This is a chapter excerpt from Guilford Publications.
Mindfulness: Ancient Wisdom Meets Modern Psychology. Christina Feldman and Willem Kuyken.
Copyright © 2019. **Purchase this book now:** www.guilford.com/p/feldman

CHAPTER 1

Unpacking Mindfulness

> If you didn't know ahead of time what your social status would be, what your race was, what your gender was or sexual orientation was, what country you were living in, and you asked what moment in history would you like to be born . . . you'd choose right now.
>
> —BARACK OBAMA (in Gold, 2016)

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

The world is a better place today than in any time in history. This is according to various metrics, including greater life expectancy, lower infant mortality, better access to health care, a growing proportion of the world's population living outside of poverty, fewer deaths due to violence, improving access to education for children, and greater opportunity for young people (Rosling, Rosling, & Rosling-Rönnlund, 2018).[1] And still there is a chasm between improved metrics such as these and the suffering that is evident in the contemporary world.

Let's look at the good news of one metric: longer life expectancy. Better living conditions and health care improvements across much of the world means that more of us are living longer. But this has come with the cost of many of us living at least some of our years with chronic physical illness and pain, including arthritis, musculoskeletal conditions, dementia, diabetes, and coronary heart disease (GBD 2015 Disease and Injury Incidence and Prevalence Collaborators, 2016; Kings Fund, 2016). This means that we have to find ways to live with pain, discomfort, and limitations on our functioning, often for years, typically in the closing chapters of our lives. The scale of the problem across the world is huge. Fourteen percent of people over age 40 in developed countries have one or more chronic physical health conditions, and this rises to 50% in those over 65 (GBD 2015 Disease and Injury Incidence and Prevalence Collaborators, 2016; Kings Fund, 2016).

We introduce Mohammed, the first of our case studies.[2]

> Mohammed broke his back playing sports at college. His life since has been marred by chronic, severe, and disabling pain. Doctors told him that they had done all they could medically. Like so many other people, Mohammed had to find a way to live his life productively while managing his pain as best he could.

Let's look at another metric: rates of mental health problems. One in four of us will experience significant mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, at some point in our lives. Mental ill health is a *1 billion person problem*—that is, one in five of the world's population will suffer a mental health problem at some point in his or her life. The World Health Organization names depression as a leading cause of disability. It often develops in late adolescence or early adulthood and runs a recurrent course that can profoundly affect the ability to live a full life (Bockting, Hollon, Jarrett, Kuyken, & Dobson, 2015; GBD 2015 Disease and Injury Incidence and Prevalence Collaborators, 2016; World Health Organization, 2011).

We next introduce Ling, the second of our case studies.

> Ling had suffered numerous bouts of depression in her life, which started in her early teens. While the first episode had been caused by many challenges at home and at school, more recently they would not have a clear trigger. Ling described her most recent episode of depression this way: "I had a plummeting feeling, I just went straight down, took to my bed, just slept, I couldn't do anything. I couldn't function." Like so many other people, Ling had to find a way to manage her recurring depression alongside working and being a single parent.

There are mental health challenges beyond depression, including anxiety disorders, addiction, and psychosis. For example, rates of eating disorders and self-harm in the developed world, particularly among the young, are alarming. Some 6.9% of young people in some countries are thought to self-harm as a way of managing their feelings (Hawton, Rodham, Evans, & Weatherall, 2002) and 13% have thought about dying or suicide (Klonsky, Oltmanns, & Turkheimer, 2003). Both physical and mental health problems affect those from more deprived backgrounds at higher rates (Barnett et al., 2012). There is a growing acknowledgment in the developed and developing world of the suffering and functional impairment caused by chronic physical and mental ill health.

It is human to want good physical and mental health, to be free from suffering, and to enjoy meaning, security, and ease of being, both for ourselves and for those we love. We can feel bewildered by the disconnection, unhappiness, or pathos we experience. We tend to blame the conditions in our lives for the despair and unhappiness we feel, and there is a relentless effort to

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

change those conditions into an imagined, ideal reality that will deliver the happiness and meaning for which we long. It can feel discouraging when our happiness and success seem all too brief, altered by the inevitable tides of change. Bewilderment and disappointment follow, forming over time into familiar psychological states of distress, maintained by our understandable, but misguided attempts to change the unchangeable.

We introduce Sophia, the third of our case studies.

> Sophia had suffered anxiety since childhood, which at times could be crippling. In her 20s she was out sick from work for several months, during which time she undertook psychotherapy. She came to see that her anxiety and much of the disconnection and exhaustion she experienced in her life was driven by a powerful inner critic that judged almost everything she did and found it wanting. At the suggestion of her therapist, she developed a regular mindfulness practice. Over several decades she worked on dismantling this inner critic—she even gave it a name: "Ms. Not Good Enough." She developed new ways of thinking about herself, her family, and her life. Later in life, Sophia developed Parkinson's disease, something she met with extraordinary courage and equanimity that she had learned through her life experience, alongside decades of mindfulness practice.

We all handle the challenges in our lives in different ways. When asked what he would like mentioned in his eulogy, Martin Luther King Jr. asked that they not mention his Nobel Prize, but instead that he lived a committed life of service to others, that his purpose was one of love. It is easy, of course, to reflect on heroic figures like Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, Desmond Tutu, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Nelson Mandela. However, in many ways, this heroism plays out for all of us, caring for our children before they are able to care for themselves, working long hours to provide food, shelter, and security for old age, and encountering the inevitable suffering of illness and old age in our parents and ourselves.

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

Mindfulness and Mindfulness-Based Programs

Some 40 years ago, Jon Kabat-Zinn—himself both a scientist and a dedicated contemplative—realized the transformative potential of mindfulness in Western medicine (Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 2011). With remarkable prescience and skill, he translated the ancient practices of cultivating mindfulness into a language and methodology appropriate for our contemporary concerns and Western medical contexts (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Of course, distress, suffering, and confusion are human experiences, yet they are supported and compounded by the

preconditions of reactivity, forgetfulness, and lack of confidence and understanding. Kabat-Zinn began his work at the front lines of suffering, working in a busy mainstream urban hospital with people with chronic pain and illness. Many of his patients had exhausted all available strategies and treatments and experienced mental health problems alongside their chronic pain and illness. He had no shortage of referrals because he offered his program to people whose doctors had run out of options within mainstream medicine.

Participants in these mindfulness programs consciously developed mindfulness and compassion in the midst of pain, fear, and despair and began to see changes (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). The program, called mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), was not a magical cure. What MBSR offered, importantly, was the possibility of seeing that familiar pathways of fear and avoidance compound pain, and that pain could be responded to in radically new ways. MBSR was first developed as a vehicle for people with chronic physical health problems across eight weekly 2-hour sessions with a skilled teacher (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

A large and growing body of research evidence suggests that MBSR is effective in helping people learn to manage chronic physical health conditions (Gotink et al., 2015; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004). People report living with these conditions with better mental health and functioning. Mindfulness programs offer an integrated approach to the mind and body and as such should help with both physical and mental health symptoms. There is promising evidence of positive outcomes in groups of people with such coexisting conditions (Bohlmeijer, Prenger, Taal, & Cuijpers, 2010; Khoury, Sharma, Rush, & Fournier, 2015; Lakhan & Schofield, 2013).

