one has to spend certain days on certain training and so on. Other programs include mindfulness-based cognitive therapy. So this is a proper cognitive therapy to which mindfulness is added. Acceptance and commitment therapy also includes elements of mindfulness. Dialectical behavior therapy also includes elements of mindfulness. Mindfulness-based eating awareness training is also a very specific module that focuses on issues related to eating, where mindfulness is included as a therapy.

A lot of these therapies actually include mindfulness as part of their therapeutic techniques. Now, what are the roots of mindfulness? From where does this whole concept of

mindfulness emerge? Let us look into some of the historical roots. So mindfulness has its roots in ancient Eastern Buddhist philosophy, which is mostly 2,500 years old. So this whole concept of mindfulness actually comes from Buddhist philosophy, where it was included as a practice. You know, the monks and other people in the Buddhist tradition used to practice something called mindfulness; they had other words for it, like vipassana and so on.

Professor Kabat-Zinn and his colleagues at the University of Massachusetts have introduced mindfulness to the Western world. Now, one of the people who has contributed a lot in this field is Professor Kabat-Zinn, who actually practiced mindfulness for a long duration with Buddhist monks and so on. And then, when he came back, he was in a more secular context. He has designed mindfulness for a secular context so that it can be used by the general population and so on. And it became quite popular after that.

He received extensive training in mindfulness from teachers of various Buddhist traditions. He secularized and adapted the practice to suit the Western mindset. He modified certain aspects of the practice, as the original forms were designed primarily for monks and not for the general population. He extracted the essential elements of mindfulness and presented them in a secular context so that they could be practiced by everyone. Especially in the Western context, people with different mindsets could engage in these practices effectively.

Here is a photograph of Kabat-Zinn. His efforts led to the creation of the first formalized mindfulness-based intervention, known as the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. It was one of the earliest programs to incorporate mindfulness into therapeutic interventions. The MBSR program is highly popular and is implemented in many hospitals and healthcare settings across Western countries, where individuals can practice mindfulness for stress management and other related benefits.

Now, let us look into the concept of mindfulness in a little more detail. We have already discussed a broad definition, but let us now examine how mindfulness has been specifically defined.

Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn, as we have already discussed, was the first academician to introduce and popularize this concept in academic and research circles. Because of his efforts and continuous promotion of mindfulness, scholars and researchers began to take great interest in the concept, leading to a significant body of research on mindfulness. He is also the founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program that we mentioned earlier.

So, how did Professor Kabat-Zinn define mindfulness? He defined mindfulness as “*paying attention in a particular way.*” The central idea of mindfulness, therefore, revolves around attention — but not just any kind of attention. It is the manner in which we pay attention that determines whether or not we are being mindful.

Paying attention in a particular way means being purposeful, in the present moment, and non-judgmental. Kabat-Zinn proposed certain key ideas associated with mindfulness. Basically, mindfulness is about how you pay attention.

How do you pay attention? What are the qualities of that attention? One important aspect is that you pay attention with a specific purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. You do not judge whatever you are paying attention to—you simply observe it without labelling it as good or bad, right or wrong. You avoid engaging in thought processes about it and instead focus on paying attention non-judgmentally to the present moment. The idea is to remain in the moment, without drifting into the past or the future. Whatever is happening right now, you simply notice it without judgment. This is how Kabat-Zinn defined mindfulness. Let us now look into this definition in a little more detail, because based on this definition, we can identify certain core components of mindfulness.

Other researchers, such as Shapiro and colleagues, proposed three components of mindfulness based on Kabat-Zinn’s definition. According to them, there are three key elements reflected in his definition.

The first is “on purpose,” which means that there is an intention involved in mindfulness—you must have a deliberate intention to engage in the practice. The second is “paying

attention,” which highlights that attention is central to mindfulness. The third is “in a particular way,” which refers to the attitude with which you pay attention.

Thus, the three core components of mindfulness are intention, attention, and attitude. In this discussion, we will explore each of these components in more detail:

1. Intention – What is your purpose for practicing mindfulness?
2. Attention – How do you direct and sustain your awareness?
3. Attitude – What mindset or quality do you bring to your awareness?

