

Contemplative and Scientific Perspectives on Human Flourishing: Psychological
Dynamics in Different Families of Meditation and a Curriculum for the Cultivation of
Well-being

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Abstract

The practice of meditation has played a central role in spiritual, philosophical, and humanistic traditions for thousands of years. In these traditions, meditation is often viewed as a practice that aids in the cultivation of virtue, wisdom, and other qualities that are thought to bring about a state of inner flourishing. Meditation practice is also being applied in contemporary secular settings to alleviate stress and promote well-being, and standardized meditation programs have become an active topic of scientific research. The historical importance of meditation and the widespread application and study of these practices in contemporary settings calls for theoretical models and standardized meditation training programs that can serve as a basis for future research. To contribute to the converging fields of well-being research and contemplative science, we present a model of meditation that delineates three families meditation practice. These families are discussed in relation to their historical antecedents in Buddhism and Greco-Roman philosophy, as well as contemporary research in clinical psychology, cognitive science, and the study of well-being and human flourishing. Drawing on this three family model and related scientific research, we also present a comprehensive well-being training curriculum that includes a variety of traditional meditation practices adapted for secular settings.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

The practice of meditation has played a central role in spiritual, philosophical, and humanistic traditions for thousands of years. In some religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Daoism, meditation is a central feature of spiritual practice (Gethin, 1998; Hartz, 2009; Klostermaier, 2003), while in other traditions, such as Greco-Roman philosophical schools and Western monotheistic religions, it played an important, though more peripheral role (Burckhardt & Chittick, 2008; Eifring, 2015; P. Hadot, 1995; Unterman, 2009). Although contextualized differently in these traditions, meditation has typically been thought of as a practice that enables one to train the mind in specific ways to aid in the cultivation of virtue, wisdom, and other qualities that bring about a state of inner flourishing.

More recently, the use of meditation has spread to other segments of society, where it is often viewed as a method to alleviate stress and other forms of mental and physical suffering (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006; Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Linehan et al., 1999; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2012). The growing popular interest in meditation is also reflected in scientific research. Thousands of clinical and neuroscientific studies have been conducted over the past decade, with results suggesting that mindfulness and other forms of meditation may have a positive impact on health (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004) and various psychological variables (Sedlmeier et al., 2012), as well as altering brain structure (Fox et al., 2014) and function (Y.-Y. Tang, Holzel, & Posner, 2015). Scientists have also sought to identify potential psychological and neural mechanisms in different forms of meditation and to classify different forms of contemplative practice (Austin, 2013; Josipovic, 2013;

Kozhevnikov, Louchakova, Josipovic, & Motes, 2009; Nash & Newberg, 2013; Fred Travis & Shear, 2010; Frederick Travis, 2014). These advances have yielded insights into the nature of mindfulness and other forms of meditation and the way in which they might impact various facets of well-being.

Despite these advances, the scientific study of meditation is still in its infancy. There is little scientific data on the wide variety of practices found in the world's contemplative traditions, and the methodological rigor of studies on various styles of meditation have been called into question (Davidson & Kaszniak, 2015; Goyal et al., 2014). To date, research has focused on a limited number of meditation practices, such as mindfulness practices and Transcendental Meditation. Moreover, the precise psychological and physiological mechanisms of individual practices are poorly understood, as are their developmental trajectories and their unique psychological, behavioral, and neural outcomes. Meditation-based interventions are similarly at an early stage of development. There are few standardized meditation interventions, and those that exist encompass a limited range of styles of meditation. For these reasons, future research must grapple with the diversity and complexity of these practices if we are to understand their role in alleviating suffering and enhancing well-being.

Important Questions in the Scientific Study of Meditation

What are the main styles of meditation practice?

As noted above, contemplative practices are found in many of the world's religious and philosophical traditions, including Asian religions like Buddhism and Hinduism (Gethin, 1998; Maharshi, 1985), monotheistic Western religions (Fadiman, 1999; Laird, 2006; Unterman, 2009), Greco-Roman philosophical schools (P. Hadot, 1995), and increasingly in contemporary therapeutic contexts (Hayes et al., 2006; Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Linehan et al., 1999; Segal et al., 2012). Across traditions, meditation is often practiced to promote self-regulation, self-awareness, and in some cases self-actualization. In their respective traditions, meditation practices are typically situated within a path of self-transformation, in which various practices are used to effect specific changes in the body, mind, and behavior. Understanding the diversity of meditations and their relationship to one another is thus a critical concern in the scientific study of meditation.

Some meditation practices serve to support the inculcation of ethical principles, while others are designed to foster insight and wisdom, or to train attention. In terms of ethics, many contemplative traditions employ specific forms of meditation to support the integration of ethical principles with everyday life. In this capacity, meditation enables the individual to monitor the cognitive and affective patterns that motivate behavior and to replace maladaptive patterns with those that are in harmony with important values and principles. In certain strands of Greco-Roman philosophy, such as the Stoic school, for instance, meditation was used to build an awareness of death, loss, and other facts of life in order to strengthen the will and build character (P. Hadot,

1995). Similarly, in Buddhism, meditation is instrumental in the cultivation of important ethical principles, such as generosity and compassion (Gethin, 1998).

Meditation plays a similar role in the generation of wisdom and self-knowledge. In both Greco-Roman philosophical schools and many Asian religions, meditation serves to generate insight into the nature of the self, the mind, and the nature of reality (P. Hadot, 1995; Harvey, 2004; Maharshi, 1985). In monotheistic traditions, meditation plays a similar role in generating insight into the nature of the divine and one's relationship to a higher power (Fadiman, 1999; Laird, 2006; Unterman, 2009). Contemporary therapeutic applications of meditation similarly use meditation to arouse insight into the nature of self and the way in which thoughts and emotions shape experience (Hayes et al., 2006; Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Linehan et al., 1999; Segal et al., 2012).

In many contemplative traditions, both the cultivation of ethical ideals and the generation of insight into the nature of experience depend on the capacity to regulate attentional processes, and especially the capacity to monitor thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Fadiman, 1999; P. Hadot, 1995; Maharshi, 1985; Wallace, 1999). This capacity therefore plays an important role in enabling one to identify and regulate maladaptive cognitive and affective patterns, and to stabilize patterns that are conducive to well-being. Meditations that bolster this capacity thus serve as foundational practices in a variety of traditions and contemporary applications of meditation. In Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy, for instance, meditation practices are used to strengthen the capacity to observe thoughts and reactions, a process

referred to as “decentering” (Segal et al., 2012). Similar practices are commonplace in the Buddhist tradition (Bodhi, 2011; Kapleau, 1980; Olendzki, 2011; Swanson & Rinpoche, 2010; Wallace, 1999).