MBSR has been adapted to meet the needs of specific populations in different settings and Kabat-Zinn (2005, 2006) has broadened his description of MBSR as a vehicle for understanding and transformation. In his foreword to the 2015 *Mindful Nation Report,* Kabat-Zinn wrote:

> Interest in mindfulness within the mainstream of society and its institutions is rapidly becoming a global phenomenon, supported by increasingly rigorous scientific research, and driven by a longing for new models and practices that might help us individually and collectively to apprehend and solve the challenges facing our health as societies and as a species, optimizing the preconditions for happiness and well-being, and minimizing the causes and preconditions for unhappiness and suffering. (Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group, 2015)

There is a growing body of evidence that mindfulness and mindfulness-based programs have transformative potential with other groups and in other contexts. The following is just a small selection of the mindfulness-based programs tailored to specific populations and settings.

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

- *Depression and addiction*. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) provides people suffering recurrent depression with an array of tools to stay well (Gu, Strauss, Bond, & Cavanagh, 2015; Kuyken et al., 2016). In another adaptation, mindfulness-based relapse prevention (MBRP) helps people struggling with substance abuse and dependence learn to relate differently to the triggers and cravings that feed addiction (Brewer, Elwafi, & Davis, 2013).

- *Children and adolescents*. Mindfulness-based programs have also been adapted and used with children and adolescents to support their social and emotional learning and ability to both manage challenges and to flourish. There are examples of this work in primary and secondary schools, clinical settings, and families (Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Kallapiran, Koo, Kirubakaran, & Hancock, 2015; Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014).

- *The criminal justice system*. Mindfulness is being used to teach skills of presence, compassion, equanimity, and patience—both to those held within the system and to those working in the system (Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group, 2015).

- *The workplace*. A healthy workplace supported by mindfulness serves both the workers and the economy (Good et al., 2016). Yet in many countries there is a rising toll of work-related mental health problems, with high levels of absenteeism and presenteeism, where people turn up to work but are not productive. There is growing evidence that mindfulness is associated with staff well-being, skilled leadership, and the effectiveness of organizations (Good et al., 2016; Wolever et al., 2012).

The key insight is that mindfulness provides a way to understand the human mind and heart. Mindfulness training with a range of populations, across a range of contexts, provides a way of responding, at least in part, to some of the world's most pressing challenges.

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

Bridging Ancient Wisdom, Modern Science, and the Contemporary World

> That which we frequently think about and dwell upon, to this does the mind incline.[3]
>
> —Nanamoli and Bodhi (1995)

This ancient Buddhist teaching has been borne out by modern psychological science. Our minds shape and are shaped by our world. Our minds are the foundation upon which our world of experience is constructed. Our minds

show *plasticity*[4] as we learn and adapt to the world, from birth into adulthood and into old age. We have an incredible capacity to shape and train our minds throughout our lives in ways that can help us better navigate our lives (Kok & Singer, 2017; Lutz et al., 2009; Slagter, Davidson, & Lutz, 2011).

Ancient Wisdom

Mindfulness and mindfulness training are embedded in most contemplative traditions. From 900 to 200 B.C.E., four distinct contemplative traditions evolved: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism in the Indian subcontinent; Confucianism and Daoism in China; monotheism in the Middle East; and philosophical rationalism in Greece (Armstrong, 2011). During this intellectually and spiritually fertile period, the Buddha, Socrates, and Confucius developed their ideas. It was the ground on which Christ and Muhammed would a few hundred years later build their teachings. Although it is possible to outline how contemporary mindfulness draws upon the rich lineage of each of these early traditions, in this book, we draw primarily on Buddhism and, specifically, Buddhist psychology.

Buddhist teachings originated over 2,000 years ago in India with a young man, Siddhartha Gautama, whom we now refer to as the Buddha. He examined the world around him and his own psychological experience to develop a model of the mind and a methodology for training the mind (see Box 1.1). He was in many ways one of the first psychologists.

In the classic story of the Buddha's life, a young man leaves the fortress of his unrealistic views to seek the understanding that would provide a more reliable refuge. His experience opened his eyes to the understanding that distress, as much as joy, is integral to the human condition. He equally realized the limitations of hiding from reality and the inadequacy of the defenses we build to protect ourselves from uncertainty, discomfort, and change. Rather than pursuing what were in that time the traditional pathways (of transcendence, avoidance, and suppression) to overcome and escape affliction, he realized that suffering could be met fearlessly and that the origins of distress could be understood. Through that understanding much human distress could come to an end. It became apparent to him how much compounded human distress was borne of the incapacity or refusal to meet the inevitable moments of adversity in life with courage and understanding. The Buddha devised a comprehensive, practical pathway of turning toward life with all its joys and sorrows with curiosity, investigation, and care. He and a set of his monks communicated the teachings orally about 2,600 years ago. As the teachings spread to different cultures and languages (India, Sri Lanka, Burma, China, and later the West) the teachings evolved and changed. They were written down in several languages, originally Pali and Sanskrit. In the original teachings, they

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

BOX 1.1. Siddhartha Gautama: The Story of the Buddha

In the ancient teaching story familiar to many, the young man Siddhartha Gautama was cocooned by an overprotective father who sought to shield his precious son from the harsh realities of life. In his 20s, Siddhartha became restless and determined to venture out beyond the walls of his perfectly arranged environment. He was struck by the sight of a person diseased and ill, and then taken aback again by the sight of an old man, stooped and frail. The third sight that made him pause was to see a corpse lying on the side of the road. Each time he turned to his companion to ask, "Will this too also happen to me?" Each time he was given the same answer: "Yes, this too will be part of your life." The young man realized that all of his status, comfort, and possessions would not hold back the inevitable rhythms of life. He learned that all the love of his family would not protect him from aging, sickness, and death. Soon after, Siddhartha left his home and set out to find the abiding peace and freedom he longed for. The final sight Siddhartha encountered was a man in the crowd who embodied stillness, calm, and peace. This was the inspiration for Siddhartha to begin a path of inner exploration to understand distress, the origins of distress, and how to end distress and live a good life. It was this systematic quest that turned Siddhartha into one of the first scientists and psychologists.