Let us begin with the first component — intention. Intention is something that sets the stage for all human activities. We cannot do anything in life without having some form of intention. It all begins with the intention to act — only then do we take action. Without intention, we cannot accomplish anything. Every action we perform in our lives is preceded by an intention. Similarly, in the practice of mindfulness, one must also have a clear intention — an understanding of *why* one is practising mindfulness. The intention defines the purpose behind the practice. People may have different intentions for practising mindfulness, depending on their personal goals and needs. These intentions may include goals such as stress reduction, emotion regulation, self-exploration, or enlightenment, among others. Intention may also change from time to time. People may practice mindfulness for various reasons — some may do it to understand themselves better, some for stress relief, some for emotional regulation, and others within spiritual contexts for enlightenment or higher states of awareness. All these intentions can be present while practising mindfulness, and the results often correspond to the intention behind the practice. Research indicates that the outcomes of mindfulness practice are correlated with one’s intention. This means that whatever your intention is, the results tend to align with it. Intention sets the direction of focus — when you intend to achieve something specific, your attention naturally moves in that direction, and the outcomes reflect that focus. For example, individuals who practice mindfulness with the intention of reducing stress tend to develop better coping skills for managing stress, while those who practice it for self-exploration often gain deeper insights about themselves, and so on. Whatever your intention is, the results will correspond accordingly. The intention you hold while

practising mindfulness will greatly determine the outcomes you experience. This makes intention an important component of mindfulness. We all have certain intentions, and these intentions shape how mindfulness leads to different outcomes.

The second and most central aspect of mindfulness is attention. It forms the core of mindfulness — and, for that matter, of any meditation practice. Mindfulness is fundamentally about paying attention, which involves observing the operations of one’s moment-to-moment internal and external experiences, or in other words, all the contents of consciousness. When we say “paying attention,” we refer to being aware of the continuous flow of what is happening both internally (such as thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations) and externally (such as sights, sounds, and other sensory experiences). Mindfulness can involve attention to any or all of these aspects. Sometimes, the practice may be more inward-focused, emphasising internal experiences, while at other times it may be outward-oriented, focusing on external stimuli. The key idea is that in mindfulness practice, attention must remain at the centre — directed toward moment-to-moment experiences, whether they are internal or external. Here, paying attention involves attending to present experiences, moment by moment — in the here and now — while suspending all interpretation and judgment. This is a very important aspect of mindfulness: you must pay attention to the present moment without interpreting or evaluating what you observe. When you pay attention, do not judge what you are observing. Whatever you are attending to, simply observe it as it is, without adding thought processes, opinions, or judgments. Just pay attention, look, and notice whatever is present. This is how attention is understood in mindfulness. Such focused attention helps us break free from our constant mental wandering and brings us back to the senses of the present moment. The moment you become grounded in the present and suspend all interpretation, simply observing what exists in the here and now, your restless and disturbed mind begins to settle. The wandering thoughts that usually cause distress fade away as you anchor yourself in present-moment awareness. That is what attention accomplishes in the mindfulness process.

The third component of mindfulness is attitude — the mental stance or quality with which we pay attention. Attitude refers to how we attend to our experiences, not merely the act of paying attention itself. This is an essential aspect of mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness is not just about observing what is happening, but also about how we observe it. It involves paying attention to our internal and external experiences without evaluation or interpretation, yet with a heartfelt attitude of acceptance, patience, kindness, and openness, even when the experience is unpleasant. This means that when you pay attention — whether to internal stimuli such as thoughts and emotions, or to external stimuli like sights and sounds — you simply observe without judgment or interpretation. You stay in touch with the present moment as it is. Paying attention with an attitude of acceptance means allowing experiences to be as they are, without trying to change, suppress, or control them. You approach each moment with patience, kindness, and openness, cultivating a non-judgmental attitude. Such qualities of attitude give us relief from our habitual mental resistance — from constantly trying to push away unpleasant experiences and cling to pleasant ones. Mindfulness, through this balanced attitude, allows us to rest in awareness rather than in reactivity. This may be called peace and real happiness in the truest sense. This attitude of paying attention gives us a break from our nonstop resistance, because most of the time, when we encounter unpleasant experiences, we resist them, and when we encounter pleasant experiences, we crave them. That is the very nature of the mind. This constant cycle of craving and resistance creates continuous disturbances in the mind, leading to stress and restlessness. The quality of paying attention with acceptance and without judgment breaks this cycle of resistance, bringing a genuine sense of peace and happiness. That is the kind of attitude to be cultivated in mindfulness practice.

These, therefore, are the three essential components of mindfulness — intention, attention, and attitude — all of which are included in its definition.

Now, let us look at some of the therapeutic effects of mindfulness. Mindfulness has been studied extensively for its benefits in physical health, mental well-being, productivity, and overall life functioning. Research on mindfulness has identified a wide range of benefits. For instance, studies have shown that mindfulness is highly effective for stress reduction. Individuals who practice mindfulness regularly find that it helps to reduce stress, increase positive emotions, and decrease anxiety, depression, and other negative emotional states.

In summary, mindfulness practice is associated with enhanced emotional balance, resilience, and overall psychological well-being. It has also been linked to improvements in working memory and related cognitive functions. People who practice mindfulness regularly often find that their memory functioning improves, particularly the capacity of working memory. This is because excessive thought processes and mental disturbances tend to hinder memory capacity, while mindfulness helps calm the mind and enhance focus, thereby improving working memory performance.