In light of this distinction between practices that regulate attentional processes, meditations that strengthen virtue, or desirable psychological qualities, and those that dismantle maladaptive patterns through self-inquiry and self-knowledge, we may therefore speak of attentional, constructive, and deconstructive families of meditation. Over the course of a lifetime, a meditator is likely to practice a variety of meditation techniques. In some cases, individuals might practice multiple styles of meditation within a particular family, intermingled with practices from the other families. The role that meditation plays in the cultivation of well-being, therefore, is extremely complex, with specific practices playing different roles across time.

Despite the broad range meditations and the individual complexity of specific practices, the bulk of rigorous scientific research to date has focused on one particular style of meditation from the attentional family: mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness-based practices have been studied in relation to physical health (Davidson et al., 2003; Rosenkranz et al., 2013), mood disorders (N. A. S. Farb, Anderson, & Segal, 2012; P. Goldin & Gross, 2010; Teasdale et al., 2000), substance abuse (Bowen et al., 2014; J. A. Brewer, Elwafi, & Davis, 2012; Westbrook et al., 2013), attention (Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008; MacLean et al., 2010; Raffone & Srinivasan, 2010; Y.-Y. Tang et al., 2007), emotion regulation (Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2009; P. Goldin & Gross, 2010), and brain structure and function (Fox et al., 2014; Lazar et al., 2005;

Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson, 2004; Y. Y. Tang, Rothbart, & Posner, 2012; Y.-Y. Tang et al., 2015). Recent meta-analyses suggest that short mindfulness-based interventions (typically eight weeks or less) may be beneficial in both clinical and normal populations (Grossman et al., 2004).

Theoretical accounts of meditation practices have similarly focused on mindfulness-based practices. Multiple papers have attempted to define and operationalize the construct of mindfulness (Bishop, 2004; Jankowski & Holas, 2014; Olendzki, 2011; Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006), to identify core mechanisms (Holzel et al., 2011; Lutz, Jha, Dunne, & Saron, 2015; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012) and specify variations in mindfulness practice (Lutz, Slagter, et al., 2008).

Although the rigor of mindfulness research seems to have improved over time (Sedlmeier et al., 2012), there are still numerous methodological and conceptual issues related to this field of inquiry (Davidson & Kaszniak, 2015; Goyal et al., 2014; Grossman, 2011).

It is important to note that research on other forms of meditation is not entirely absent. In the past few years, scientific interest in compassion-based meditation has increased. Though the number of studies on this topic is still relatively small, preliminary research suggests that this style of practice may also have beneficial effects on physical and mental health, increase prosocial behavior, and alter brain activity (Klimecki, Leiberg, Ricard, & Singer, 2014; Leiberg, Klimecki, & Singer, 2011; Pace et al., 2009; Weng et al., 2013). In addition to compassion-based practices, there is also a sizeable body of research on transcendental meditation (TM) – a practice with elements

of the attentional and deconstructive families (Orme-Johnson & Barnes, 2014), although many of these studies have been criticized on methodological grounds (H Canter, 2003; Sedlmeier et al., 2012). Visualization practices – a group of constructive family practices commonly practiced in Tibetan Buddhism (Kozhevnikov et al., 2009), and deconstructive styles, such as Zen meditation (Kemmer, Guo, Wang, & Pagnoni, 2015) and non-dual meditations (Josipovic, 2013), have also received some scientific attention. Theoretical papers have also attempted to identify core processes in other styles of meditation (Austin, 2013; Josipovic, 2010; Frederick Travis, 2014), yet only one paper has attempted to provide a unifying scientific taxonomy for the range of meditation practices (Nash & Newberg, 2013) and this account does not specify core psychological mechanisms in different families of meditation.

Thus, although these findings indicate that specific forms of meditation may play a positive role in the cultivation of well-being, the current state of research leaves many questions unanswered. Future studies will therefore need to look at a broad range of practices to shed light on the unique mechanisms, targets, and outcomes of each family of meditation. It will also be important to study the developmental trajectory of each practice, the synergistic effects of different combinations of practices, and the environmental, cultural, and interpersonal factors that inform the meditation training process.

How do different families of meditation practice affect well-being?

Meditation is generally thought to bolster well-being, and it is likely that specific practices do so in different ways. Since the bulk of scientific research to date has focused on mindfulness practices, little is known about the relationship between the three families of meditation outlined above – the attentional, constructive, and deconstructive families – and the different ways that they might impact well-being. Although scientific data on this topic is lacking, traditional and contemporary sources provide ample theoretical suggestions concerning the relationship between well-being and different styles of meditation.

Primary sources on attentional family, for instance, outline both direct and indirect pathways through which mindfulness and other forms of meditation in this family might impact well-being. The most direct route is the state of deep physical ease and mental tranquility that is said to arise through sustained practice (Wallace, 1999). Although this state is typically only experienced at advanced levels of training, experiences of equanimity are thought to occur at early stages of practice as well. Attentional practices might also impact well-being indirectly by supporting the regulation of thoughts and emotions. As noted above, a core component of meditation practice – especially those in the attentional family – is the capacity to monitor what is happening in the mind and body (Holzel et al., 2011). This capacity becomes especially important when strengthening healthy thoughts and feelings and weakening those that undermine well-being. This regulatory process is the primary focus in the constructive and deconstructive families of meditation, but even in the attentional family, the

process of identifying and altering cognitive and affective mental processes is important, especially in focused attention practices.

Constructive family meditations similarly involve the capacity to monitor experience, but add the process of identifying thoughts and emotions that undermine well-being and replacing them with more adaptive qualities. Some meditations do so by strengthening prosocial qualities like kindness and compassion (Salzberg, 2002), while others promote ethical considerations and a reorientation toward what is truly meaningful in life (Swanson & Rinpoche, 2010) or a shift in perspective toward positive qualities in oneself, others, and one's environment (Makransky, 2007). This family should therefore impact well-being in a variety of ways. Interpersonal practices should strengthen positive social connections and decrease feelings of loneliness and isolation, and also increase positive emotions like compassion and gratitude. Practices related to ethics and values may impact a variety of domains, but especially those related to meaning in life. Perceptual practices that shift one's subjective orientation may impact levels of optimism, as well as one's sense of autonomy and the capacity to cope with the challenges of life.

