



# WELL-AWARE-NESS Psychology

MINDFULNESS & WISDOM BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY ~ MIND-BODY WELLNESS~ COUNSELLING  
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Health Psychologist & Mindfulness Meditation Teacher John Barter Presents

## ‘Stress Less – Live More – Love Life’

*‘A healthy mind is the greatest gain.*

*Contentment is the greatest wealth. A trustworthy friend is the best of kin.*

*Unconditional freedom is the highest bliss.*

The Buddha: DHAMMAPADA, V.204

### ~ STRESS LESS ~

#### The Most Important Thing

- If we ask ourselves ‘What is the most important thing?’ hopefully we would answer that it is ‘Life!’
- The most important and precious thing that we have is life itself, before we can even start to talk about what’s happening in our life, we need to talk about and appreciate being alive.
- It is not enough just to think ‘Yes I am alive’ we need to actually ‘Feel it’. To be alive we need to feel alive!
- So how alive do we feel? Have we ever felt more alive than we do now?
- Our contemporary culture has evolved to the point where we live exceedingly busy and fast paced lives.
- Much of our life is lived on ‘automatic’ just ‘going through the motions’; we can often live our lives days / weeks ahead of our self; no wonder we don’t feel connected to where we belong.
- There is a great difference between feeling that our life is full and actually feeling that our life is fulfilled.

#### Stress in our Life

- Our quality of life is not so much about what we have, and what we do, but what we feel.
- How do we want to feel: Alive, Happy, Fulfilled, at Ease, Content, Joyous, at Peace, Free?
- These wonderful feelings are all compromised and diminished in varying degrees by STRESS; Psychological Stress.
- Stress disables our dexterity; diminishes our cognitive functions; disempowers our emotional availability, sensitivity, and quality of caring concern and connection to others.
- Stress, impacts on the health and wellness of our mind and body; Medical science now shows how stress can both cause and exacerbate many illnesses e.g. Skin rashes, irritable bowel syndrome, hypertension, asthma, allergies, etc.
- Stress causes activation of the neuroendocrine system that releases hormones that compromise our immune system.
- Stress can cause a depletion of the neuro transmitter Serotonin (integral to happiness), leading to depression.

#### Stress Less!

- Life is stressful; it has always been, is and will always be.
- Life in the twenty first century is particularly stressful and we need to find ways to manage stress or we will burn out.
- Much of stress is Psychological; where our mind stands in relation to a stressor: the issue, the illness, the pain.
- How we perceive the experience, will determine how we receive the experience, and how we create our reality.
- By prioritizing the ‘main thing’, rather than getting caught into the minor things; asking what is really important?
- By understanding our mind, how it works, we can both manage and develop its potential to stress less.
- Mindfulness is the quality needed, so we can mindfully relate to the experience rather than be caught up in the experience.

#### Mindfulness: ‘The X Factor’ to Stress Less – Live More – Love Life

- Mindfulness denotes is a fullness of mind, awareness, presence of mind, attention, a ‘Knowing-ness’.
- Without Mindfulness we would live mindlessly, our mind fragmented, distracted, distorted, diminished.
- Mindfulness is that quality that collects and connects us to our experience, to what is going on, to our Life.
- Engaging Mindfulness means ‘To Care’: being Careful and being Caring i.e. engaging Mind and Heart
- Mindfulness is the added value, the added extra, the X Factor that enhances what ever we are doing or experiencing.
- Mindfulness is: Life Giving; Life Guiding; Life Guarding; it is the real health / life insurance we need.
- Elements of Mindfulness include being: Present-Centered; Attentive; Objective; Receptive; Non-Personal (not having to always take things personally).

### **Developing Mindfulness through Mindfulness Meditation**

- Whilst we all have a degree of Mindfulness it can be developed both by using Mindfulness when we engage in our life, or more especially through the conscious exercise of Mindfulness Meditation.
- Of all the forms of Meditation, Mindfulness Meditation is the most applicable in the context of our contemporary culture given that it does not require any religious beliefs or practices to accompany it.
- Mindfulness and Mindfulness Meditation has been studied and practiced for over 2,500 years through Buddhism. Mindfulness is the core teaching of the Buddha and at the heart of Buddhist Psychology. Much of the Buddha's teachings evolve out of the development of Mindfulness through meditation, and revolve around the application of mindfulness in daily life for the development of wisdom and compassion.
- Mindfulness Meditation is the practice and process of developing a quality of sustained awareness leading to both inner calm as well as insights into the nature of our mind and the cause of our emotional pain and psychological suffering.
- Mindfulness Meditation is best practiced daily in a quiet place for approximately 30 minutes, bringing mindful attention to the body and the ongoing sensation of the breath, strengthening and stabilizing the mind.

### **Mindfulness and Mind-Body Medicine; Neuro-Science and Neuroplasticity**

- Medical Science has recently become interested in Mindfulness, especially the new medical paradigm of Mind-Body Medicine (Pert 1999) that sees the mind and body as two parts of the one whole.
- Due to technological advancements in brain imaging (fMRI, EEGs) and the ground breaking work in the area of Neuroscience such as by Davidson (2004) research shows that our mind can change our brain.
- Neuroplasticity is the term used when neural connections change in response to experience. Neurogenesis occurs whereby new neurons grow even in adults, enhancing the structure and function of the brain.
- Mindfulness practice appears to enhance neural plasticity and especially strengthen neural connectivity in the left prefrontal cortex of the brain which significantly relates to enhanced psychological wellbeing and physical health.