Mindfulness practice has also been associated with greater relationship satisfaction and a decrease in interpersonal conflicts. As the mind becomes more peaceful, accepting, and balanced, these qualities naturally reflect in one's relationships, fostering better understanding and reducing conflict. Furthermore, mindfulness has been found to enhance immune functioning and physical health. Research indicates that individuals who practice mindfulness consistently show improvements not only in mental health but also in various physical health parameters. Overall, mindfulness contributes to multiple indicators of well-being, including increased positive emotions, higher life satisfaction, and a greater sense of overall harmony between mind and body. It also contributes to various other aspects of well-being. These findings clearly demonstrate that mindfulness offers numerous benefits for physical health, mental health, and overall functioning in daily life.

Now, let us look at the mechanisms through which these therapeutic effects of mindfulness come into existence. In other words, why does mindfulness produce such positive impacts on our mind and body? What could be the possible mechanisms behind these effects? One of the key mechanisms discussed in the literature is known as *re-perceiving*, which has been described as a meta-mechanism—that is, an overarching process through which mindfulness brings about positive change. Re-perceiving essentially involves intentionally attending with openness and non-judgment, leading to a significant shift in perspective. Shapiro and colleagues identified this as the primary meta-mechanism underlying mindfulness. In essence, during mindfulness practice, a shift in perspective takes place: when you observe your experiences—whether internal or external—with openness, acceptance, and without judgment, those experiences lose their hold on you. They no longer cling to or disturb you, even when they involve unpleasant emotions or sensations.

This change in perspective, or re-perceiving, transforms how you relate to both internal and external stimuli, fostering greater calm and psychological flexibility. And this shift in perspective is what brings about all the positive changes. Because internal or external stimuli can no longer affect you in the same way—your relationship with those stimuli has transformed through mindfulness and the way you pay attention to them. This process is what Shapiro and colleagues defined as re-perceiving. Re-perceiving essentially means a shift in perception. Shapiro and colleagues described it as de-identifying from conditioned judgments and instead shifting focus to the direct perception of sensations in the present moment. In simple terms, through mindfulness practice, the way people pay attention changes. This shift allows them to disidentify from judgmental thought patterns, such as “why is this happening?” and other ruminative mental loops. In essence, mindfulness helps individuals detach from these habitual judgments. This shift—referred to as re-perceiving—creates a profound positive impact on one’s mental and external experiences. It helps us dissociate from the ongoing mental drama and observe our moment-to-moment experiences with greater clarity, objectivity, and equanimity. So, you remain a witness rather than being completely identified with your thought processes or perceptions. You simply observe without becoming entangled or overly interested in those thoughts, emotions, or mental events. This disidentification helps create a sense of distance from them, and it is this process that brings about many of the positive changes associated with mindfulness. Now, this process of re-perceiving can give rise to several other positive mechanisms that further contribute to beneficial outcomes. Re-perceiving can be viewed as the broadest or meta-mechanism, under which several sub-mechanisms operate to bring about positive changes when one practices mindfulness.

According to Shapiro and colleagues, re-perceiving functions as a meta-mechanism, meaning it provides the overarching framework through which multiple additional mechanisms contribute to the positive effects of mindfulness. Some of these include:

- Enhanced self-regulation and self-management
- Greater emotional, cognitive, and behavioural flexibility
- Mindfulness also leads to values clarification, and
- The fourth mechanism involves something called exposure.

Let us briefly look at each of these mechanisms to understand how they contribute to the overall effects of mindfulness.

The first mechanism discussed is self-regulation and self-management. Mindfulness is closely associated with enhanced self-regulation and self-management because it enables individuals to regulate and manage themselves more effectively, which in turn leads to a variety of positive outcomes. Thus, mindfulness promotes self-regulation, self-management, and other related positive effects. Re-perceiving facilitates a greater connection with our experiences. As a result, we gain increased access to experiential information and reduce our tendency to avoid unpleasant feelings and emotions. Because of this shift, our relationship with emotions changes significantly. Previously, when one was fully identified with emotions, a negative emotion such as anger would automatically make the person angry. So, this is what happens when you identify with your emotions. But in the practice of mindfulness, you don't identify with them. When anger arises, you simply observe it without judgment. In doing so, you disidentify from it, which leads to better emotion regulation. Now, when anger arises, you don't automatically get angry—you just observe. As a result, anger cannot take control of you. Over time, the anger diminishes, and the cycle continues. This is how mindfulness makes your emotion regulation much more effective. It increases our degree of freedom. We can choose how to respond because we are no longer identified with the emotional content. This freedom reduces automatic, intrusive, and habitual maladaptive behaviours. Often, emotions trigger immediate reactions, but mindfulness allows us to step back from that automatic pattern. When anger arises, people immediately become angry. Whatever emotion occurs, they instantly identify with it because there is no freedom—emotion dictates their life. Through mindfulness, however, this changes. Mindfulness increases your freedom. You can observe emotions from a distance and choose how to respond. This is how mindfulness enhances self-regulation and self-management.

