

TEACHING MINDFUL YOGA FOR NON-YOGA TEACHERS AND CLINICIANS: PART 2, Principles and Methods

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Starting with the premise that movement is a widely shared, basic human capacity, we will begin by illustrating how even very simple and functional movements such as standing, sitting, and walking not only benefit from mindful attention but can be used as an effective prelude to the more formal and structured practice of MBSR-based yoga. We view ‘mindful movement’ as a mode of learning to be “embodied” in everyday life, rather than divorced or “disembodied” from the experience of being alive. Opportunities to practice ‘mindful movement’ are everywhere.

SOME PRINCIPLES OF MINDFUL MOVEMENT

Movement is a basic human characteristic: We are made to move. Deviation from this principle is fertile ground for illness, suffering: disuse atrophy, Movement of the body is enlivening, affecting blood flow, lymphatic flow, synovial fluid that nourish joint tissue, enhance organ function, and promote cell regeneration.

Very simple and functional movements are effective learning opportunities: Bring awareness of the physical experience of movement into daily life in simple activities like walking, breathing, doing dishes, hugging, lifting, standing-in-wait.

‘Mindful movement’ is a mode of learning to be ‘embodied’: We define mindful yoga broadly to weave the totality of the direct flow of experience (thoughts, sounds, emotions, breathing, etc.) with postures and motions of the body. This may entail setting aside “doing yoga” and turning toward direct experience in physical movement. Seen this way, rigorous movements like swimming, running, cycling, rowing, dancing with awareness can embody ‘mindful movement.’

SOME PRINCIPLES OF SHARING MINDFUL YOGA IN MBSR

Set aside the need to constantly be an expert and instead be yourself: There is so much diversity in what is known as yoga today: fashion, commercial emphasis, forms that range from spiritual to highly athletic.. Set these aside as part of your practice. We are always moving, so practice bringing awareness to your ‘way’ of being embodied both informally moving through life and formally such as ‘working out’. You have everything you need. Learn from experiencing movement in your own life, then share what you ‘know,’ rather than what you ‘do.’

Classes can of course be helpful in learning to experience embodied movement: Yoga, martial arts, Feldenkrais, Pilates, stretching, and other mindful somatic education classes with an attentive, mature teacher can help you learn more about being ‘embodied’ and help develop your foundation for sharing mindful movement with others.

Effort, posture and biomechanics: Invite students to discover and dwell as much as possible at the appropriate “edge” of their own capabilities in regard to balance, strength, flexibility, endurance, and attentiveness. Consider this the ‘Goldie Locks’ approach to mindful movement: neither too rigorous to invite injury nor so tentative as to shy away from one’s capacity. Invite exploration of the territory of the forgotten ‘edge’ of life. The Swedes have a word for this: *logom*, or ‘just enough’. It is a worthy principle, reminiscent of ‘the middle way’.

FURTHER READING

Austin, M, et al Yoga for Wimps. 1999.

Rogers, B. and M. Pielage The Yoga Hillsboro Resource Book: mindful hatha yoga for ordinary people like you and me. (and 2 audio CD’s). 2008, 2010. www.yogahillsboro.com
Stress Reduction Clinic at Yoga Hillsboro. Mindful Yoga in a Chair. (video DVD) 2012. www.yogahillsboro.com



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