

MINDFULNESS ON AND OFF THE BENCH

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

What is “mindfulness”?

“Mindfulness is deliberately paying full attention to what is happening around you and within you—in your body, heart, and mind. Mindfulness is awareness without criticism or judgment.” (Bays, 2011, 2)

“...I define mindfulness operationally as *the awareness that arises by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally*. (Kabat-Zinn 2013, xxxv)

“Simply put, mindfulness is moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness.” (Ibid, xlix)

How can we enhance mindfulness through practice?

| Formally: Meditation | Informally: Single-tasking | Intensively: Retreats |
|---|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <u>Sitting Meditation</u>: breath awareness, body scan, deep listening, mantra, guiding intention, chanting, loving-kindness meditation2. <u>Walking meditation</u>3. <u>Mindful movement</u>: yoga, Qui gong, Tai Chi, Alexander Technique, Feldenkreis | Apply deep present-centered awareness of your body, breath, sense impressions while executing common daily tasks, such as <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eating• Bathing/ washing• Washing dishes• Driving• Walking to your next location• Standing in line!• Set your devices aside while engaged in other tasks | Devote a half day, full day or longer period to meditation, silent meals, and mindful movement at a location free from distractions. (Most appropriate for experienced meditators.) Modifications: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disconnect from all electronic media to connect to something deeper (enjoy nature, company of loved ones, creative activity)• Take a break from your worries to enjoy life. |
| Requires some time <i>As little as 5-10 minutes per day works wonders!</i> | May be incorporated into your existing daily schedule. | Require an extended break from your daily schedule |
| Taking your mind to the gym | Your mind takes the stairs rather than the elevator. | A spa or resort for your mind. |

PART 2: FORMAL MEDITATION PRACTICES

Breath Awareness

1. Begin by emptying your lungs with a slow deep exhalation.
2. Four-part breath: inhale—gently hold—exhale—gently hold
3. Continuous breaths: merge inhalation and exhalation seamlessly while observe the motions and sensations in your abdomen and nostrils
4. Breath counting: 3 breaths-5 breaths-10 breaths-20 breaths
 - a. Count at the end of each exhalation.
 - b. If you lose count, start over or make your best guess and the next number and continue—it's all good.
 - c. When you can maintain your desired count, shift to another focus (mantra, body scan, listening)
5. Breathing with mantra: (adapted from *How to Relax* by Thich Nhat Hahn, Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2015)

| INHALE | EXHALE |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Breathing in. | Breathing out. |
| Breathing deep. | Breathing slow. |
| Feeling calm. | Feeling ease. |
| Smile. | Release tension. |
| Resting in the present moment. | This is a wonderful moment. |

Body Scan

1. To begin, stabilize your attention by counting 5, 10, or 20 breaths. Then proceed to step 2 or 3 below.
2. Full body scan: direct your breath to each of the following body parts in turn. If you have trouble feeling an area, scratch it gently with your hand: top of head, face, back of head, neck, etc. down to toes.
3. Partial body scan: identify a part of your body that feels tense or sore. Direct your breath there. Inhale softness, exhale and release into length.

Mindful Listening

1. To begin, stabilize your attention by counting breaths, and or complete a partial or full body scan.
2. Let your breath and body sensations rest in the background of your attention as you listen to sounds in your surroundings.
3. Listen to prominent sound. Listen to the quietest sound you can hear. Enjoy the different pitches and timbres, like you would a piece of music.
4. Can also strike a piano tone with pedal or a bell or other decaying sound and listen until you cannot hear the sound anymore

Loving-kindness Practice

1. To begin, stabilize your attention on the sensations breathing.
2. Wish happiness and health to yourself, to one or more loved ones, to a friend, to an acquaintance, to someone you don't know, someone you don't like, to all beings.
3. Adaptation for religious observers: mentally recite or chant an original or liturgical prayer as you sit and breath calmly

PART 3: USING FORMAL MEDITATION WHILE TEACHING AND PRACTICING

Formal mediation practices can be used in miniature to refocus the mind before during and the end of the session.