Mindfulness also supports value clarification. What does that mean? It helps people identify the true values and meaning in their lives. Normally, we are heavily influenced and conditioned by external societal forces, which shape our values and choices. Often, when our minds lack clarity, it is because we are overly identified with them, and our minds

are largely influenced by the outside world. Societal pressures—what people say we should believe, suggestions we receive, and so on—condition us. As a result, we may not be aware of our own true internal values. Practising mindfulness allows us to step back from these external influences. We can objectively examine our lives, reflect, and rediscover our authentic values and the true meaning of life. When we are overly conditioned by external factors, it becomes difficult to distinguish our real values from those imposed by the outside world. Mindfulness helps you ground yourself and observe yourself more objectively. This allows you to better identify your true values—those you genuinely want—without being influenced by external pressures. In this way, mindfulness clarifies the values and intentions that guide your life.

The third benefit of mindfulness is what we call cognitive-emotional-behavioural flexibility. Mindfulness fosters flexibility, preventing rigidity in thinking, feeling, and acting. People who practice mindfulness develop more open minds—they can consider different perspectives and respond more adaptively. This flexibility occurs at multiple levels: mental, emotional, and behavioural. By “reperceiving” our experiences, we gain greater clarity and objectivity in our moment-to-moment awareness. As a result, our degree of freedom increases, and we have more choice in how to respond to any situation. Whether mentally, emotionally, or behaviourally, we become less and less victims of our environment, thoughts, and emotions. The more flexibility we develop, the better we can adapt to situations. By considering different perspectives, we can choose more effective ways to act. Flexibility allows us to respond thoughtfully rather than react automatically, making us less controlled by external circumstances or internal impulses. Flexibility, therefore, offers significant advantages in adapting to life’s challenges.

The last mechanism is how mindfulness promotes positive change through exposure. Exposure is a technique used in various therapies, such as those for phobias. In many phobias—like fear of heights or snakes—people experience an exaggerated fear response. Exposure works gradually: by systematically confronting the feared object or situation in a controlled way, the fear diminishes over time. For instance, someone afraid of heights may start with a very low height and slowly progress to greater heights, allowing their fear to reduce step by step. When people are exposed to what they fear and gradually process

it, they slowly adapt, and their fear decreases. Through repeated exposure, these stimuli no longer disturb them as much. The basic principle is that systematic exposure desensitizes people to unpleasant emotions over time. This is the foundation of many phobia therapies. A similar process occurs in mindfulness. By mindfully directing attention to experiences—whether positive or negative—people experience change through exposure. In mindfulness, we connect directly with moment-to-moment experiences, including negative emotions, observing them without avoidance or resistance. This approach reduces maladaptive and neurotic emotional patterns, such as phobias and anxiety. Inner emotional difficulties gradually diminish because we face them directly. In contrast, when we avoid these emotions, they sink into the deeper unconscious and continue to disturb us. Mindfulness, therefore, helps us confront our emotional patterns safely, allowing them to dissolve over time. When we are exposed to our internal emotional challenges—such as deeper anxieties, phobias, or other difficult emotions—and observe them mindfully, they gradually emerge from the deeper unconscious and eventually diminish. The key is to maintain a non-judgmental attitude and not react to them. This process works like exposure therapy: over time, we become desensitized, and these inner difficulties slowly fade. Although it takes time, this mindful exposure reduces many negative emotional patterns. Combined with the other mechanisms we discussed—such as emotion regulation, value clarification, and cognitive-emotional-behavioural flexibility—mindfulness can lead to numerous positive outcomes. These mechanisms explain why regular mindfulness practice produces so many beneficial changes in people's lives.

Now, let us look at how mindfulness is actually practiced. It works with thoughts, thought processes, emotions, and even external stimuli. One key focus of mindfulness is learning to mindfully deal with thoughts and emotions, because this is often where many problems arise. While mindfulness can also be practiced with external objects or sensory experiences, a primary target is our thought processes, as uncontrolled or negative thoughts create significant challenges.