The deconstructive family plays a similar role to the constructive family, but rather than focusing on the strengthening of adaptive qualities, this family emphasizes the dismantling of unhealthy psychological patterns and often employs various forms of self-inquiry to this end (Azeemi, 2005; Goldstein, 2003; P. Hadot, 1995; Maharshi, 1985). This family is therefore likely to bolster well-being indirectly by decreasing unhealthy emotional and cognitive patterns tied to maladaptive conceptions of self.

Moreover, since many practices in this family foster insight into the nature of the mind, experience, and even reality itself, deconstructive practices should especially increase the capacity for self-growth and self-actualization.

As noted above, the bulk of research to date has focused on mindfulness-based practices. In regards to well-being, preliminary clinical and neuroscientific studies suggest that attentional practices may indeed impact well-being by altering psychological processes and brain networks related to emotion regulation (Chambers et al., 2009; P. Goldin & Gross, 2010; Westbrook et al., 2013), attention (Chiesa, Calati, & Serretti, 2011; Hölzel et al., 2013; Lutz et al., 2009; MacLean et al., 2010; Posner, Rothbart, Sheese, & Tang, 2007; Y.-Y. Tang et al., 2007), and increased awareness of self-related processes (J. a Brewer et al., 2011; N. a S. Farb et al., 2007a; Nielsen & Kaszniak, 2006). Future studies must therefore improve conceptual and methodological rigor in the study of mindfulness-based practices and extend the range of inquiry to include other forms of meditation and the potential synergistic effects of different styles of practice.

What interventions are needed to study the full range of meditation practices?

The growth of popular and scientific interest in meditation has, to date, centered largely on Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and adaptations of this program (Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2013). MBSR has the benefit of being a standardized program with a large group of trained meditation instructors and an accessible, secular set of

mindfulness practices. This training program was initially intended for use by those with chronic illnesses, and first spread widely within the healthcare system in the United States.

As a short, standardized program with trained instructors, MBSR also served as an ideal candidate for scientific research. Some of the first rigorous studies of meditation focused on MBSR (Davidson et al., 2003; J Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, & Burney, 1985; Jon Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992) and it continues to catalyze research across a number of scientific domains, including clinical psychology (Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010), medicine (Lengacher et al., 2012), and neuroscience (Hölzel et al., 2011; Rosenkranz et al., 2013). Moreover, mindfulness-based interventions have been implemented and studied in a variety of populations, such as people with health conditions or mood disorders (Carlson et al., 2014; P. R. Goldin & Gross, 2010), in various professional settings (Davidson et al., 2003; Gold et al., 2010; Good et al., 2015; Irving, Dobkin, & Park, 2009), and with the general public (Creswell, Pacilio, Lindsay, & Brown, 2014; Rosenkranz et al., 2013; Shapiro, Oman, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008).

The growth of interest in MBSR, paired with encouraging results from scientific research, led to adapted versions of MBSR in other settings. Perhaps the most well-known and widely studied such adaptation is Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), a fusion of classical Cognitive Behavior Therapy and MBSR mindfulness practices (Segal et al., 2012). MBCT and other mindfulness-based therapeutic interventions have now received substantial attention from the scientific community and

have been shown to be effective in the treatment of depression and other mood disorders (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011; Khoury et al., 2013; Piet & Hougaard, 2011). Similar adaptations have been developed for professionals, educators, and children (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2015; Gold et al., 2010; Good et al., 2015; Irving et al., 2009).

There is also an emerging field of research on the use of online interventions related to health and wellness. Evidence suggests that online training programs can be effective in the treatment of mood disorders (Boettcher et al., 2014; Spence et al., 2011), medical conditions (Devineni & Blanchard, 2005; Hunt, Moshier, & Milonova, 2009), and in improving general health outcomes (Petersen et al., 2008). Indeed, one meta-analysis found that internet-based psychotherapeutic interventions demonstrated similar effects to in-person therapy (Barak, Hen, Boniel-Nissim, & Shapira, 2008). Preliminary studies also indicate that mindfulness-based interventions can be effective when delivered online (Cavanagh et al., 2013; Cavanagh, Strauss, Forder, & Jones, 2014; Dimidjian et al., 2014).

Standardized programs have thus played a critical role in the spread of secular meditation practices. They have also provided the scientific community with a single training regimen to use as a basis for the investigation of the effects of meditation on the body, mind, and brain. Although their efficacy is still in question, online training programs have extended the capacity of standardized well-being training interventions by increasing the number of people who can utilize them and also by creating more opportunities for the intervention to be employed consistently on a day-to-day basis.

Three Areas of Research and Design

In the preceding section, I presented an overview of the broad range of meditation practices found in various spiritual, philosophical, and humanistic traditions and explored the unique role that different styles of meditation may play in the cultivation of well-being. I also discussed the importance of standardized meditation programs as a basis for scientific research and in making secular meditation programs available in a diverse range of settings. In light of the current popular and scientific focus on mindfulness, the current state of research thus calls for comprehensive models that encompass different styles of meditation and standardized training programs that will enable these practices to be studied.

No single theoretical model, line of research, or intervention can address the questions raised above. Nevertheless, in the pages that follow I attempt to contribute to the growing body of scientific research on meditation practice and the cultivation of well-being. This work contains three main sections. In the first, I present a three-family model of meditation practice that focuses on the psychological mechanisms found in different styles of meditation practice. This model is contextualized by discussing views of human flourishing found in Buddhism and Greco-Roman philosophy, and the meditation practices used in these traditions to cultivate well-being. These historical perspectives and practices are then discussed in terms of their contemporary application in a variety of settings and their potential utility as a basis for scientific research.

In the second section, the three family model is discussed in the context of cognitive and affective neuroscience. This discussion centers on the cognitive mechanisms found in the three families of meditation and the brain networks that may be linked to these mechanisms. The mechanistic account contained in this section describes these mechanisms in relation to specific forms of meditation, drawing parallels with related areas of research in cognitive neuroscience, clinical psychology, and other areas of scientific inquiry.

The third and final main section presents a secular well-being training program that utilizes different forms of meditation drawn from traditional practices. This program contains four modules that relate to (1) attentional family practices that foster mindfulness and the regulation of attention, constructive practices that (2) elicit a sense of purpose and meaning in life and (3) prosocial qualities like kindness and compassion, and (4) deconstructive family practices that strengthen self-knowledge. Individual modules include insights drawn from the scientific study of well-being, as well as self-report and behavioral assessments that will be used to study the program's impact. The curriculum presented here outlines the goals and scope of the program, its individual components, and will serve as a basis for the design and implementation of the program itself.