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

were presented as a large number of discourses or *suttas* (>15,000).[5] This body of work has provided the foundation of contemporary mindfulness.[6]

Modern Psychological Science

Compared to the contemplative traditions, science is a relatively recent development. The current University of Oxford Museum of the History of Science started out as an *experimental philosophy* department in the 17th century, with chemistry laboratories in the basement and undergraduate teaching on the ground floor. Modern psychology is only a little over 100 years old, and neuroscience much younger still. Yet in that time, we have accumulated a wealth of knowledge about:

- How we see and experience the world (e.g., attention and perception);
- How we make sense of the world (e.g., learning and memory, language and thought, social perception);
- What supports mental health and human flourishing;
- What creates and maintains mental ill health (e.g., personality, psychopathology[7]); and
- How we can learn to use this understanding to lead our lives well.

There is, as yet, no unifying model of the mind, and arguably we are some distance from having one. In many ways, modern psychological science took a backward step when it accepted Descartes' conclusion that the mind and body were distinct, that consciousness was located in the mind, and, more recently, that consciousness could be reduced to the brain (Damasio, 1994). It seems increasingly clear that complex mind–body systems shape our experience, health, and well-being (Davidson et al., 2003; Kahneman, 2011; Sapolsky, 2017). It is likely that as we inch toward a unifying model of the mind we will need to integrate many disciplines besides psychology, including the understanding and perspectives from contemplative traditions such as Buddhist psychology.

The Confluence of Ancient Traditions and Modern Science

The architecture and functioning of the human mind and body has not evolved a great deal in the last few thousand years. Moreover, many of the fundamental challenges of life—negotiating childhood and adolescence, health and illness, old age and death—are the same challenges that people have faced throughout the history of the human species. The understanding and comprehensive pathways of transformation, mapped out by the Buddha, are as meaningful today as they were centuries ago. Rather like the confluence of two rivers, there has been a remarkable confluence of ancient Buddhist psychology with modern psychological science and neuroscience (e.g., Dalai Lama, 2002, 2011b; Kabat-Zinn, 2011). This confluence provides perspectives on and methods for working with some of the challenges of the contemporary world.

The key proposal we make is that ancient Buddhist psychology and modern psychology can be drawn together in ways that help us better understand the mind. Mindfulness training provides ways to train and shape the mind so we can better respond to challenges in our lives and help others respond to the challenges in their lives.

The last case study we introduce is Sam. His journey was from a life of addiction that nearly destroyed him, and those around him, to being an active, useful person.

> Sam was a recovering addict. Through years of recovery in 12-step programs and then an MBRP program, he learned first to understand his addiction. He began to "tame his demons," and over time made some major life changes. Like many others, Sam was able to use what we know from psychology and 12-step programs to work with the cravings and self-destructive behavior that nearly killed him. After a few years in recovery and through sponsoring people in his 12-step fellowship, he decided to become an addiction counselor.

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

What Is Mindfulness?

> Mindfulness is the unfailing master key for knowing the mind, and is thus the starting point; the perfect tool for shaping the mind, and is thus the focal point; and the lofty manifestation of the achieved freedom of the mind.
>
> —NYANAPONIKA THERA (1962)

Mohammed experiences a searing stabbing sensation in his lower back for the hundredth time that day. He meets the pain with care and equanimity, choosing to do some small gentle stretches. Ling recognizes the negative thought "I don't think I can face the day, it's going to be too much," and says to herself, "This is a thought, not a fact." Sam has a powerful urge to drink when he sees a bottle of whiskey in the supermarket aisle; he surfs the waves of the urges until they pass. Sophia is sitting in the doctor's surgery waiting room worrying what her latest medical test results will say. She notices a spider spinning its web and intentionally allows herself to be immersed in the wonder of the spider at work. Mohammed's, Sam's, Ling's, and Sophia's experiences in these moments all illustrate mindfulness. When our phone's notifications demand our attention, we choose to stay focused on the task at hand. When in the midst of the busyness of rush hour traffic, we find peace by anchoring our awareness in our breath and body with a sense of interest and care. When we are eating, we choose to really savor the food. When we are with someone we love, we make an active choice to really be present to and with that person. These are further examples of the awareness available to all of us in any moment.

How can the word *mindfulness* encapsulate this myriad of meanings? Has the word become so diffuse and overused that its meaning has become muddied (Heffernan, 2015)? Or is mindfulness like a diamond with many facets that can capture Mohammed's, Ling's, Sam's, and Sophia's experiences? The rest of this chapter unpacks the word *mindfulness*. We look in turn at the different facets of the diamond and consider both ancient and modern definitions (see Table 1.1). We outline some of the most illustrative similes, metaphors, and imagery used to define mindfulness (see Table 1.2) and consider the functions of mindfulness. By considering each of these facets and functions in turn, we outline the myriad perspectives that together represent the idea or construct of "mindfulness." We also touch on some of the most common misunderstandings and misrepresentations. The chapter concludes by offering a synopsis and working definition of mindfulness. Unpacking mindfulness in this way is the foundation for the rest of the book, sketching a map of how mindfulness helps us to navigate life's difficulties and joys.

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

One of the challenges we faced is the way terms and language are used differently in psychology and Buddhist psychology. To provide a middle way, we offer some operational definitions of key terms in Appendix 1. With the proliferation of mindfulness approaches and programs, we also offer an operational definition of mindfulness training and mindfulness-based programs in Appendix 2.

TABLE 1.1. Definitions of Mindfulness

"The clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us at successive moments of perception" (Nyanaponika Thera, 1962, p. 32).

"Mirror-like thought. Mindfulness reflects only what is presently happening and in exactly the way it is happening. There are no biases" (Gunaratana, 2002, p. 139).

"Present-moment awareness, presence of mind, wakefulness" (Goldstein, 2013, p. 13).

Ellen Langer (1989) has a somewhat different definition and refers to four interrelated dimensions of mindfulness: (1) novelty seeking, (2) engagement, (3) novelty producing, and (4) flexibility.

Self-regulation of attention (skills of sustained attention, switching, inhibition of secondary elaborative processing) and orientation to experience (curiosity, experiential openness, and acceptance; Bishop et al., 2006).

Perhaps the most often quoted definition of mindfulness is Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition, which has appeared in a number of his articles and books: "A way of being in a wise and purposeful relationship with one's experience, both inwardly and outwardly. It is cultivated by systematically exercising one's capacity for paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally."

He has also emphasized seven principles of mindfulness: acceptance, nonjudging, nonstriving, beginner's mind, letting go, patience, and trust (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2006; Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group, 2015).

The cognitive scientist John Teasdale has described the essence of mindfulness as full awareness of our experience in each moment, equally open to whatever it has to offer and free of the domination of habitual, automatic, cognitive routines that are often goal oriented and, in one form or another, related to wanting things to be other than they are (Teasdale & Chaskalson, 2011a, 2011b).

Shauna Shapiro (2009) has defined mindfulness as the awareness that arises out of intentionally attending, in an open and discerning way, to whatever is arising in the present moment. She emphasizes attention, intention, and attitude (openness and nonjudgment).