Mindfulness teaches that thoughts are not facts—they are simply thoughts. Most of the thoughts we have about ourselves, our future, or our circumstances arise in the moment based on certain situations, but they are not necessarily true. They come and go. The

problem occurs when we take them as facts; then they begin to strongly influence our feelings, behaviour, and even our life outcomes. For example, if someone thinks, “I am a worthless person” because of a negative event, they may start believing it. Although it is just a thought, accepting it as truth can have a powerful impact on their emotions and behaviour, shaping their reality in a negative way. This is not a factual statement. It is triggered by a negative event or situation in one’s life. While one thought may arise from a single negative experience, it does not define your overall worth. You may have accomplished many positive things, and a single event cannot make you worthless or diminish your value as a person. Yet such thoughts can arise, and if we take them as truth, they begin to influence us. Most of these thoughts are not facts—they are products of our belief systems. They come and go, often spontaneously, and have no inherent truth.

The key in mindfulness is not to cling to these thoughts. Instead, we simply observe them as they arise and let them pass. Thoughts are not inherently harmful; they are useful for practical purposes such as problem-solving, creativity, and planning. Mindfulness allows us to use thoughts constructively without being controlled by them. There is no doubt that thoughts play a vital role in our lives. However, many of the thoughts we have—especially about ourselves or our lives—may not be factual. Thoughts become problematic when they overwhelm us, pulling us away from the present moment into worry, anxiety, and rumination. Much of this emotional distress stems from thoughts that are unrealistic or even largely self-generated. At the same time, thoughts are essential for practical purposes: solving problems, fostering creativity, making plans, and guiding action. The challenge arises when we use thoughts against ourselves, letting them create stress, anxiety, or worry. While thoughts have practical value, it is equally important to recognize when they are imaginary or unhelpful, contributing more to emotional problems than to solutions. Mindfulness helps us distinguish between useful, constructive thoughts and those that merely create suffering.

Mindfulness helps us deal with thoughts in a very specific way. One key point to understand is that most of our thoughts pull us away from the present moment. When we become too engaged in the mental world of our thoughts, we lose awareness of what is happening here and now. When our attention is absorbed by thoughts, it is no longer

available for the current moment. In this way, thoughts disconnect us from the present. Most of the time, we exist mentally either in the past or the future—neither of which truly exists. The past is gone, and the future is yet to come; we cannot know what will happen. The only moment that is real is the present moment, yet we seldom truly exist there. Instead, we live in imagined spaces of past regrets or future worries, cutting ourselves off from the one moment that is actually available. And in this present moment, there is rarely any real problem.

If you observe life closely, the present moment generally does not have significant problems. Most difficulties exist either in the past or the future. In the present, we can act and engage with life, and often there is little to no real problem. Problems arise when we dwell on what has already happened or worry about what might happen. Thoughts about the past and future are the main sources of most of our problems and worries. This is especially true in cases of excessive worry, anxiety, or rumination. People often try to cope by using strategies such as thought suppression or distraction—going to the movies, keeping busy, or otherwise avoiding uncomfortable thoughts. However, these strategies usually provide only temporary relief. Attempts to control or suppress thoughts can have a rebound effect: the more we try to push them away, the more persistent they become. Such approaches are generally ineffective for long-term management of the mind.

In contrast, mindfulness offers a healthier, sustainable approach to dealing with thoughts. Rather than suppressing or avoiding them, mindfulness encourages us to observe thoughts non-judgmentally, allowing us to engage with our mental experiences in a way that reduces their disruptive impact over time. So, how do we mindfully deal with thoughts? The practice involves observing thoughts without attachment. We simply notice them as they arise, without labeling them as good or bad, without trying to control them, suppress them, or distract ourselves. We observe thoughts just as they are, without judgment. When we do this, thoughts lose their power to influence us. They come and go naturally, and we allow them to pass without clinging to them or giving them undue importance. All thoughts are welcome—we don't fight with them. The moment we stop resisting, thoughts no longer hold us; they cannot stick or control us. Each new thought arises, and we continue to observe it mindfully. Judgment is what creates attachment. When we judge a thought, we

form a relationship with it, and it begins to influence us. Mindfully dealing with thoughts is a very different approach: rather than suppressing or distracting ourselves, we simply observe and let them pass. This approach has been found to be very effective for managing thoughts and emotions.

Now, let us consider the practical aspects of mindfulness. How do we actually practice it? While we have discussed the theoretical foundations, it is equally important to understand how mindfulness can be applied in daily life. Mindfulness can be practiced in many ways using various stimuli. According to research by Naik and colleagues (2014), almost any activity can become a mindfulness practice if it incorporates certain key elements. Mindfulness can be integrated into almost anything we do. It can be applied as an approach to everyday activities or practiced in a dedicated, secluded way through meditation. The essential idea is that any activity can become mindful, provided it includes the fundamental elements of mindfulness. What are those elements? One is the engagement of one of the five senses. So the senses will be engaged while you're doing mindfulness practice. Focusing on your senses helps ground you in the present moment. When you look at our sense organs, like eyes, ears, and taste through the tongue, the senses are always in the present moment. When you look at things, it is in the present moment. When you hear, the stimulus is in the present moment. When you taste something, it is in the present moment. Senses are always in the present moment. So when you focus on your senses, you come back to the present moment. From the whole clutch of thoughts, you come back to the present moment. So senses are a very good way or a portal where you can anchor yourself in the present moment.