Chapter 2

Contemplative and Scientific Perspectives on Meditation and the Cultivation of Well-being

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Abstract

In scientific research, well-being is increasingly viewed as something that can be cultivated, or learned by training specific skills. This view has roots in Greco-Roman philosophy, especially in Aristotle's notion of eudaimonia, and is also a common perspective of Buddhism and other contemplative traditions. Both Greco-Roman philosophical schools and Buddhism employed practices, including forms of meditation, to cultivate various aspects of what contemporary science refers to as well-being. Despite the growing popular and scientific interest in meditation, we still understand very little about the nature of meditation practice and how specific forms of meditation may contribute to well-being. In this article, we discuss well-being and how it can be cultivated, drawing on the perspectives of Buddhism and Greco-Roman philosophy. We present three families of meditation that are common to these traditions and discuss pathways through which they may contribute to well-being. The classical perspectives that underlie these practices may yield important insights for the scientific study of human flourishing.

Introduction and Overview

Meditation and other forms of contemplative practice have been an important part of the world's religious, philosophical, and humanistic traditions since antiquity (Burckhardt & Chittick, 2008; Eifring, 2015; Gethin, 1998; P. Hadot, 1995; Unterman, 2009). These practices play a variety of roles, but typically aid in a process of psychological transformation by enhancing the capacities of self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-inquiry. Although the philosophical views and ethical frameworks that inform the world's religions and philosophical schools vary widely, there is notable similarity among the styles of practice they employ. There is also a commonly held view that the mind can be trained, and that doing so can help bring about the state of human flourishing espoused by each tradition.

The use of meditation and other contemplative practices is thus not unique to Buddhism or other Asian religions. Indeed, such practices are found in Western monotheistic religions, in Greco-Roman philosophical schools, and increasingly in contemporary medical and psychotherapeutic contexts (Burckhardt & Chittick, 2008; Eifring, 2015; Pierre Hadot, 2002; Hayes et al., 2006; J Kabat-Zinn et al., 1985; Linehan et al., 1999; Savin, 2001; Segal et al., 2012). In all such domains, we find the use of practices to cultivate a heightened awareness of the body and mind, to strengthen healthy, or virtuous, qualities, and others that are thought to generate insight into the nature of the self and its relationship to the world. These practices are typically not

considered ends in themselves. Rather, they are viewed as pragmatic tools to bring about a state of optimal well-being and/or to alleviate suffering.

Popular and scientific interest in meditation – an important subset of contemplative practice –has grown considerably in recent years (Davidson et al., 2003; Fox et al., 2014; Goyal et al., 2014; Leiberg et al., 2011; MacLean et al., 2010; Sedlmeier et al., 2012; Y.-Y. Tang et al., 2015). Meditation practices are increasingly incorporated into education and healthcare, various forms of psychotherapy, and in professional settings (Hayes et al., 2006; Irving et al., 2009; Linehan et al., 1999; Teasdale et al., 2000; Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014). This growing interest in mindfulness and other forms of meditation has coincided with the burgeoning fields of positive psychology and well-being research (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Ryff, 2014; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), and the intersection of these areas of inquiry has led to a fruitful discussion on the cultivation of well-being.

Despite the growing popular and scientific interest in meditation, we still understand very little about the nature of meditation practice and the way in which specific forms of meditation may contribute to well-being. In this regard, classical presentations of meditation practices and their respective aims offer important insights. Greco-Roman philosophies and Buddhist contemplative frameworks are of particular relevance. As the foundation of Western thought, the philosophical schools of ancient Greece and Rome played a central role in shaping the scientific and philosophical views of the modern world, while Buddhism is the source of many styles of meditation

currently taught and studied in contemporary medical, therapeutic, and professional contexts.

In the following pages, we revisit the philosophical foundations of these two traditions with an emphasis on the principles that each viewed as central to the cultivation of well-being and virtuous living. We then turn our attention to the meditative exercises prescribed by both the Buddhist and Greco-Roman traditions. Our discussion centers on three families of meditation. In each, we highlight important psychological processes and consider the impact these practices might have on well-being. Finally, we consider current research on meditation and well-being and suggest directions for future studies. In particular, we highlight gaps in scientific research and discuss new directions that may help us better understand the role that these practices play in the cultivation of human flourishing.

Distant Foundations: Buddhist and Greco-Roman Views on How to Live

Buddhist meditative traditions and Greco-Roman philosophical schools share a common interest in the cultivation of well-being. In both traditions, the cultivation of well-being was viewed as a practice, and both philosophical inquiry and meditative exercises were used as pragmatic methods to facilitate a process of self-actualization (Gethin, 1998; P. Hadot, 1995). Sharpening the mind through dialogue and investigation, and softening the heart through meditation and ethical living, were thus

not viewed ends in themselves, but rather practical means whereby individuals, communities, and cultures can truly flourish.

Within and between these traditions we find a range of competing philosophical positions and ethical prescriptions. On the surface, it may appear that they share little common ground. Yet examining the forms of practice that they employed, we find many shared features. Both Buddhism and Greco-Roman philosophy stress the importance of self-awareness – the ability to step back and observe one’s mind and behavior – as an important constituent of well-being (Aurelius, 2006; Wallace, 1999). This capacity may be cultivated as an end in itself, or as a foundation for ethics and discernment, or inquiry and self-reflection.

The cultivation of virtue is also a common theme in these traditions (P. Hadot, 1995; Keown, 2005). Ethical living is viewed as an indispensable practice and a key component of individual and collective well-being. Virtue, moreover, is viewed in both traditions as something that must be cultivated. Although different virtues were emphasized in specific philosophical schools and contemplative lineages, a core principle in these traditions is the notion that there are specific psychological qualities that contribute to well-being, and that these qualities can be systematically strengthened. As we will see below, the cultivation of virtue contributes directly to well-being by eliciting wholesome states of mind and prompting healthy behaviors, and also indirectly by reducing mental states that produce states of suffering and psychological distress.

A third area of overlap pertains to the development of self-knowledge and wisdom, or insight into the workings of the mind and the nature of the self. The famous Greek maxim “know thyself” is perhaps the most notable example of this principle. In the writings of Plato, for instance, we find the importance of self-inquiry mentioned repeatedly by Socrates, who stressed that one should first seek to understand one’s own mind before striving to understand abstractions that have no import for daily living (Plato, trans. 1997). In Buddhist traditions as well we find a rich body of literature and contemplative practice related to self-inquiry and the cultivation of insight, both of which are viewed as indispensable when it comes to the path to inner flourishing (Harvey, 2012).