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

TABLE 1.2. Metaphors of Mindfulness

Simple knowing

Simple knowing or awareness is likened to standing on an elevated platform or tower, surveying the surrounding landscape. There is no agenda but to see, and our attention and awareness are intentional, receptive, and relaxed. We have a perspective that does not overly identify with the particulars of the terrain, which is the first step in dis-identifying or decentering.

The flashlight beam of attention can be intentionally moved around different objects. The focus, size, and tonal quality of the beam can be altered.

Protective awareness

Protective mindfulness is like a town's wise gatekeeper who is able to recognize and admit the genuine citizens of the town, and to decide who is to be admitted entry and who should not be admitted. Each of the *sense doors* has a guardian who watches what experiences come to the door and actively allows, or does not allow them entry, discerning whether they will bring beneficial outcomes or bring harm. A more contemporary example might be a security guard.

A cow herder initially had to closely watch over his or her cows to prevent them from straying into growing fields. However, once the crop had been harvested, the cow herder was able to relax beneath a tree and simply watch the cows from a distance. This conveys how mindfulness training can be used for protective awareness (before the crops are harvested) and then shift to a broader choiceless awareness after the crop has been harvested.

A person at a bus stop waits for buses to come and chooses whether to get on or not. Occasionally, the person might get on a bus on automatic pilot only to realize some time later that he or she has been carried somewhere unintended—in that moment of waking up, the person can choose to get off the bus. Mindfulness is the capacity to notice buses coming and going, and then making the active choice whether to get on or off them.

Investigative awareness

Investigative mindfulness is likened to a surgeon operating on a person who has been wounded by an arrow. Rather than forcefully pulling out the arrow, a skillful surgeon would probe around the wound to determine its nature. He or she would be able to ascertain the nature of the injury, make a diagnosis, determine the most beneficial way of removing the arrow, and prescribe a course of treatment.

Reframing perception and views

Like someone driving a stick shift, we are able to voluntarily shift our minds from automatic, impulsive, and reactive modes to a mode of intentionality, discernment, and choice.

A musician can play the same piece of music in different keys. How we hear and experience music is changed fundamentally by the key it is played in, and whether it is played on acoustic or electric instruments. Mindfulness enables an intentional choice of key or mode that can transform our experience.

(continued)

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

TABLE 1.2. *(continued)*

The view of Earth from space is a reframed view. Astronauts have commented that when viewed from space, divisions of peoples, nations, and cultures can seem arbitrary. A view on the galaxy provides an even larger sense of perspective and scale.

Bringing it all together

A careful charioteer guides a chariot through a crowded street. Mindfulness has the ability to carefully direct attention, thought, and action.

A trained elephant whose power and impulses have been tamed can now help with transport and heavy lifting. Rather than a danger to the village, the elephant (the mind) has become a great friend and resource.

A horse and rider work in harmony. The rider understands the horse and their union enables great speed, endurance, and power. The horse (the mind) has become a great asset.

A kayaker's skill enables him or her to navigate every state of a river safely, skillfully, and intentionally.

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

Ancient and Contemporary Definitions of Mindfulness

One of the most ancient descriptions of mindfulness is of villagers taming a wild elephant. An untrained elephant is driven by impulse and can rampage when it feels threatened, leaving destruction in its wake. But when it is trained, the power of the elephant becomes a great asset to the villagers. The mind is like an elephant: it can be destructive if it is rampaging, and impulsive and an extraordinary force for good if well trained.

Ever since Buddhist psychology was introduced into Western contexts, teachers and students have grappled with how best to define mindfulness. The first Buddhist scholars, translating the Pali and Sanskrit texts in the 19th century, faced a similar challenge. Finding other terms inadequate, they borrowed the word *mindfulness* from the Christian gospels (Gethin, 2011).

It was Rhys Davids (1881) who first translated what was a Buddhist technical term in the Pali language, *sati,* as mindfulness. *Sati,* translated literally, is *remembering.* This does not mean remembering historical events or data, but rather remembering to come back to the lucid awareness of present-moment experience. It suggests that the mind is established in the present moment rather than lost in distractedness, or in thoughts of the past or future.

Mindfulness encourages a more unified way of being. Bodily sensations, feelings, mental states, and present-moment experience are perceived and held in awareness where they can be explored with attitudes of curiosity, patience,

BOX 1.2. Mindfulness Practice: Pausing to Attend to Experience

A simple exercise is to pause for a moment just now and sense what is happening in your body and mind—what is happening around you. Attending to your body experience, you sense how your body feels touching the chair, the sensations of the air on your skin, any tension in your shoulders. You might begin to sense what your mood is: Tired or energized? Restless or steady? Anxious or calm? The background whisper of thoughts becomes discernible. You may discover yourself becoming sensitized to the sights and sounds of the moment. Let the torch beam of your attention move around these experiences. Allow yourself to attend to the immediacy of these experiences that make up our moment, without adding narrative or speculation. Simply know what is present just now, in this moment.

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

and kindness. This type of awareness sounds remarkably simple, until we try it (see Box 1.2). We can read about how to ride a horse, but try then getting onto a horse and seeing if the written instructions are enough, especially if the horse is a bit flighty. Learning about mindfulness is much the same—it is a practice largely learned experientially.

When we try to bring awareness to our direct experience in the moment, we typically find that our mind has a strong inclination and habit to move away from the present moment. Our minds can be forgetful and distracted, easily pulled in different directions, often without us even being aware of it. Our negative thoughts, pain, or cravings powerfully draw us into a vortex of reactivity.

Mindfulness training, however, involves repeatedly coming back to our experience in this moment, a process that develops the capacity to sustain attention, to understand our present-moment experience and calm our usual reactive patterns. It can be used to respond (or not respond) to the seemingly trivial cues like phone notifications, and also to clearly nontrivial experiences, like Sam's destructive cravings in full-blown addiction.

As mindfulness becomes more established in mainstream culture, the quest goes on to find a good definition. Table 1.1 provides some illustrative definitions from Buddhist texts (Nyanaponika Thera, 1962), Buddhist scholars (Gunaratana, 2002), first-generation Western teachers of Buddhist psychology (Goldstein, 2013), and contemporary mindfulness scientists (Bishop et al., 2006; Langer, 1989; Shapiro, 2009). Rather than reflect on each of the definitions in this table, we draw out some of the commonalities and themes among ancient and modern definitions of mindfulness.

First, we can describe mindfulness as a state, process, and faculty:

- A state of *being present* (e.g., of openness, allowing, inclusive). It is an abiding way of being present in our lives that is embodied and experiential. In this sense it is the antidote to *forgetfulness,* which is the habitual inclination of the mind to be lost in preoccupation, thought, memory, and anticipation, divorced from the body and present-moment experience;
- A *process* of unfolding moment-to-moment experience; and
- A *faculty.* This is key because it connotes that mindfulness is a trainable quality that can be cultivated and applied in our lives.