| SEGMENT | MUSIC LESSON | INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE SESSION |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Beginning | Post sign in entrance: Count 10 breaths. Have students practice mindful breathing or body scan if they arrive early. Begin lesson by taking 3 to 5 mindful breaths with the student. | Devote 5-10 minutes to stretching, breathing and partial or full body scan <i>before</i> warming-up at the piano. Experience the full length of your spine and take a deep, mindful breath before you play your first sound. |
| Transition | Ask student: "What have you learned from what we just did? Let's take three breaths as we think about that." Now close your eyes as I strike the bell/ tone. Clear your mind to make room for our next task. | Reflect/ write down insights. What did you learn for the next practice session? Breathe. Sound bell or long tone to clear you mind for next piece/task. |
| When a challenge arises | Breathe into body part that appears tense or strained. Take a mindful breath together. What can we do next? | Respond to negative self-judgements with curiosity. For example: This is hard for me---what is tricky here? I can't do this---I can't do this yet. I'll try doing this and see what happens. |
| Conclusion | Name something important you learned today. Breathe it in. Now breathe out with a smile. Take that smile with you! | Same! |

PART 4: INFORMAL MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."
-Aristotle

Mindfulness is like a muscle: the more you use it, the more powerful it becomes.

Three Guiding Principles

1. **Neuroplasticity:** The brain can change its structure, function, and neural networks in response to illnesses, injury, life experiences, and daily habits.
2. **The Myth of Multitasking**
 - a. Multi-tasking is actually task switching. Neural activity can change in tenth of a second as we shift our attention from one task to another.
 - b. Overloading the brain with too many competing stimuli creates stress that shrinks the gray matter in the pre-frontal cortex.
 - c. Do one thing at a time. Don't allow digital and other distractions to disrupt you from doing deep meaningful work.
3. **Process Before Product**
 - a. While engaged in any task, let go of thoughts of self judgement about your progress and worries about the results. Don't rush to finish. Focus your awareness on each step you take. Set your goal, then keep it in the background as you focus on what you are doing and experiencing moment by moment.
 - b. This process of **single-tasking** will allow your brain to build new neural networks for the skills you acquire from your focused actions.
 - c. If your mind should wander from the present moment, you have not failed. If you are aware of your distracting thoughts and choose to let them go, you are cultivating mindfulness!

Daily Practices for Mindful Living

Here some daily routines to quiet your mind and help you experience your musical and non-musical activities more deeply.

1. Stop, Breathe, and Be: several times throughout your day, take 10 to 30 seconds to stop, breathe mindfully, and observe your present experience impartially without trying to change yourself or external surroundings. This is a core practice in MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction).
2. Mindful Chores: Choose one or more utilitarian daily tasks as a chance rest attention fully on your present experience. As you do the task, don't rush to finish. Concentrate on PROCESS BEFORE PRODUCT. Observe your sense impressions, body movements, breath, and the sights and sound connected with doing the task. Examples: washing dishes, shaving/bathing, cleaning your desk, putting on clothing....
3. Mindful Travelling: Turn off radio, tv, computer, and other devices while driving, walking, or travelling to your next destination. Don't think about what's next: enjoy the sights, sounds, smells, and sensations of your journey.
4. Mindful Socializing: Be fully present in social settings. Put away the phone or lap top during meals or meetings, and don't look at your watch. When someone is speaking, let go of your desire to respond and instead, observe the person's voice tone, body language, and message.
5. Mindful eating: turn off devices, put away work and reading materials. Focus on enjoying the sight smell, taste, and texture of your food. Feel gratitude for all of the people whose hard work brought the food to your table. Savor every bite slowly. Listen to your body, not your cravings: when you no longer feel hungry, stop eating!
6. Parking Lot: during any activity, if your attention shifts to concerns about the past or future, write your thoughts in a book, and set a time to reflect and act upon them later. (Think of Beethoven and his copious sketchbooks!)
7. Use technology mindfully and intentionally
 - a. Turn off cell phone and computer alerts (except for loved ones in case of an emergency)
 - b. Check messages, email at predetermined times instead of interrupting your work. Your responses will be more skillful and thoughtful
8. Mindful listening: avoid listening to music or television while you do unmusical tasks so that you do not develop the habits of an inattentive listener.
9. Gratitude: Every day, when you wake up, ask yourself "What am I grateful for." Write a list of things or people you are grateful for in your planner or at the top of your to do list. Take an in-out breath for each item on your list.