A final point of convergence between these two traditions is an emphasis on what may be referred to as “psychological balance,” which we find expressed in the Aristotelian principle of the “golden mean” and the Buddhist notion of the “middle way.” Both schools of thought and practice emphasized the importance of moderation and balance in all things, and viewed excess as a barrier to well-being. These ideas will be explored in more detail in the following pages, but here we may simply note the principle of balance was a central tenet in both traditions.

Exercises related to self-awareness, virtue and ethics, and self-inquiry thus serve a practical role in the cultivation of well-being. These practices are meant to help us recognize and strengthen the very best within us, to shape our relationships with others and to bring meaning to our pursuits, and to help us understand the mind, how it

works, and how we can gain insight into our place in the world. In the following pages, we provide a brief overview of the role that these styles of meditation practice play in both the Buddhist and Greco-Roman traditions, especially in relation to the question of how to live a meaningful life.

The Buddhist Path of Awakening

Buddhism is a non-theistic tradition that focuses on the alleviation of suffering and states of discontent (Pāli, Sanskrit: duḥkha) and a corresponding achievement of inner flourishing, which is traditionally referred to as “awakening” (Pāli, Sanskrit: bodhi) (Gethin, 1998). The Buddhist account of well-being emphasizes a pragmatic course of training in self-awareness, self-regulation and the cultivation of virtue, and self-inquiry. Though contemporary adaptations of Buddhist principles often focus on the practice of meditation, the cultivation of ethics and the pursuit of wisdom are equally important aspects of Buddhist practice. All three of these areas of practice are meant to inform one’s daily life, to improve the quality of one’s relationships, and to guide one’s actions and pursuits.

The Buddhist notion of awakening is viewed as a process of self-actualization, in which one learns to recognize and nurture the very best within oneself. In practice, this approach highlights the importance of avoiding the twin pitfalls of indulgence and asceticism (Ricard, 2008). The first pitfall is the belief that lasting happiness can be achieved through the pursuit of pleasurable experiences. On the other end of the

spectrum is the idea that happiness can only be achieved by denying the needs of the body in order to free the mind from its attachment to the world of the senses.

According to the Buddhist view, both of these approaches undermine well-being and perpetuate a cycle of chronic dissatisfaction.

As an alternative to the pleasure seeking approach of the hedonist and the world-denying path of the ascetic, Buddhist practice advocates navigating a "middle way" between these two extremes by training in ethics, learning to regulate attention, and cultivating insight into the nature of experience. These three factors are referred to as the "three superior trainings" and together comprise the Buddhist path (Gethin, 1998). Each form of training is held to play a critical role in the cultivation of well-being. Not only does each offer a unique contribution to human flourishing, all three mutually reinforce one another and are thought to foster enduring experiences of well-being.

From the very beginnings of the Buddhist tradition, ethical training has been a cornerstone of contemplative practice (Keown, 2005). Buddhist ethics are rooted in pragmatic questions concerning the question of suffering. Virtue, from the Buddhist point of view, is simply any physical, verbal, or even mental action that leads to happiness and well-being, while non-virtue is defined as that which leads to suffering and distress. This pragmatic framework allows for moral complexity and eschews an external locus of control or authority, instead placing the principle of virtue and ethical integrity within the context of well-being.

Though ethical training in the Buddhist tradition necessitates the self-regulation of behavior, in practice, the cultivation of virtue is based on the capacity to monitor and regulate the mind and emotions (Harvey, 2000). Buddhist ethical training is thus a training of the mind more than a set of rules and regulations. Nevertheless, external codes of discipline play an important role in supporting the path of contemplation by fostering a balanced attitude toward the world of the senses, one in which the basic needs of the body are fully appreciated and met, but without reinforcing an excessive desire for pleasure (Harvey, 2000). As we will see below, this approach is similar in many respects to schools of Greco-Roman philosophy, which similarly employed contemplative practices to address the habitual impulse to indulge one's appetites and desires (P. Hadot, 1995).

There is no single ethical framework in the Buddhist tradition. However, there are guiding principles that inform the various Buddhist sects and lineages. Of particular importance are the cultivation of non-violence, compassion, and the recognition of innate purity (Kongtrul, 1998). Non-violence is a foundational principle in Buddhism and is based on a profound appreciation for all living beings (Keown, 2005). In practice, it involves a commitment to regulating one's appetites and desires, such that impulses prompted by desire, aversion, or ignorance do not lead to behaviors that create suffering for others. Compassion, a central principle in Mahayana Buddhism, builds on non-violence by promoting an other-centered attitude in which one's primary motivation is not only to avoid harming other living beings, but to also help them achieve lasting

well-being and freedom from suffering (Harvey, 2000). This principle is most clearly embodied in the practice of "arousing the heart of awakening" by committing oneself to the awakening of all beings as the primary motivation for one's life and pursuits (Emmanuel, 2013). In Vajrayana Buddhism, a third central principle relates to the cultivation of a subjective viewpoint in which all beings are regarded as embodiments of wisdom and compassion. This practice of recognizing the innate purity of all beings, traditionally referred to as "pure perception" (Tibetan: *dag snang*), is a practical method that enables the individual to see the very best in oneself, in others, and even in one's environment and surroundings (Kongtrul, 1998).

In light of the current interest in mindfulness and other forms of meditation, it is interesting to note that, in Buddhism, ethical conduct is regarded as an essential prerequisite for calming the mind through the practice of meditation (Bodhi, 2006). The reason for this is quite simple. Without a firm grounding in ethics, the tendency to indulge one's impulses and desires reinforces thoughts and emotions that agitate the mind. This mental and emotional turbulence is the primary factor that impedes the stable awareness cultivated in certain forms of meditation. The relationship between ethics and attention is also reciprocal. Living a life of non-violence and compassion naturally calms the thoughts and emotions that upset the mind, while a stable and wakeful attention allows for the self-regulation of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that comprises ethical training. Thus, training in ethics and attention mutually support and reinforce one another.