Second, mindfulness has, at its core, *an intentionality in how attention and awareness are deployed*—that is, mindfulness involves deploying attention like a flashlight beam, *choosing* where to shine the light and what to leave in darkness. More than this, we can choose to *play with attention,* making the focus of attention narrow or broad, sharp or dim, energetic or more passive. We can choose deliberately, with awareness, to focus attention or allow a broader awareness. When our attention is broad, there is no single point of attention. Instead, whatever appears *on the workbench of attention* is attended to, but crucially with intentionality.

Children learning mindfulness can relate to the flashlight analogy.[8] Asking them to play with a flashlight can be a precursor to asking them to play with attention. The flashlight can be shone in different directions, and on some flashlights the beam and lens can be altered. With attention, they can *play with* what is foregrounded and backgrounded in their awareness.

Attention can also be intentionally placed in different sense modalities, including hearing, seeing, bodily sensing, tasting, and smelling. Each modality can be the primary window through which we pay attention to our experience. Attention can also be placed in the realm of thoughts, images, and moods—we choose which of these becomes the object of our attention.

Mindfulness trainings typically start with focal attention, so people can learn to stabilize and deploy their attention in the ways we have outlined above. Once this is established as a base, they are invited to broaden awareness so that their experience can be seen in a wider and more expansive way, sometimes called "open monitoring" (Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008).

Third, attention and awareness are imbued with certain *attitudinal qualities.* Perhaps most fundamentally, we can develop an attitude of attention that is open, allowing, and inclusive, whether the experience is positive, negative, or neutral. Further attitudinal qualities include curiosity, perseverance,

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

patience, friendliness, care, trust, and equanimity. The landscape of attention and awareness is not, we must point out, attitudinally neutral—mindfulness is not cold or mechanical. Rather, attention is imbued with a sense of purpose, interest, warmth, and energy.

Fourth, mindfulness training and mindfulness programs involve *effort*. A student of mindfulness learns about sustained effort—that is, what is too much, what is too little? This is not a striving effort, rather it is an effort that has warmth of feeling, compassion for any struggle encountered, and a sense of measured enthusiasm or dedication. Over time, a sense of trust in the ability to turn toward experience, however difficult, emerges. An analogy that is sometimes used is that the right amount of effort is like tuning a guitar string, not too tight so the note is too high in pitch, not too loose so the note is too low in pitch.

Fifth, mindfulness has an *ethical dimension*. It is deployed and trained in the service of understanding, lessening suffering, enhancing joy, increasing compassion, and providing greater opportunities to lead a mindful life. The mind can learn greater clarity, responsiveness, and calm in the present moment of experience, where distress is lessened or even ended. At the heart of this ethical dimension is figuring out what, in our experience, is wholesome, so that we can turn toward what is likely to lead to good outcomes. As we turn toward what is wholesome, we can then choose to let go of patterns and tendencies that do not enhance the well-being of others or ourselves. For example, in the face of suffering, we can bring an inclination toward compassion and let go of an inclination toward harshness.

> ***To summarize, mindfulness is like a diamond with many facets. It is a state, process, and faculty; it has at its core intentionality; it is imbued with certain attitudes (curiosity, friendliness, patience, and care); it requires effort; and it is intrinsically ethical. These facets of mindfulness have sometimes been summarized into the what and how of mindfulness. The what is attentional focus and broader awareness. The how is an attitude of turning toward experience, with curiosity and care, to every aspect of experience. We would add the why of mindfulness—namely, a clear intentionality guided by ethics and a map of where we are trying to go.***

The Function of Mindfulness

The function of mindfulness is to help us shift from automatic reactivity to responsiveness, and from avoidance patterns to a genuine willingness to meet present-moment experience as it is. Classically, mindfulness helps us shift

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

from unconsciousness to awareness, from impulsiveness to an intentional way of being. Faced with threat, adversity, and pain, our first response is to flee, dissociate, and either lean backward into the past or forward into the future. Threat and pain become triggers for rumination, anxiety, obsession, and bewilderment. We become preoccupied with *fixing* distress rather than understanding it. The habitual pattern of the mind to flinch and flee in the face of discomfort and pain can become lifelong patterns of avoidance and agitation. Caught in the avoidance mechanisms that can govern our mind and life, our capacities for resilience, tolerance, and equilibrium are undermined. When Sam was caught in the throes of addiction, his cravings and self-destructive behavior ran his entire life. To a lesser degree, this can be true for all of us. We all can go through a whole day without many spaces of lucid awareness, of being truly awake and alive.

Mindfulness reverses these habitual tendencies. It can help us cultivate the capacity to know, understand, and inhabit the present moment. As the Buddhist teachings put it: "Suffering is to be understood." Flight and abandonment do little but deepen our sense of fear and helplessness in the face of pain, hindering our ability to respond with skillfulness. Our willingness to turn toward the moment, rather than away from our present experience, is the beginning of a journey toward greater confidence, commitment, and understanding. Mindfulness can only be cultivated in the *real-life* classroom of our lives, with all the joys and sorrows that are part of every human experience. Understanding distress and its origins is the only curriculum. It is here that we learn the lessons of healing and transformation.

Many of the patterns that create distress for us have long histories, not only our particular learning histories but also in the evolutionary history of the human species. We inherited these habits of mind because they have served a function for our species. Yet the mind is malleable and capable of tremendous change. Mindfulness training is intended to help us first see, then know these patterns of mind and then start to change them. In remarkably short periods of time, such as during an 8-week mindfulness program, participants can make significant life-changing shifts in how they relate to present-moment experience (Allen, Bromley, Kuyken, & Sonnenberg, 2009). These changes are even more marked in long-term mindfulness practitioners who have engaged in sustained training over many thousands of hours (Lazar et al., 2005; Lutz, Slagter, et al., 2008). There is growing scientific evidence that these changes are mirrored in our brain structure and function, our nervous system, bodily responses to stress, and even our genomes (e.g., Goleman & Davidson, 2017; Luders, Cherbuin, & Gaser, 2016; Luders, Toga, Lepore, & Gaser, 2009; Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, & Davidson, 2008; Schutte & Malouff, 2014).

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

Traditionally, mindfulness has been described as having four primary functions.

Simple Knowing and Awareness

Establishing simple knowing and awareness is the starting point of any mindfulness training. Learning to shine the light of clear, sustained attention upon present-moment experience—without bias or preference—is the point where we begin to distinguish the experience itself from our capacity to be aware of the contents of experience. Awareness taps into our feelings, sensory impression, moods, and thoughts. Aspects of our experience that have been unconscious, habitual, or shrouded in confusion can be recognized and, in time, seen with clarity. In mindfulness practices, we may be invited to move the flashlight beam of attention around the entirety of our experience, highlighting present-moment sensations, thoughts, and feelings, so that we can become familiar with the nuances of the moment.