This also gives you a chance to experience the sensory input separately from the thoughts you may have about them. So you separate thoughts from actual sensory experiences. So when you eat something, what is the taste, and so on? The sensory experiences you get into, then thoughts don't influence as much because you are in the present moment, actually experiencing what the sensory experience is and so on. One important aspect is that in a lot of these mindfulness practices, the senses are engaged fully, either all of the senses or some of the senses.

Another important thing is that in all mindfulness practices, there is an anchor to which you can return, which helps you root in the present moment. So this anchor is your focal point during mindfulness practice. This is where you focus. For example, if you are being mindful of your breath, you concentrate on the physical sensation of breathing. Many people practice mindfulness using breathing; they just focus on their breath, saying that whatever thoughts are naturally coming and going, there is an ingoing breath and an outgoing breath. You just observe it. So how do you use this breath? Many times, it is used as an anchor, so whenever your mind... When you get distracted, come back to your breathing; focus on your breath and connect with the sensory experience of it. What is the sensation of the breath? How is it touching your nostrils? How is it going below your belly? How is it coming back? Focus on all these sensations. So, what happens? So you come back from all the thought processes to an anchor, which could be a breath, for example. So, such as the feeling of air entering and exiting your nostrils or the expansion and contraction of your lungs, the exact sensation isn't important as long as you stay focused on it. So this helps you come back or use something like breathing as an anchor, which helps you return to the present moment. So whenever your mind distracts you come back, use the anchor to come back. So this anchor is present in most mindfulness practices. Other common anchors include sounds. You can use sounds like a bell, the taste, or the texture of food, and so on. One can use eating as a mindfulness practice when focusing on their taste and so on. The options are nearly endless, so you can experiment with different anchors to find what works for you. But most commonly, when people practice, breathing is used as an anchor because the breath is constantly occurring. Other things, sometimes present, sometimes absent, but breath is always present with you. And when you focus on breathing, your mind cannot focus on all the thought processes; it actually becomes peaceful.

You cannot focus on breathing and think at the same time; both cannot happen. So it is a very effective anchor in terms of coming back from all the thought processes and disturbing thoughts to the present moment—just focus on the breathing. If you focus on the breath, you cannot be in the thought process. Both cannot coexist. So an anchor is very important

in the practice of mindfulness. Then, while practising, people keep returning to the anchor because their minds get distracted many times while practising. This step is where the power of mindfulness practices lies. You are likely to be able to focus on your anchor only briefly. Generally, we cannot focus on anything for a long time; our mind wanders and get distracted, which is normal. When you notice your focus has drifted, gently bring your attention back to the anchor. This process helps you return to the present moment. Each time you return to the anchor, you strengthen your mindfulness skills and enhance your ability to stay present. Distraction is natural, but repeatedly coming back to the anchor rebuilds your focus.

You can create mindfulness practices throughout the day by paying attention to simple, everyday experiences. For example, notice the sensations in the soles of your feet while walking to your car, or savour the taste and texture of your morning coffee. These ordinary moments can become meaningful mindfulness exercises. Whatever activity you engage in, you can practice mindfulness. Whether drinking a cup of tea or coffee, focus fully on the sensory experience—the taste, the aroma, the texture—without getting lost in thoughts. By doing so, even routine actions can become mindful practices. While walking, focus on the sensations in your feet and on whatever you are experiencing in the moment. Be fully present with these experiences, and the activity itself becomes a mindfulness practice. In fact, any experience or activity can become mindful if approached with the right attitude and attention.

That said, a regular structured practice can be particularly valuable in the beginning, as it can be difficult to maintain mindfulness in everyday activities without some guidance. Structured practice helps develop the habit, which can later be integrated into daily life.

Two common mindfulness practices will be discussed here. A structured approach can be applied to almost any activity, but a formal practice helps establish a foundation.

The first practice is mindful breathing. This typically involves sitting comfortably and practicing mindfulness in a focused way. Posture is the first key aspect. Sit in a relaxed yet upright position—straight, alert, but comfortable. You may sit on a chair or on the floor;

the important point is to feel both comfortable and attentive. You may choose to close your eyes to reduce distractions. If you keep your eyes open, let your gaze rest softly a few feet in front of you without focusing on anything in particular. You can practice formal mindfulness with your eyes either open or closed, though closing them is often preferable to reduce distractions. If you keep your eyes open, let your gaze rest softly in front of you without looking around. This is an important aspect of maintaining posture during formal practice.