In the same way that ethical conduct forms the basis for the training of attention, the training of attention sets the stage for the cultivation of self-knowledge, wisdom, and insight. Cultivating self-awareness through attentional exercises creates the inner workspace needed for the practice of self-inquiry. When insight into the workings of the mind arises through the practice of inquiry, the stabilization of attention is what allows for the integration of insight and wisdom with everyday life. A traditional example for the relationship between attention and insight is a candle flame surrounded by a glass enclosure. A candle flame can be blown out easily without protection, and on its own, a glass enclosure serves no useful purpose. When the candle flame is placed within an enclosure, however, the flame is stable and its light magnified. Here, it is the light of wisdom that needs to be stabilized and applied in the midst of the complexities of life, with stable awareness providing the protective enclosure that safeguards wisdom and insight from being lost or diminished. This stabilization of insight into the nature of experience is held to be the single most important factor when it comes to fostering a stable and enduring sense of well-being.

The Greco-Roman tradition: Philosophical Art of Living as Road to Well-Being

As noted above, Buddhism suggests three contemplative practices that are believed to be important in the cultivation of well-being: stabilizing attention through meditation, cultivating virtuous qualities, and practicing self-inquiry. Interestingly, similar forms of contemplative practice can be found in western philosophy, figuring in

diverse ways in many important philosophical schools in the Greco-Roman world (Hadot 1995, 2002).

In contemporary well-being research, an important distinction is made between eudaimonic and hedonic views of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This distinction is rooted in Aristotle's conception of *Eudaimonia*. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle presents eudaimonia as the highest purpose or goal (*telos*) of human life (Aristotle, trans. 1925). Although often interpreted to mean happiness, Aristotle was explicit that his conception of eudaimonia was not about pleasure or contentment, but rather the realization of the best within oneself (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Importantly, Aristotle emphasized that realizing the best within oneself requires the practice of virtue.

Aristotle understood virtues to be dispositions of character that enable optimal human functioning and which thereby support well-being. He distinguished *intellectual virtues* from *moral virtues*. Intellectual virtues, such as theoretical wisdom or *sophia*, are theoretical and philosophical, and can be learned by education. Moral virtues, in contrast, are pragmatic and can only be cultivated through lifelong practice. The category of moral virtues represents a broad range of moral qualities, including courage, temperance, justice, magnanimity, and friendship. Aristotle saw virtue as existing in the "right mean" between competing extremes. The virtue of courage is thus the right mean between fearlessness and cowardice, while the virtue of temperance is the right mean between self-indulgence and anhedonia.

Aristotle did not consider humans to be virtuous by nature. Instead, he believed that they have the potential to develop virtuous qualities, but also that doing so requires effort and the capacity to constantly monitor whether one is acting in accordance with virtue. One can only become a just person and acquire the virtue of justice by performing just actions. Virtuous living further required the reign of reason over desire and emotion. Greco-Roman philosophical schools commonly locate the source of people's anxiety and unrest in the human passions and desires. Although Aristotle viewed desire and emotion as an intrinsic part of human nature, he believed they need to be guided by reason to prevent them from disrupting the pursuit of eudaimonia or well-being.

Another relevant theme in ancient Greco-Roman philosophical schools is the inescapable tension between the pursuit of philosophical wisdom and the necessity of dealing with the struggles, hurdles and hardships of daily life. Aristotle emphasized that the philosophical contemplative life is only suited to rare individuals, and that most people are destined to lead the political life of the citizenry, continuously dealing with the complex reality of everyday life. Note that for Aristotle as well as other philosophers of antiquity, the political life included all relevant aspects of how human beings live together in communities, thereby underscoring that the Greco-Roman ethics of self-realization was not an individualistic pursuit but rather deeply embedded within social existence.

To accomplish the good life, the Greco-Roman schools suggest practical contemplative exercises. These exercises are likened to an athlete's training and consisted of a training in self-control, meditation, and the practice of virtue (P. Hadot, 1995). These exercises were viewed as practical tools designed to integrate philosophical insights and ethical principles with direct experience, thereby enabling individuals to use these principles to guide their actions in the complex reality of everyday life. These principles were not presented as dogmatic views that must be blindly accepted, but rather as practical guides meant to inform a life of thoughtful reflection and self-inquiry.

An example of a guiding fundamental principle is the Stoic emphasis on distinguishing what is within the realm of human control from what is not. Cultivating an awareness that death, loss, illness, and other circumstances are natural facts of life would, they believed, lead to an attitude of acceptance and equanimity. The Stoics thus believed that our feelings about the circumstances of life – not the circumstances themselves – lead to unhappiness (Epictetus, trans. 1983). The Epicureans, by way of contrast, believed that wealth, fame, and other such factors are not necessary, and that desiring them leads to suffering. The basic strategy of the Epicureans was therefore to train the mind to focus solely on those human desires that are both natural and necessary (such as the desire for food and shelter) and to strive for a life of simple pleasures that satisfy these needs (Epicurus, trans. 1993).

Although the philosophical schools of the Greco-Roman world thus differed considerably in terms of the basic principles they saw as underlying the good life, they did agree that striving for eudaimonic well-being requires *practice* and that contemplative exercises play an important role in this pursuit. Hadot (1995) has therefore argued that it would be fundamentally flawed to perceive ancient philosophy as a theoretical discourse or an academic discipline, as we have come to perceive philosophy in modern times. Instead, he argues that in the Greco-Roman world, philosophy was a *way of life*. It consisted of various practices designed to educate one in the art of living and was therefore not concerned with the acquisition of knowledge, but rather with self-actualization, nurtured via contemplative exercises that impact the entire being of the individual (P. Hadot, 1995; Pierre Hadot, 2002).

In this respect, the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition bears remarkable similarities with the founding principles of the Buddhist tradition. Indeed, forms of contemplative practice have played a central role in the cultivation of well-being across a broad range of traditions and in both religious and secular contexts (Eifring, 2015; Fadiman, 1999; Hayes, 2004a; Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Linehan et al., 1999; Maharshi, 1985; Segal et al., 2012). Importantly, both Buddhist and Greco-Roman traditions were interested in developing practices to realize the best way to live. However, in Buddhism the emphasis on contemplative practices has remained an important focus up to the present day, whereas Western philosophy largely lost its association with the practical concerns of everyday life and developed into a theoretical discourse during the course

of modernization. Although a revival of Greco-Roman ideas about the “art of living” and “care of the self” has taken place in the realm of moral philosophy (Foucault, 1998; Kekes, 2005), and while popular authors have called for bringing insights from the ancient philosophers back into daily life, academic philosophy in our contemporary world is largely restricted to internal communications among university scholars. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the Western philosophical tradition harbors original sources and ideas that show notable similarities with the Buddhist methods for enhancing eudaimonic well-being, but also some important differences such as the Buddhist focus on inner contemplation in contrast to the focus on dialogue and engagement in Aristotle’s conception of virtue.