Simple knowing and awareness is likened to a person standing on an elevated platform or tower surveying the surrounding landscape—there is no agenda but to see, the awareness is receptive, relaxed, and intentional. We have a perspective that does not overly identify with the particulars of the terrain.

All of the main mindfulness practices used in mindfulness-based programs cultivate this first function of mindfulness: simple knowing. For example, in intentional walking practice, people are invited to choose a path and commit to walking that path, focusing only on the direct sensory experience of walking. The practice reveals the difference between habitual, automatic modes of walking and mindful walking. When lost in thought, dullness, or preoccupation, we could spend 20 minutes walking on a path only to realize we have seen nothing, been touched by nothing—the world has been only a backdrop to the swirl of mental activity. When we walk that same path in an intentional way—returning our attention over and over to what it is just to walk, to inhabit the body and the moment—we sense how mindfulness illuminates the world. The sights and sounds touch us; the body is a fluid changing experience. It is a clear moment of wakefulness; we remember to come back to the present moment over and over again.

The cultivation of this simple awareness, learning to sustain it in every moment of experience, initiates a profound shift in consciousness. Simple knowing is a way of attending where no judgment or narrative is added to the experience of the moment. A thought is a thought, a sensation is a sensation, a sound is a sound, and a feeling is a feeling. Historical association is released, future dreads and anticipations are released, and we establish the capacity to

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

know the moment just as it is. We may be acutely aware of the pull of habitual patterns to interpret, evaluate, speculate, and ruminate. Yet those patterns are also known in the light of simple awareness—habit as habit, reactivity as reactivity.

> Sam's recovery from addiction had involved attending 12-step meetings. One evening after a meeting he felt agitated, impulsive, and on the verge of relapsing. Every fiber in his body wanted to act out, to phone his dealer to score a hit. He phoned his 12-step program sponsor, who agreed to meet him on the beach for a walk. While Sam waited for his sponsor, he walked on the beach. As he walked, he became acutely aware of the intensity of his agitation, how every fiber in his body wanted oblivion. The compulsion gripped him like a vice; he experienced it as a powerful impulse to act out. This was the first of many instances in which Sam closely observed his mind and body states without acting them out, each time with greater clarity. Over time, he came to see them as waves he could anticipate and surf. Sam's experience is an extreme example of a common experience—namely, the arising and falling away of cravings.

If Sam's addiction seems extreme, consider that the impulse to reach for our phone to check for notifications is much the same, as is the impulse to eat even when we are not hungry, as is the impulse to check our favorite websites rather than do something we need but don't want to do. They are all habitual forms of avoidance and escape.

The cultivation of simple awareness is a form of fasting that cuts off the reinforcement of the patterns and habit that lead to distress through thought and speculation. Central in the development of mindfulness is training the capacity to be steadfast in our attention in the face of all experience, whether pleasant or unpleasant, without pushing it away and becoming lost in the contents of experience or ruminating. Cultivating simple knowing is not easy. It is an intentional way of being present that requires a surprising amount of effort. We begin with applying our intention to be here, only to find that our attention is hijacked by more habitual modes of forgetfulness and distractedness. As we learn to apply and reapply the intention, our capacity to sustain attention begins to grow. There is a simple formula underlying this process: where there is interest, intention follows; where there is intention, attention follows.

Protective Awareness

The second function of mindfulness is protective awareness. Mindfulness teaches us a way of being that clearly recognizes the potentially destructive power of some of the habit patterns and moods that assail the mind and then

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

acts to protect the mind. Mindfulness reveals the way that rumination, anxiety, aversion, dissociation, and identification serve to create distress, diminished capacity, and negative self-view. Through simple awareness, we explore the landscape of our mind, becoming intimate with the familiar and repetitive habits that undermine well-being so that we can begin to use our attention to choose what we allow into awareness and what we keep out of awareness. This is not easy: there is a curious tension of wanting these habits to end, yet also being enchanted by or almost addicted to them.

There is an ancient simile of the gatekeeper of a city, whose job it is to meet all visitors. The gatekeeper recognizes and welcomes the visitors to the city who are helpful and beneficial, and turns away those who mean the city harm.

> The gatekeeper would be wise, competent, and intelligent, one who keeps out strangers and admits acquaintances. While he is walking along the path that encircles the city he could not see a cleft or an opening in the walls big enough for a cat to slip through. He might think, "Whatever large creatures enter or leave this city, all enter and leave through this one gate." (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2005)

Protective awareness requires discernment, of knowing who the residents of the city are, who are visitors, who intend benefit, and who intend harm. This can seem to be at odds with mainstream mindfulness-based applications that so strongly emphasize the nonjudgmental and inclusive nature of mindfulness. In Buddhist psychology, a judging mind inevitably creates struggle and distress. Judging and *discernment,* however, are two different processes. Mindfulness, in Buddhist psychology, emphasizes developing and strengthening our capacity for discernment as the basis of an ethical life and the bridge to skillful responsiveness.

Discernment is not concerned primarily with worse and better, right and wrong, good and bad, worthy or unworthy, but rather is supported by simple awareness. For example, if we walked down the street and witnessed a vulnerable person fall down, simple knowing would enable us to clearly perceive the event. Merely observing his or her plight would not, of course, help the injured person. Remember Mohammed, the man living with chronic pain. If he sees the sensations of pain clearly in his awareness but has no sense of agency or choice, then this is of little help. Discernment registers the pain *and* leads us to make skillful choices, to address our own and other people's distress. The moment when Sam knows he is on the point of relapse and phones his sponsor is a moment of discernment. The moment Mohammed sees his pain spiraling into a sense of catastrophizing and hopelessness is a moment of

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

discernment. Mindfulness is thus dynamic, engaging with experience in ways that are rooted in knowing what leads to distress and what leads to the end of distress.

Discernment can be learned. When we are engaged in cultivating mindfulness of the body, we might feel the familiar pull of habits (such as aversion, rumination, and shame). Instead of letting our attention become lost in our negative patterns, we can return to a place of knowing the body as the body, a thought as a thought. This is the function of protective awareness. Protective awareness is different from avoidance or suppression, which are patterns rooted in aversion, avoidance, or fear. Instead of turning away and dissociating from difficult experiences, protective awareness helps us fully know present-moment experience, so that we can choose not to engage in patterns that create and re-create distress. The moment Mohammed acknowledges an awareness of his painful sensations by applying some well-chosen stretches will provide some quick relief from the stabbing, searing sensations. This is an alternative to the well-worn ruts of physical contraction, hopelessness, and catastrophizing.

The tendency of the human mind to blame, shame, judge, ruminate, and/or simply want things to be different from what they are, is powerful, repetitive, personal, and universal with predictable painful outcomes. These tendencies or habits can directly contribute to mental ill health. There is even evidence that anxiety and depression, and the tendency to worry and ruminate, can be passed from generation to generation (Ziegert & Kistner, 2002). There may be much we are asked to understand about these distress patterns, yet that understanding is rarely borne of more rumination. Protective mindfulness is not a process of pushing away the unwelcome, but simply learning that we do not need to live in a way in which we are repetitively overwhelmed by it. It also may help us end the cycle of unhelpful thought patterns that are passed down from generation to generation.

