

MINDFULNESS FOR BEGINNERS ©
Breathing for Healthy Body and Mind
WITH BERYL BENDER BIRCH

Class 1-2
Scientific Basis for Mindfulness

Transcript

Hi. You are back again. Welcome to this next segment. I am so happy that you have continued this far. Good for you. Well, as I explained in our first segment of this course, we are really looking at mindfulness and why we want to be mindful and how that is going to impact our health and our wellbeing. There is a revolution going on in the medical world. It used to be that the only people that knew or had awareness of the benefits of mind and body practices like yoga and mindfulness meditation were people that were on some kind of spiritual track -- either studying yoga or any of the Eastern wisdom traditions or the Christian contemplative tradition or Kabbalah, but all of that is changing. Doctors and scientists are now looking at yoga, meditation, and yogic breathing techniques and looking at how some of these techniques have wonderful benefits for our health and wellbeing. Every day there is lots of new research coming out that is showing how a simple breathing technique, like we are going to learn in this course, can help us manage the stress in our life. It can help us learn to deal with a whole array of anxiety disorders like insomnia or depression, and also have wonderful benefits for anybody with any kind of chronic disease – they can really lessen the difficulties of going through a chronic disease.

This is also wonderful practice for just about anyone who wants to be healthier, be happier, be more mindful and more content with their life as it is. Very often we go through periods in our life where we sort of feel like we are trapped or stuck in a place or in a relationship or in a job that we are not thrilled with. As we practice yoga and we practice paying attention, we learn that nothing is a mistake. Everything we go through in our life is an opportunity to really grow from that experience, whether it is a pleasant experience or whether it is not such a pleasant experience.

Learning a breathing technique that can help us turn on what is called “the relaxation response” is a way to deal with some of the negative effects that stress has on our life. We all know about the fight or flight response. When we are stressed, when we are anxious, what happens is that our body kicks in to high gear. You know -- our adrenal glands release what is called the stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, and that gets us ready to jump up and fight or run away from what the perceived threat is. Now sometimes that is important. Sometimes there really is a grizzly bear standing on the path and we have to run like hell. Or if we think we can overcome the threat; we will stand and fight. But we also need to be able to balance that out. We need to learn how to turn on the relaxation response.

The term “relaxation response” was coined by a man at Harvard by the name of Herbert Benson 30 years ago, and the relaxation response is the polar opposite of the fight or flight response. Learning to turn on the relaxation response means that we take control of the portion of the autonomic nervous system that settles us down, that calms us down. It quiets the brainwaves, slows the heart rate, slows our respiration, it lowers blood pressure, and it makes us more grounded and more settled. Now, studies are coming out that show that there are techniques that we can do that help us learn to turn consciously turn on this relaxation response. So when we are feeling threatened, whether it is simple a perceived threat -- perhaps there really is no threat, we are just remembering an anxious moment -- or we are fearful about something that is going to happen in the future. We start to get stressed. Those stress hormones kick in to gear. We want to be able to learn how to settle ourselves down. That is what being mindful is about. It is catching ourselves and going “I don’t have to go down this road. I don’t have to freak out here. I have a choice.” Once you get it, that you have a choice, it is very, very empowering.

Now, the stress hormones aren’t necessarily bad hormones. They have kept us alive as a species for thousands of years but in our high stress culture, they’re on too much of the time. Most of us are busy. Everybody talks about how busy they are. Oh, they’re so busy. Oh, I’m so busy. Everybody is busy.

Yoga practices help us to say “Okay, appreciate this moment.” You have a moment with your daughter, or your son, or your mother, or your father, with your dog, or a favorite family

member. We can take that moment, we can be present, we can appreciate what is because we all realize as we go through life that we never know what could happen tomorrow. We never know. Things change all the time. I look around this room and everything looks pretty stable, like it is not changing. But everything is changing every moment. And so it is really important for our happiness and our wellbeing to learn how to be present in this moment.

So, once we tune in to this autonomic nervous system, or what we use to call the involuntary nervous system, we know now that it's not really so involuntary. That there are things we can do that take control of these aspects of the autonomic nervous system. It is divided into two portions. There is the sympathetic nervous system, which sort of fires us up and gets us more excited, turns on the stress hormones. And there is the parasympathetic nervous system which quiets us down, which slows everything down, brings us closer back to center. Our practices help us find the balance between these two because we do not want to be way up here all the time, and we do not want to be asleep all the time. We want to find a balance and we want to become more conscious, more aware of when we are out of balance.

I think, unless you have any questions, that we are going to move on to the next segment where we are actually going to begin to learn a practice that is going to help us get calm, get center, get quiet, get more happy, and more content.

Thank you for tuning into this segment. For more information on these and other programs, please visit:

www.betterlearn.com
www.power-yoga.com
and
www.betterlisten.com

©2012 All Rights Reserved.
BetterLearn!, a division of BetterListen! LLC, and Beryl Bender Birch

BetterListen!TM.com