The next stage is getting grounded. Take a moment to notice any areas of tension in your body. Relax your face and jaw, release your shoulders, and feel the weight of your body supported by the chair or the floor. Grounding yourself in the present moment means observing and focusing on the various sensations throughout your body.

If you notice tension in certain areas, consciously release it. Pay attention to how your body contacts the chair or floor, and become aware of all the sensations in your body. This helps you anchor yourself in the present moment and connect with your body. The body is always in the present, while thoughts often dwell in the past or future. By connecting with your body and feeling its sensations, you bring your awareness to the here and now. This is called grounding.

Once you feel settled and grounded, the third step is noticing your breath. Bring your awareness gently to your breathing, observing it as it flows naturally in and out. Now, focus on your breath. Pay attention to the sensations of the air moving in and out of your nose, the rise and fall of your lungs, and the sound of your breath. If it is difficult to feel your breath, you can place your hand on your belly to sense it rising and falling with each inhale and exhale.

The practice is simply to observe your breathing. Notice the sensations as the air touches your nostrils, moves through your lungs, and then leaves your body. Feel your stomach rising and falling, and observe the subtle movements throughout your torso. Just be present with these sensations.

Breathing is one of the easiest ways to get grounded and practice mindfulness because it is a continuous, natural movement. By noticing and observing your breath, you can focus your attention on the present moment. This does not require intense concentration; simply observe what is happening with your breath, moment by moment.

Mindfulness is not about creating a stressful or forced focus; it is about observing a single thing with openness. In this practice, your main task is to stay with your breath as much as possible, simply noticing the natural movement of breathing.

Maintain a relaxed posture and a gentle focus. If you feel tension, discomfort, or sleepiness, adjust your posture and release any tightness. It is normal for the mind or body to wander, especially in the beginning. With regular practice, your ability to remain alert and focused will gradually improve.

When your attention drifts or distractions arise, calmly bring your focus back to your breath. It is natural to get distracted many times; there is no need to judge yourself for it. This repeated return to the breath is the essence of the practice.

When thoughts arise, simply observe them without judgment. Do not evaluate or react to the thoughts themselves—just notice them and return to your breathing. This gentle, non-judgmental awareness is central to mindfulness practice.

Simply observe thoughts and let them pass. When a thought arises, you might feel that it is boring or uncomfortable—that is normal. Just notice it without clinging or reacting. Your primary focus remains on your breathing, but thoughts will naturally appear, and that is part of the practice.

Remember, the goal is not to maintain perfect, uninterrupted attention on the breath. Distractions will occur, and that is completely natural. What matters is your ability to gently return your focus to the breath each time it wanders. Strengthening this skill of returning to your anchor is the essence of mindfulness practice. This formal practice—observing the breath and returning to it repeatedly—helps develop the capacity for

mindfulness. Once this foundation is established, mindfulness can be incorporated into daily activities, such as mindful walking or other everyday experiences.

Once you have developed some capacity for mindfulness, you can practice *mindful walking*. Begin by standing upright—alert yet relaxed. Distribute your weight evenly between both feet. Let your arms rest naturally by your sides, or clasp them behind your back if that feels more comfortable.

The goal is to stand comfortably and relax. Take a moment to notice how your body is supported by the ground beneath you. You may find it helpful to soften your gaze slightly downward to maintain focus.

As you stand, bring awareness to the sensations in your body—how your feet touch the ground, the feeling of your legs and torso, and any other bodily sensations. Fully observe whatever is happening in the present moment.

You can softly gaze downward just to get focus rather than looking too much around. So that is the posture required for mindful walking practice. You can choose some paths to walk on. For your first mindful walking practice, consider choosing a short path. Short path about 100 feet or less, and walk back and forth along it. So take a short path, and you can walk back and forth. As you become more familiar with the practice, you can explore longer and more varied paths or even incorporate mindfulness walking as you move through your daily routine.

So initially, for developing this, choose a very short path where there is less distraction, and you can use that to come back and forth, and so on. Once you develop a habit, you can include any kind of walking in your daily life. So now, how do we do that? In walking with your first steps, bring your attention to the sensations of your weight shifting on the soles of your feet, see how your feet feel while walking, how weight is moving to one foot and then another foot, just observe all the sensations. If you are barefoot, notice the different textures of the ground, try to maintain a steady pace, and don't run; just maintain a steady pace, walking slightly slower than usual. A little slower walking will be helpful so that you

can focus on every movement of the body, sensations in the body, and so on.