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

Investigative Awareness

The third function of mindfulness is investigative awareness. The analogy used to describe this element of mindfulness is that of a surgeon operating on a person wounded by an arrow. Rather than yanking out the arrow, a skillful surgeon would first assess the wound to determine its nature. After assessing the nature of the injury, the surgeon would then make a diagnosis, determine the most beneficial way of removing the arrow, establish a prognosis, and prescribe a course of treatment. Investigative mindfulness is centrally about understanding and insight. It is the window of mindfulness through which understanding emerges that can radically change the shape of our experience

and in time, the mind. Investigation ties mindfulness to the core of teachings of mindfulness training and mindfulness programs—to know that there is distress, to know that there are origins to distress, to know that distress can come to an end, and that there is a pathway to the end of distress (Teasdale & Chaskalson, 2011a).

Investigative awareness is both experiential and conceptual. Through formal mindfulness practices, psychoeducation, and in-group inquiry, we have a growing understanding of the mind, the ways in which it creates our internal experience, and also shapes and is shaped by our external world. On the simplest level, Mohammed becomes aware of painful sensations in his back, but with mindfulness he also knows that aversion and resistance will compound the sensations. He really looks into the sensations, seeing them as they are—"searing" and "stabbing." He learns to meet pain with a caring attention and understands that he does not need to be defined by pain, that there are other things that define him, such as being a good father. Mindfulness does not always mean the sensations will disappear, but we can radically shift how we relate to the sensations and how we allow them to impact our consciousness. Investigative awareness provides discernment and choices. For example, there are many activities that are immersive, distracting, and enjoyable but we have discernment and we choose to do them (such as knitting, gardening, watching television, talking to a friend, listening to podcasts). The key in investigative awareness is intentionality and choice.

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

Reframing Perception and View

The fourth function of mindfulness, clearly interwoven with the previous three, is a conscious reframing of perception and view. In Buddhist psychology, this function is taught by consciously cultivating an attitude of kindness and friendliness toward ourselves, others, and all events and experiences. Kindness and friendliness are embedded in all mindfulness teaching. Aversion, on the other hand, forces us to turn away from ourselves, others, and the events of our lives. When we feel aversion, we fear the unwelcome, engage in judgment and blame, and far too often spend our lives in a state of agitated avoidance. When our awareness turns toward all experience with curiosity and friendliness, our view of others as enemies or threats begins to soften. We begin to see that we are not the broken, imperfect person we can believe ourselves to be. We allow ourselves to see that pain arises and changes; bleakness is not a constant. We can challenge our self-descriptions of unworthiness in the light of a new perception. The life we may have perceived as threatening, gray, or meaningless can be seen in new ways. We realize that we have choices that can change our thinking and our lives.

The cultivation of all four functions of mindfulness constitutes what in Buddhist psychology is referred to as wise or skillful mindfulness, dedicated to liberating the mind from distress and embodied in a mindful way of living. To bring these four functions to life, we revisit Ling, the 44-year-old court magistrate and single mother of two teenage children. Ling had a history of depression that started when she herself was a teenager. After participating in an MBCT program 2 years ago, she learned new skills to stay well in the long term. She found the program helpful and continued a mindfulness practice to sustain herself. Below we see an example of how mindfulness fulfills these four functions for Ling.

For no obvious reason, Ling woke at 3:00 A.M. with a sense of foreboding. Almost as soon as she was awake, every conditioned pathway in her mind pulled her toward a sense of worry and agitation. There was a familiar sense of knowing the day would be marred by tiredness, fertile ground that could trigger her depression (*simple knowing and awareness*). She was aware of a plummeting feeling. It was a familiar, scary place. For Ling, this recognition was the first step. With courage and firmness, she said to herself: "This is my black dog; this is depression."

The next step was a subtle but profound shift in orientation of mind (*protective mindfulness*) to one of friendly allowing: "Here you are again, familiar old friend, it's OK, I know you well." Ling is meeting the plummeting feeling with friendliness, open to investigating what she is experiencing in her mind and body. The next deliberate step was a steadying of her breath and body, intentionally bringing her attention to her belly, placing her hand on her belly and feeling the movement of her belly as her breath moved in through an in-breath and out through an out-breath. One breath, two breaths, deliberately slowing and steadying the breath. Inevitably, it seemed her mind pulled her back toward worry. Firmly, gently back to the belly, breathing (*protective awareness*). Ling is steadying herself with her attention.

After 10 minutes of steadying her attention with her breath, Ling felt she had an active choice. She could stay in bed and use a practice she knew might help her sleep or she could get up, have a cup of coffee, and get on with her day knowing she'd probably sleep well the following night (*investigative awareness*). She chose to get up, to really savor a cup of coffee (before her family woke), and get on with something she had been putting off for some time: writing a reference for one of her former colleagues. An hour later, as she printed out the letter, she stopped to read it with a sense of appreciation that she had been able to help her colleague. It brought a smile to her face to know that her reference would help her friend get a good job. It brought to mind her teenage children, sleeping upstairs. She poured herself another cup of coffee. As she sat drinking it, she stopped to really savor the coffee and bring to mind her family. The shift in mind Ling was able to make that morning was transformative and

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

empowering, changing the trajectory of her day. Her black dog was still there, but she had been able to meet it with mindfulness (*reframing perception and view*).

We can see these different facets and functions of mindfulness in action for Ling in the course of her early morning. In the past, it is likely this moment would have spiraled into an episode of depression; her sense of foreboding would have consumed her experience, plummeting in a downward spiral. However, she recognized this and was able to *steady her attention,* bringing *qualities of friendliness and patience* to her experience. She *practiced mindfulness* of breath and body to further *steady her attention* (*protective awareness*). The foreboding was labeled as "the black dog" (*insight, reframing perception and view*) and related to with attitudes of *friendliness, equanimity,* and *patience* ("Here you are again, familiar old friend, it's OK, I know you well"). She started to feel she had an *active choice* and she chose to get up and *do something constructive,* showing *discernment* and *resilience* in the face of the early warning signs of depression. She *savored* her coffee and stopped to *appreciate* the colleague she had helped and her family asleep upstairs (*awareness of positive experience*). All of these actions of mind and body were on the tip of intention—namely, to be free of the grip of depression and enjoy better *mental health* and *well-being,* both for her benefit and for all the people whose lives she affected (her children, friends, and colleagues). These shifts in mind enabled Ling to change the trajectory of her day and over time build her *capacity* for leading a mindful life.

The key insight is that mindfulness has four functions: (1) simple knowing and awareness, (2) protective awareness, (3) investigative awareness, and (4) reframing perception and view.