### **Psychological Health Benefits of Mindfulness Meditation**

- Research shows that exercising mindful attention through meditation enhances important regions of the brain associated with increase in positive emotions as well as quicker recovery from negative ones. (Davidson 2004)
- Mindfulness appears to enhance Serotonin reducing Depression and Anxiety; Studies show that most psychological disorders are significantly reduced through Mindfulness practice. (Siegel 2007)
- Mindfulness Practices show increase in interpersonal skills and quality of relationships (Siegel 2007)

### **Physical Health Benefits of Mindfulness Meditation**

- Research shows that Mindfulness Meditation through the left prefrontal lobe activity enhances physical health through reduction in stress and increased immune function. (Hassad 2000, Siegel 2007)
- A great body of research by Kabat-Zinn and colleagues shows Mindfulness Practices (MBSR) reduces subjective states of suffering (especially chronic pain), improves immune function and accelerates healing.

## **~ LIVE MORE ~**

### **Live More Life**

- Can we live more? Maybe we can live more in two ways!
- By using mindfulness, and practicing meditation we can enhance our health, wellbeing and longevity of life.
- By using mindfulness and being mindful, we can live more consciously and more fully where our life is happening from.

### **Realizing Where We Belong**

- Not feeling quite alive and fulfilled, can cause us to feel estranged from our life; Not feeling connected.
- We might feel as if we don't quite belong in our self, to our self, in our life, to Life itself!
- Why is it that we feel like this? Maybe we have been 'living where, we don't belong'?

### **Coming to our Senses**

- How do we know we are alive?
- We know we are alive by experiencing life; not just thinking it, but seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, feeling.
- Our 5 senses are only sensitive to what is happening in the present: NOW.
- To feel alive, to Live More, we need to 'Come to our Senses'; Metaphorically: coming to clarity, awareness; Literally: connecting with our senses, getting in touch with our direct experience not just what we think, wonder or worry about it.

## ~ LOVE LIFE ~

### Loving this Life

- How receptive are we to our experience, to what is happening, to that which is our life?
- Are we receptive to all that we are experiencing, not just the pleasant, that which makes us feel good about our self?
- So much of our time and energy can get caught in reacting and resisting what is; this is the cause of stress.
- If we ask: Who gets stress? What gets stressed? What creates the stress? The answer is: Me, I, the self.
- Much of our sense of self is created out of a mental, emotional and behavioural reacting to the flow of life.
- The left-brained thinking created self, is formed from duality, separation and reaction, wanting and not wanting.
- This creates the duality of: Me – You; I – that, and is the opposite of 'Oneness'; a 'Non dual Awareness', no separation, no stress.
- 'All is Life and Love in disguise' my mentor and friend Rahasya says!
- Everything that we are experiencing is our life; rather than Reacting-Resisting-Denying-Distracting from the unpleasant and unpleasing, we can use mindfulness to open our Mind-Heart Awareness to what is; Acknowledging what is, accepting the reality of what is; Being with what is; Learning from what is; Seeing what can be change – when and how?; Flowing with what is; Being the Flow of what is!

### Conscious Relationship to Life

- Mindful Living = a Conscious Relationship to Life; one that is not Conditioned or Conditional
- When we can be open to life in this way it creates the experience of Real Love, no conditions placed on our experience; the relationship to life becomes one of Love; of great energy, aliveness, compassion and care.
- This is the way to save energy, reduce stress, be more connected to what is; with alignment, balance, harmony, joy.
- If we can 'Be present to that which is present', this then, becomes the ultimate meditation; a prayer of Love.

### Being and Knowing rather than Doing and Thinking

- Such a conscious, unconditioned and unconditional relationship to life, allows the left brained thinking, worrying planning Mind, to relax its grip on our experience, providing a chance for our right brained being, knowing and feeling to be engaged.
- Being and Knowing is expressed as the quality of 'Equanimity': the balance of Compassion and Wisdom
- Equanimity is a way of being with a stressor without becoming stressed or distressed.
- Equanimity is a way of knowing the experience; this is happening, this is how it is; knowing that things do change, that pain is a part of life, and that we don't have to take things personally.
- Being and Knowing, brings our mind back to what is, rather than being caught in the reaction, resistance to what is.
- Presence, Peace, Joy, Learning and Love for life, our life becomes possible; for what else, did we think that we are here for?

### Concluding Reflections

- The real SECRET to Stress Less; Live More; Love Life, is MINDFULNESS; not simply getting what we want but knowing how to experience and appreciate fully what it is we have.
- If we are to Be Well and Live Well, to feel good and function well; to have health, happiness, experience peace and joy, we can only experience these things where we are; here, now this present moment.
- Mindfulness helps us to arrive in our life and connect consciously to the present moment, the place and point of existence, the only place to live our life, the place to realize and live from freedom.

**John Barter:** is a Psychologist and Mindfulness Psychotherapist, Mindfulness Meditation Teacher, and University Lecturer (UNSW, UTS). John brings to his work nearly 30 years of continuous study and practice of Mindfulness disciplines, 10 years of which he was an ordained Buddhist Monk of the Theravada Forest Tradition, living and practicing in Australia, Thailand, Britain and Europe. John is the director of WELL-AWARE-NESS Psychology a Sydney based psychology practice through which clients see John for individual or couple sessions. Throughout the year John sees clients and leads Mindfulness based Meditation Classes, Courses, Workshops and Retreats in Sydney, the Byron Coast, and Gold Coast QLD.



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