Meditation Practices in Buddhism and Greco-Roman Philosophical Schools

As we can see from the preceding discussion, both Greco-Roman and Buddhist traditions prescribe meditative practices to alleviate states of psychological distress and to foster states of well-being. These exercises were designed to teach people to live their lives in accordance with important ethical and philosophical principles, and also to deal with the problems and challenges of daily life with care and wisdom, thereby safeguarding both their own and others’ well-being. Both traditions, moreover, utilize a range of contemplative practices, some which relate primarily to attention, some to the cultivation of virtue, and others to self-inquiry, wisdom, and insight. In this section we further examine these styles of practice.

First, attentional practices are meant to strengthen self-awareness and attentional processes, and in particular to foster a heightened awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, sensory impressions, and actions. A second group of practices are thought to bolster psychological qualities, traditionally referred to in both traditions as "virtues," that contribute to well-being. A third style of practice involves the acquisition of self-knowledge through the practice of self-inquiry. Self-inquiry can take many forms, but typically involves an active exploration of subjective experience, often guided by a question that prompts one to think about or observe one's own psychological processes. We refer to these three forms of meditation as (1) the attentional family, (2) the constructive family, and (3) the deconstructive family (Dahl, Lutz, & Davidson, 2015). Each family plays a unique role in addressing the psychological patterns that perpetuate suffering and strengthening those that lead to a state of inner flourishing.

Attentional Meditation Practices

Attentional meditations are primarily concerned with increasing the capacity to monitor what is happening in the body, mind, and environment. They target what might be referred to as experiential fusion, a state of being absorbed in experience, as opposed to being fully present, alert, and aware, especially of the processes of thinking, feeling, and perceiving. This style of practice will be described in more detail below, but here we may note that this heightened awareness, which is often referred to as mindfulness in traditional Buddhist contexts (Dunne, 2011; Olendzki, 2011; Sharf,

2014), is considered an essential prerequisite to any form of mental training, and therefore possibly to the cultivation of enduring well-being.

Attentional practices were also prevalent in Greco-Roman philosophical schools. The Epicurean and Stoic schools, for instance, both stressed the importance of training the mind to release excessive concern with the past and future and to instead pay close attention to one's experience in the present moment. On this account, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus counsels, "Pay attention, therefore, to your sense-impressions, and watch over them sleeplessly. For it is no small matter that you are guarding, but self-respect, and fidelity, and constancy, a state of mind undisturbed by passion, pain, fear, or confusion, in a word, freedom" (Epictetus, trans. 1928, p. 311). These sentiments echo Buddhist writings, which similarly emphasize the importance of monitoring present-moment experience in an effort to bring about a state of equanimity and to enhance one's capacity to strengthen virtue and wisdom (Wallace, 1999).

Constructive Meditation Practices

Buddhism is also concerned with strengthening affective, cognitive, and behavioral patterns that foster well-being. As noted above, the Buddhist notion of virtue classifies actions as either virtuous or non-virtuous based on whether a given act leads to well-being or to distress. Meditations that strengthen virtuous qualities are the main emphasis of the constructive family. This style of practice typically involves arousing and stabilizing qualities that are central to well-being and inner flourishing, such as

compassion and tolerance. The cultivation of virtue is considered a lifelong practice, and meditations that strengthen virtuous qualities proceed in stages. In cultivating kindness, for instance, one may begin by arousing and stabilizing feelings of affection and affiliation toward a loved one, and then gradually extend these feelings to strangers, to those one has difficulties with, and eventually to all living beings. This process is said to undermine conscious and unconscious biases and to prime the mind to engage in helping behaviors (Ricard, 2015).

Another common meditation in this family is the contemplation of one's own mortality. This practice is found in a number of Buddhist schools and typically functions to reorient the mind toward one's most deeply held values and beliefs (Buddhaghosa, 2011; P. Rinpoche, 1998). Here too we find a parallel in the writings of the Stoics. In *Meditations*, for instance, Marcus Aurelius writes, "Imagine you were now dead, or had not lived before this moment. Now view the rest of your life as a bonus, and live it as nature directs," (Aurelius, trans. 2006; 7:56). It thus appears that similar styles of meditation were practiced across a range of philosophical and contemplative traditions.

Deconstructive Meditation Practices

A third style of meditation – which we refer to as the deconstructive family – utilizes the practice of self-inquiry to arouse self-knowledge and insight into the nature and dynamics of experience, and to thereby undo distorted beliefs and other psychological patterns that perpetuate suffering. In Buddhism, the primary object of

contemplation is the self (Siderits, 2003). This tradition holds that inaccurate beliefs about the self, and in particular the notion that the self is enduring and unitary, is the primary cause of suffering (Collins, 1982). Although there are many forms of meditation that address distorted beliefs about the self, one common practice involves contemplating the fleeting and composite nature of experience, and the way in which all things are interconnected. Again we see parallels in the writings of Marcus Aurelius, who writes, "All things are in a process of change. You yourself are subject to constant alteration and gradual decay. So too is the whole universe," (Aurelius, trans. 2006; 9:19) and again, "You should meditate often on the connection of all things in the universe and their relationship to each other," (7:56).

Differences between the Two Traditions

Though there are similarities between Greco-Roman contemplative exercises and the three families of meditation practiced in Buddhism, there are also some notable differences. One interesting difference is that many of the Greek and Roman philosophical schools placed a great deal of emphasis on dialogue as a means of self-inquiry. Socrates' famous conversations with the citizens of Athens is a notable example of this emphasis. Dialogue does play a role in the Buddhist tradition, as evidenced by the early philosophical debates in early Buddhist history and the contemporary practice of philosophical debate practice in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries (Dreyfus, 2002). Nevertheless, the primary emphasis in Buddhism is on meditation practices that are

typically practiced in solitude. In the Greco-Roman tradition, we find just the opposite. While Greco-Roman philosophical schools knew of and likely practiced different forms of meditation, the primary emphasis in these traditions seems to have been dialogue and philosophical discussion.

Another general difference pertains to the strong emphasis that the Greeks and Romans placed on reason and its role in mastering human passions and desires. This distinction between the rational domain and the domain of the passions would become a leading theme in the development of Western thought and feeds into the Cartesian separation between the subject and the world of objects, dividing the realm of consciousness from the realm of materiality. Though it has often been contested, this dichotomy still deeply informs Western conceptions of self (Taylor 1989).