Metaphors of Mindfulness

Throughout Buddhist psychology and contemporary accounts of mindfulness, similes, metaphors, and imagery are used to connote mindfulness. We have already used some in defining mindfulness and summarize some of the most helpful in Table 1.2. These metaphors capture the myriad facets of mindfulness in ways that sometimes narrative text cannot: they bring a richness and texture to our understanding.

One powerful metaphor, learned from a participant in a mindfulness program, was of a kayaker navigating a turbulent river upstream from Niagara Falls, New York. The participant explained that without mindfulness a kayaker can easily be swept downriver at the whim of the river's currents and into

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

danger. Without awareness, a kayaker is vulnerable to being dragged toward and over Niagara Falls, an experience she compared to being dragged into a depressive relapse. A skilled kayaker, on the other hand, can navigate the river, making skillful choices as she travels downriver. For example, even in a turbulent river, a skilled kayaker can find an eddy where the kayak can rest in safety and the kayaker can pick out a skillful route downriver. She compared this to seeing the early warning signs of depression, anchoring awareness and choosing to respond in ways that prevent depression and support recovery and well-being.

What Mindfulness Is *Not*

As we noted at the start of the chapter, mindfulness encapsulates myriad meanings. As such it is prone to misunderstanding, becoming clichéd or even parodied. We address some of the most common misunderstandings in turn.

Mindfulness is neither *relaxation* nor *in the service of becoming relaxed*. While relaxation may be a positive outcome of some mindfulness practices, mindfulness is about attending to and being aware of our experiences, whether they are positive, negative, or neutral. Mindfulness is not about zoning out. In fact, it is referred to in classical teachings as *waking up* to our experiences and lives.

Mindfulness is neither a *quick fix* nor *simple*. Even though one dimension of mindfulness is *simply knowing,* this does not mean that mindfulness or mindfulness practices are simple or lead to easy, quick changes. Anyone who sits down to practice mindfulness learns this soon enough, and when we stop and examine it the mind presents the texture, richness, and depth of our experience, both the pleasant and the unpleasant.

Mindfulness is not about *emptying the mind, not thinking,* or *turning away from experience*. Rather, it is about turning toward experience and being with and alongside whatever is found in our experience. What is intended is that mindfulness enables choices and clearer thinking. Some advanced practitioners of mindfulness have described states of mind that can be described as spacious, where the endless stream of thinking ceases for a while. But this is neither common nor a goal of mindfulness-based programs.

Mindfulness is not about *dismantling the self*. Instead, mindfulness is about creating conditions whereby we can learn firsthand and experientially about our minds. It is true that this learning often leads to shifts in perspective. Ling, for example, gained the understanding that experiences shift and change, they are impermanent. When she became aware of her thoughts and feelings, she was able to shift her thinking ("I am not my negative thoughts") and make positive choices, instead of spiraling into old patterns. Mohammed

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

also experienced an important shift when he came to realize I am not my pain. Sam too saw he was not his craving, even when the cravings were so powerful. He developed a faith in his capacity to know and manage powerful mind states through many years of learning to ride the waves of these sensations. This was not so much a dismantling of the self as a new way of being and knowing. We learn that we can choose to make these shifts—like driving and selecting different gears, we can see mind states and select different gears.

Mindfulness and meditation are not one and the same. Meditation practices are found in almost every contemplative tradition and serve a variety of purposes. They can train attention, develop different types of awareness, cultivate attitudes of mind, and develop a sense of intentionality and ethics. Mindfulness, on the other hand, is a state, process, and capacity that we all have and can be trained and cultivated through these meditation practices. In mindfulness-based programs, the practices have a particular intention—namely, to better understand the mind and then to train it in the service of living with less suffering and greater joy and ease. See Appendix 2 for a fuller description of mindfulness training and mindfulness-based programs.

Mindfulness practice can evoke a range of experiences that are unfamiliar, unknown, and even frightening. These include involuntary body movements, seeing lights or hearing sounds, states such as dissociation, or an exacerbation of anxiety or low mood. This is, of course, not the intention of mindfulness practice. It is imperative that mindfulness teachers are appropriately trained. In the same way that an engineer or a doctor should only undertake work they are qualified to do, mindfulness teachers need to be well trained to do the work they are doing—they are working with an organ of extraordinary complexity and power: the human mind (Baer & Kuyken, 2016).

Finally, mindfulness is not attentional training that can be used for ethically questionable practice. If snipers train their attention so they can better kill people, this is attentional training, not mindfulness. If an organization uses certain meditation practices to bring its members into acquiescence, this is not mindfulness, it is brainwashing. Mindfulness is intrinsically ethical. In mindfulness training, everything rests on the *tip of intention*—namely, to support people to suffer less and lead meaningful and rewarding lives.

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

SYNOPSIS

In many ways, we are living at a time of extraordinary potential in the contemporary world. More of the world's population is living longer, in better economic security, with less risk of violence, and with improved education and opportunity. Yet we continue to see a lot of human suffering of various

forms, much of it originating in the human mind and heart. We outlined how mindfulness is a confluence of ancient understandings and practices from Buddhist psychology and modern psychological science. We suggested that mindfulness and mindfulness training can provide a way to understand and then transform this suffering, and suggested that it might provide a pathway to living with greater understanding, compassion, and responsiveness. But first, we need to define mindfulness, to sketch its myriad meanings.

Mindfulness is a state, process, and faculty that can be trained. It involves awareness imbued with a clear intentionality and a particular set of attitudes—turning toward experience with interest and care. Mindfulness is *part of an extended family of qualities* that work together to produce its effects. These qualities include ethics, energy, and discernment. They operate together to develop the understanding and core psychological shifts that liberate the mind from suffering and create insight, understanding, and the possibility of a mindful life characterized by psychological well-being, satisfying relationships, reduction in anxiety and depression, freedom from addictive behavior, and a sense that life is fulfilling and meaningful, even in the midst of pain and inevitable difficulties. This ripples outward into relationships, families, communities, organizations, and the wider world.

Mindfulness has several key functions:

- Simple knowing and awareness;
- Protective awareness;
- Investigative awareness; and
- Reframing perception and views.

The following working definition includes the elements and functions of mindfulness listed above. It is intended to capture the key dimensions of mindfulness that might be helpful to those learning and teaching it.

Mindfulness:

- ***Is a natural, trainable human capacity.***
- ***Helps bring attention and awareness to all experiences.***
- ***Is equally open to whatever is present in a given moment.***
- ***Conveys attitudes of curiosity, friendliness, and compassion.***
- ***Is discernment.***
- ***Is in the service of suffering less, enjoying greater well-being, and leading a meaningful, rewarding life.***

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press

Copyright © 2019 The Guilford Press.
No part of this text may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher.
Purchase this book now: www.guilford.com/p/feldman

Guilford Publications
370 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001
212-431-9800
800-365-7006
www.guilford.com