

Awakening Joy

Lesson Plan for Step 2: Mindfulness

Candle Lighting and Opening Words: (2 minutes)

"There is a most wonderful way to help living beings overcome grief and sorrow, end pain and anxiety and realize the highest happiness. That way is the establishment of mindfulness." The Buddha

Centering (5 minutes)

Checking In (20 minutes)

1. What three or four things have you done to nourish yourself since our last meeting?
2. Have you been meditating, singing, exercising, dancing or writing in a journal?
3. Have you set an intention every morning?
4. If you're comfortable, would you like to share your intention with us?
5. Do you make choices throughout your day based on your intention?
6. How's it going? Have you had any "aha" moments you want to share?

Shared Readings on Mindfulness: (20 minutes)

Participants take turns reading quotes on the Awakening Joy theme of Mindfulness.

The following quotes are from *Awakening Joy: 10 Steps That Will Put You On The Road to Real Happiness*, James Baraz and Shoshana Alexander, Random House, 2010 (Hardcover); *Awakening Joy: 10 Steps to Happiness*, James Baraz and Shoshana Alexander, Parallax Press, 2012 (Paperback).

"The secret to awakening joy is being present with whatever part of life we're tasting right now. The key to this secret is the practice of mindfulness, and it is the underpinning of all the other practices in this Awakening Joy program with mindfulness we live in the present moment. The habit of being a little (or a lot) ahead of ourselves, living in the past or lost in fantasy exacts an enormous price: We miss out on our life." Pg. 30 (Hardcover); Pg. 31 (Paperback).

"Mindfulness has many benefits, but for our purposes the most important is that it can help you live a happier life. You can't make joy or well-being happen, but you can help create the conditions in which those states more naturally arise. This starts with allowing yourself to be right where you are. Mindfulness is a tool that helps you learn to do that." Pg. 31 (Hardcover); Pg. 32 (Paperback).

"Although mindfulness is non-judgmental awareness, this doesn't mean that we abandon the faculty of discrimination. In fact, when we are aware

of what we're actually thinking and feeling, we can clearly discern the difference between those thoughts and actions that are harmful and those that are beneficial. Becoming aware of our habits and the automatic ways we react when we're confused or upset is the first step to freeing ourselves from their power." Pg. 34 (Hardcover); Pg. 34 (Paperback).

"The present moment is always changing. Mindfulness directly reveals this truth of impermanence. When we see this truth of change for ourselves, our relationship to experience dramatically shifts. We learn to enjoy pleasant experiences without holding on to them when they pass (which they will) and we are able to remain present with unpleasant experiences without fearing they will always be this way (which they won't)." Pg. 36 (Hardcover), Pg. 37 (Paperback).

"We are creatures of habit. The practice of mindfulness interrupts the habits that put your mind on automatic. With mindfulness you begin to develop the freedom to make choices that lead to greater happiness and well-being instead of suffering and regret." Pg. 38 (Hardcover), Pg. 39 (Paperback)

"Changing negative habits depends upon paying mindful attention to what is happening inside us when they arise. The mind and body are interconnected, each affecting the other." Pg. 47 (Hardcover),Pg. 47 (Paperback).

"The Buddha was a preeminent mind researcher 2,500 years ago. As he investigated his mind in meditation, he noticed different categories of thoughts: those that led to suffering and those that led to happiness. The first group included thoughts connected with blind desire, ill will and cruelty which led, as he put it, 'to my own affliction and the affliction of others.' The other set of thoughts—those of contentment, kindness and compassion-had just the opposite effect. Not only were they harmless to himself and others, but they actually led to happiness." Pg. 49 (Hardcover), Pg. 49 (Paperback)

"While what arises in our mind is somewhat random and out of control, we do have control over which thoughts we choose to dwell on. By training ourselves to pay attention to what is happening in our mind and body in any situation, we make it more likely that we will empower those thoughts that support our well-being."
Pg. 49 (Hardcover), Pg.49 (Paperback).