The idea is to stay with your body, be in the present moment, and enjoy the sense while just observing whatever sensations are arising in that moment. So this is how you have to work initially, then stay with the steps. That is the practice. As you find a rhythm, keep your attention on the sensations in your feet. Focus on the sensations in your feet as you walk. If you notice your mind drifting gently, redirect your focus back to the experience of each step. Remember, the key to this practice is not how long you can stay focused, but the act of noticing how your mind has wandered and kindly refocusing on it. The main idea is not to get distracted; you can get distracted, and that is common, but are you able to bring yourself back to the practice in the present moment? As you are walking, focus on the walking and so on. So this is another practice that one can do in a more structured way initially, and then it can be included in the daily walking practice.

Another simple practice that can be done in the external visual world is called *mindful seeing*. So mindfulness can be included in any sense organ. So, seeing is one such exercise. It is a simple exercise requiring only a window with some kind of a view. Follow this step: step one. Find a space by a window where there are sights to be seen outside.

So you can choose one window where you can see some visual sights, like maybe some trees, some birds, and so on, whatever it is. So through the windows, we can see a lot of things. So you can choose a window where there are certain sights. Step two: look at everything there is to see. Just look at and observe whatever you can see or perceive.

Avoid leveling and categorizing what you see outside the windows. Don't say this is a tree, this is a bird, this is whatever it is; this is a beautiful bird, this is an ugly bird, this is a beautiful tree. Don't label anything. Just look at whatever is visible. So that is what is called mindfulness seeing.

You don't have to label or judge anything. Just observe in the present moment and be with whatever you see. Instead of thinking of a bird or a stop sign, try to notice the colors,

patterns, and textures. See how they look in terms of color, patterns, and textures. So that is more important than judging what this object is, whether it is a good object or a bad object.

Avoid all this leveling. Step three: pay attention to the movement of the grass or leaves in the breeze if there is movement. Notice the colour and different shapes present in the small segment of the world. You can see. See how many shapes there are. Different colors, patterns, and movements are present.

Try to see the world outside the window from the perspective of someone unfamiliar with this place. Look at them as if you had seen them for the first time. Don't judge them; label them as if I know all these things. What are these things? Just observe them, just like a small child will observe them as if looking at them for the first time without any preconceptions. Just look at the colours, brightness, textures, and movements in nature throughout this window. Step four: Be observant but not critical. Be aware but not fixated. Just be aware. You don't have to fixate on anything with concentration and so on. Just be aware. Step five: If you become distracted, gently pull your mind away from those thoughts and notice colour shapes again to put yourself back in the right frame of mind, and so on.

So you can practice like that sometimes, whatever is available according to your schedule and so on. So this will kind of help us get grounded in the present moment and break from the thought processes, disturbing thoughts, emotions, and so on. We will be able to control thoughts and all mental disturbances and achieve a very peaceful state of mind. All these practices can be helpful in that direction.

There are several common challenges people face when practicing mindfulness, along with ways to address them. Finding time for practice can be difficult in today's busy world, but even just 10 minutes a day can make a meaningful difference for mental health and overall well-being.

One frequent concern is: “*I can’t stop thinking.*” This is precisely why mindfulness is helpful. Rather than resisting or judging your thoughts, the practice encourages you to observe them without attachment. Thoughts may come in waves or storms, and that is normal. Your role is not to control or suppress them. Observe your thoughts as if you are watching from a distance, like sitting by the roadside and noticing people passing by. These thoughts are like strangers—you do not have to engage with them or form any relationship. Maintaining this attitude helps slow the flow of thoughts and allows you to stay present. By observing thoughts without attachment, you automatically begin breaking your relationship with them. This allows you to rest in the stillness of your mind.

Some people feel too restless to practice mindfulness. This is very common, especially in today’s fast-paced world. Stick with the practice, and over time, your mind and body will gradually slow down and adjust. Like any new habit, mindfulness requires patience and consistent practice.

Others may feel too tired to practice. Mindfulness can initially highlight fatigue or drowsiness, making it challenging to focus. If tiredness persists, consider checking your sleep habits. If boredom causes drowsiness, try more active practices such as mindful walking. If sitting is difficult, these movement-based exercises can be very helpful.

During practice, uncomfortable emotions often arise because you are facing them directly rather than avoiding them. Strong emotions may surface, and it is important not to resist, judge, or fight them. Trying to suppress emotions or thoughts only intensifies them. By maintaining a detached, witnessing stance, you can observe these emotions and the physical sensations they create, such as tightness in the chest or anxiety. Simply noticing these sensations allows the emotions to gradually diminish.

If an emotion becomes overwhelming, you can pause the practice for the day and try again later. Professional support from counselors or therapists is also advisable if needed.

Mindfulness can begin with more structured practices and gradually be integrated into everyday life. The key is the attitude and attention you bring to any activity. Research

shows that mindfulness provides numerous benefits for mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

This concludes the discussion on mindfulness and its practice. Thank you.