

The Art of Mindful Singing NVN Annual Gathering 2022

Where everything is music

Rumi

Do not worry about saving these songs.
And if one of our instruments breaks,
it does not matter.
We have fallen into the place
where everything is music.
The strumming and the flute notes
rise into the atmosphere,
and even if the whole world's harp should burn up,
there will still be hidden instruments playing.
So the candle flickers and goes out.
We have a piece of flint and a spark.
This singing art is sea foam.
The graceful movements come from a pearl
somewhere on the ocean floor.
Poems reach up like spindrift
and the edge of driftwood along the beach, wanting.
They derive
from a slow and powerful root
that we cannot see.
Stop the words now.
Open the window in the centre of your chest,
and let the spirits fly in and out.

Definitions of mindfulness

Knowing what is happening, while it is happening, without preference

Rob Nairn

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. This kind of awareness nurtures greater awareness, clarity and acceptance of present moment reality. It wakes us up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments. If we are not fully present for many of these moments, we may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives, but also fail to realise the richness and the depth of possibilities for growth and transformation.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness is a turning towards life....To live life as if each moment is important, as if each moment counted and could be worked with, even if it is a moment of pain, sadness, despair or fear

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness is loving all the details of our lives

Pema Chodron

Mindfulness

When we practice mindfulness both technique and attitude are equally important.

Technique – we recognise that our minds are often ‘unsettled’ – we can’t control our thoughts and we often get pulled into either ruminating about the past, going over and over something that has already happened or worrying about or trying to predict or control the future. Both of these cause us extra suffering, over and above the suffering that is an inevitable part of life. When we practice mindfulness, we use a ‘support’ to anchor us in the present moment. This can be awareness of breath, sensations in the body, sounds or the body moving. When we notice that the mind has got caught up in thinking we recognise that there is nothing wrong with this, it is normal, and we very gently and kindly bring our attention back to this support – time and time again. This reduces suffering. So we allow thoughts and emotions to be there – to arise, display themselves and self-liberate, without needing to get so caught up in them.

Attitude – mindfulness is also about developing an attitude of acceptance and loving kindness towards our inner environment. We learn to accept and welcome our thoughts and emotions – especially difficult ones – and that when we do this, they lose some of their heat and have less of a hold over us. We learn to open up to the well of loving kindness that is already there inside us. This helps us to be with difficult thoughts, emotions and physical sensations and not react to them or try and push them away and so create further suffering. Developing an attitude of kindness towards ourselves also helps to counter our negativity bias. Rick Hanson, the neuroscientist describes how positive thoughts tend to slide off us like a silk scarf and negative ones stick to us like Velcro! It also helps to activate our soothing system and to calm the stress and anxiety caused by our over stimulated threat and drive systems.

Mindful singing

Can we use the body singing as a support to anchor us in the present moment?

As we sing can we begin to notice - with an attitude of allowing

:

- sensations in the body
- thoughts
- emotions?

As we sing can we observe our judgements, preferences, stories, allowing them to arise, display themselves and self-liberate without needing to get so involved with them?

Placing a hand on the heart if useful, or elsewhere, as a gesture of soothing and care, can we allow ourselves to soften and open fully to this moment, allowing the loving kindness in our hearts to begin to flow?

Can we sing into any areas of difficulty allowing our voice to act as a soothing presence?

Can we allow our own unique voice to flow and flourish as an open and loving expression of who we are in this moment?

Remember there is no wrong or right practice – just our own unique experience in this moment.

Apps

Mindfulness Association free apps – the 3 stage breathing space and self-compassion break practices are in the mindfulness section of the app

<https://www.mindfulnessassociation.net/apps/>

Books

- Wherever you go, there you are – Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World (includes CD with guided meditations) – Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman
- The Art of Mindful Singing – Jeremy Dion

Clearing

Martha Postlethwaite

Do not try to save
the whole world
or do anything grandiose.
Instead, create
a clearing
in the dense forest
of your life
and wait there
patiently,
until the song
that is your life
falls into your own cupped hands
and you recognize and greet it.
Only then will you know
how to give yourself
to this world
so worthy of rescue.