"We strengthen habits of thought through repetition. If you often think unkind, negative, or depressing thoughts, you'll tend to continue thinking in that way. If you choose thoughts that uplift, nourish and bring kindness to yourself and others, your mind will increasingly lean in that direction." Pg. 49 (Hardcover), Pg. 50 (Paperback).

“Mindfulness teaches us to incline our mind toward joy by helping us wisely choose our thoughts and actions. And the more we do this, the more readily it happens. Research psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky says in her book, *The How of Happiness*, that ‘an unhappy person spends more than twice as much time thinking about unpleasant events in their lives, while happy people tend to seek and rely upon information that brightens their personal outlook.’” Pg. 51 (Hardcover), Pg. 51 (Paperback)

Discussion Questions for Mindfulness (50 minutes)

Joan uses these questions to stimulate discussion.

1. How do you define mindfulness?
2. Are you aware of being mindful throughout the day?
3. Did any of the readings resonate with you?
4. Which of your habits serve you well?
5. Which of your habits don't serve?
6. When you find yourself in a contracted state, what do you notice in your body and mind?
7. When you're feeling expansive, what do you notice in your body and mind?

Practices that Strengthen Mindfulness (5 minutes)

1. Mindfulness Meditation.

Instructions are found in the book *Awakening Joy*, by James Baraz and Shoshana Alexander, 2010 (Hardcover), pg. 45; 2012 (Paperback), pg. 46.

2. Taking in the Good.

Whenever you're experiencing a moment of joy or contentment, pause and take in the good. Dr. Rick Hanson says that if you take in the good for thirty seconds, six times a day, you will notice greater well-being and notice a real difference within just a couple of weeks. *Awakening Joy* live class presentation by Dr. Rick Hanson, author of *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love and Wisdom*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2009.

3. Practice being in the present moment.

From the exercise titled, “Just As It Is”.

Awakening Joy, 2010 (Hardcover) pg. 33; (Paperback), pg. 34.

Wherever you are, notice how you're feeling, physically and mentally.

Notice sounds and what you see.

Observe the thoughts going through your mind.

Notice when you feel contracted or expanded in your body and mind.

Setting Intentions (5 minutes)

State what practice will bring more joy and well-being in to your life until we meet

again.

(For example, "I plan to meditate every day for five minutes," "I'm going to take a walk in nature this weekend.")

Closing Meditation (10 minutes)

Joan reads Patricia Ellsberg's Meditation – On the Breath found in the Awakening Joy Practice Letter.

Extinguishing the Candle and Closing Words

Joan reads a quote she has found on the theme. She then invites the group to say the following phrases of loving kindness:

May I be present with whatever part of life I'm experiencing right now.
May I be aware of what I'm actually thinking and feeling so I can clearly discern between those thoughts and actions that are harmful and those that are beneficial.
May I empower those thoughts that support my well-being.
May I choose thoughts that uplift, nourish and bring kindness to myself and others.

Singing

Standing in a circle, holding hands, Joan leads the group in singing.

"I Can See Clearly Now", Johnny Nash; Jimmy Cliff

"Awakening Joy"(to the tune of Amazing Grace)

"Go Now in Peace" Don Besig and Nancy Price

<http://www.shawneepress.com/product/viewproduct.do?itemid=35008009&lid=0&keywords=Go%20Now%20in%20Peace&subsiteid=204&>

Supplemental Readings

Joan adds quotes from a variety of sources. For example, for the theme on Mindfulness, she shared quotes from:

Jack Kornfield, author and Buddhist teacher <http://www.jackkornfield.com/>

Dr. Rick Hanson's book, *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love and Wisdom*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2009.

Mary Oliver's poem "Mindful", from her book of poems, *Why I Wake Early*, Beacon Press, 2004.

Newsweek article written by Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction teacher Amy Gross.

<http://www.newsweek.com/mindfulness-meditation-rediscovered-64203>