PART 5: INFORMAL MINDFULNESS PRACTICES WHILE TEACHING AND PRACTICING

Embodying Mindful Presence While Teaching

"...when we speak of *mindfulness*, ...we equally mean *heartfulness*. In fact, in Asian languages, the word for "mind" and the word for "heart" are usually the same. ...It is more-than-conceptual-knowing. It is more akin to wisdom, and to the freedom a wisdom perspective provides. (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, xxxv)

- **Wait time.** Use wait time before you speak and after you ask a question. Doing so will give the student an opportunity for mindful reflection.
- **Choose curiosity over judgment.** After hearing a student play or sing, your first words don't have to be praise or critique. Use Socratic methods to help your student assess the current level of learning objectively without judging themselves. "What's working here?" What challenges to you see? What can you do next? Why do you think the composer wrote this marking?" Remember, a teacher is not a judge but a gatekeeper. We find the right doors to open that will lead students to meaningful discoveries about themselves, the music, and life.
- **Parking lot.** For chatty students, keep a small pad of paper near the piano. When the student starts to talk about thoughts are distracting them from meaningful music making, allow the student to write down one to three words that recall their thought. Have the student put the paper in a pocket and assure them that their thought will be waiting for them to address later. Then ask a question that helps the student redirect their attention to the lesson.

Set an Intention Before You Practice

Before you make your first sounds, identify your objectives (intended outcomes) and the time duration for your practice session. Then commit to an intention to guide your process.

| Learning Stage | Intention |
|---|--|
| Sight reading a new unfamiliar piece | Maintain a beginner's mind . (What can this piece teach me?) |
| Early stages of practicing a difficult passage. | Practice with patience . |
| Playing through a piece while recording it to assess your progress. | Practice non-striving . (Let the music breathe through you and see what happens.) |
| Listening to a recording of your practicing. | Practice acceptance . Accept your current level of preparation without wishful thinking so you can be objective and identify next steps |

Shift Mental Focus While Repeating a Passage

- **Massed or blocked practice:** mastering a task or skill through focused nearly identical repetitions.
- **Problem:** for music, can build short-term muscle memory at expense of long-term memory needed for memorization and peak execution in performance conditions
- **Solution:** vary mental focus between kinesthetic, visual, and aural factors among multiple attempts. Alternate between playing, singing, audiating, fingering, visualizing, and combinations of these actions. Doing so can also provide rest for your voice or hands.
- After focusing on several anchors, then ask the student: "Now just play. Don't think, just listen and respond to what you hear and feel."

Cultivating Selfless Trust Before Performing

There is a Zen proverb: "No self, no problem." This means that our idea of a self that is separate from the rest of the universe is just an illusion. Every element in us originated outside of us. We can address our performance anxiety if we stop thinking about our selves and instead be grateful for all things and beings that support our health, intellect and well-being.

A Loving-kindness Meditation Before Performing

1. Imagine that you are hearing and seeing the composer play the first phrase of the piece you are about to perform. (If you are the composer, imagine that the piece was not composed by you but given to you to give to others.)
2. As you continue breathing deeply, imagine the composer saying the following phrases to you:
 - a. May this music flow through me (the composer, the person who wrote it).
 - b. May this music flow through you (meaning you, the performer).
 - c. May this music flow through him or her (visualize a person in the audience that you know and love).
 - d. May this music flow through all of us in the room (including those you do not know).
 - e. May this music bring harmony to our world.

"...When we know how to *be* peace, we will find that art in a wonderful way to share our peacefulness. Artistic expression will take place in one way or another, but the being is essential. So we must go back to ourselves, and when we have joy and peace in ourselves, our creations of art will be quite natural, and they will serve the world in a positive way. "

--- Nhat Hanh (1991)

For more information and discussion about mindfulness practices, subscribe to my Blog, "The Mindful Musician" at www.jdflowersmusic.com.