Interestingly, modern neuroscience teaches us that the brain does not respect the strict separation between thought and emotion or cognition and affect. There is no region of the brain that is strictly devoted to cognitive functions and not affective processes. Rather, modern findings indicate that the circuits that support cognition and affect overlap (see e.g., Shackman et al., 2011). Similarly, in Buddhism there is no corresponding division between cognition and emotion. Classical Buddhist psychology, for instance, contains detailed taxonomies of mental processes, yet the most common way to classify these processes is based on their relationship to well-being. Buddhist thinkers thus differentiate basic psychological processes from those that are either wholesome or unwholesome, classifying these processes based on whether they lead to

well-being or distress, respectively (Asanga, 2001; Bodhi, 1999; Vasubhandu, 1991). It is interesting to note that each category listed above contains instances of what Western thinkers might think of as “cognitive” and “affective” states, for example, by grouping both distraction – a “cognitive” process – and malice – an “affective” process – into the “unwholesome” category, due to the view that each impedes well-being and creates distress and suffering.

It is also worth noting that Buddhism and Greco-Roman philosophical schools shared the view that excessive desire for sensory pleasure impedes lasting well-being. The two part ways, however, in their discussion of the means by which these impulses are regulated. Following the division between reason and the realm of the passions, the ancient Greeks and Romans stressed the importance of employing reason to “master” the emotions. In Buddhist literature, it is not emotion that needs to be controlled or mastered, nor is it reason that allows the passions to be governed. As noted above, it is destructive psychological processes – including excessive desire for pleasure – that need to be addressed.

Although all Buddhist schools stress the importance of regulating destructive processes, there are diverse approaches to dealing with them (Gethin, 1998). In some schools, emotions like desire and aversion are viewed as enemies that must be conquered, whereas in others they are not viewed as obstacles, but rather as opportunities for self-exploration and the generation of insight. There is also a great deal of discussion of embodiment, with similarly diverse views on whether the physical

body is an aid or an impediment to awakening (Buddhaghosa, 2011; Kongtrul, 2007). Many exercises from the Buddhist tradition thus grant an importance to human embodiment that is much less prominent in the Western philosophical tradition.

A third general difference relates to the Buddhist notion of a "reified self" as the primary target of certain meditation exercises. Transforming or correcting misguided beliefs and perceptions about the self also played an important role in the Greco-Roman tradition, particularly for the Stoics. In this sense, the contemplative exercises found in the Western tradition also aimed at replacing inaccurate or maladaptive conceptions of self with more accurate ones that would not compromise well-being. However, the Buddhist emphasis on seeing through the illusion of a reified self seems to go a step further with the principle of no-self, the idea that there is no stable, unitary substrate to human experience (Collins, 1982; Harvey, 2004; Siderits, 2003). Such a view is not found in a comparable form in the roots of the Western philosophical tradition.

Having discussed a few important differences, a point of convergence between the two traditions lies in the process through which insights are integrated with direct experience. While the path of meditation advocated in Buddhism assumes that self-inquiry and the cultivation of insight are rooted in ethical conduct and a calm, stable mind, the role that study and understanding play in this process mirrors the path of transformation found in many Greco-Roman philosophical schools. The attentional exercises in the Western tradition were directed towards imprinting the fundamental philosophical principles of a certain school into the mind. However, one first had to

have a basic understanding of what these principles were, an understanding that was typically gained through study and dialogue. A similar approach is found in Buddhism. The most common formulation of the learning process in Buddhism begins with study and intellectual understanding, deepens through reflection and contemplation, and ends with an integration of the principles one has learned through the practice of meditation (Karr, 2007). Thus, in both traditions the cultivation of intellectual clarity is viewed as an important step on the path to insight and wisdom.

Psychological Dynamics of Meditation Practice: Implications for Well-Being

We see from the preceding discussion that the use of meditation to cultivate attention, virtue, and insight is not unique to Buddhism and other Asian religions, but is found in the very roots of Western philosophy and science. Moreover, although there are many differences within and between these complex traditions, the notion that training the mind can lead to demonstrable changes in well-being seems to be a common theme. In this section, we will explore important psychological processes in each of the three families of meditation that may help us to better understand the relationship between specific meditation practices and the cultivation of well-being. Before examining the psychological processes in these different families, we first review contemporary formulations of well-being with an emphasis on their philosophical and theoretical foundations.

Hedonic and Eudaimonic Conceptions of Well-being

Because the goal herein is to link meditative practices to well-being, this section briefly examines how researchers of the present era have formulated what well-being is. Over fifty years ago, national survey studies conducted largely by sociologists examined the inner life of Americans by asking people to report about their happiness and life satisfaction (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Bradburn, 1969; Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Gurin, Veroff, & Feld, 1960). Decades later, mainstream psychology became interested in subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1999), which some referred to as hedonic psychology (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999). Typical indicators included assessments of positive and negative affect as well as life satisfaction (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). Many studies linked subjective reports of these kinds of well-being to other domains, such as personality (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998), heredity (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996), living conditions (Veenhoven, 1991), and currently accessible information (Schwarz & Strack, 1999).

Alternative approaches to well-being emerged from conceptions of positive functioning in clinical, developmental, existential, and humanistic psychology (e.g., Allport, 1961; Buhler, 1935; Erikson, 1959; Frankl, 1959; Jahoda, 1958; Jung, 1933; Maslow, 1968; Neugarten, 1973; Rogers, 1961). Ryff (1989) identified points of convergence among these approaches, which led to different dimensions of well-being, such as having purpose and meaning in life (purpose in life), the realization of personal talents and capacities (personal growth), being able to manage the world around

oneself (environmental mastery), having quality ties to others (positive relationships with others), being aware of personal strengths and weaknesses (self-acceptance) and living in accord with personal standards and convictions (autonomy). Extensive research has examined how these qualities of well-being are linked with aging, personality characteristics, work and family life, physical and mental health (including biomarkers), as well as to diverse interventions (see Ryff, 2014).

What are the philosophical underpinnings of these differing contemporary approaches to well-being? An integrative review of research on well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001) distilled the contemporary field into two broad traditions: one dealing with happiness or hedonic well-being, and the other dealing with human potential or eudaimonic well-being. Both perspectives are traceable to the ancient Greeks, who, as noted above, were interested in how to live. Epicurus (trans. 1994), for example, believed that the ultimate goal of life was to achieve a happy and tranquil life that is free of pain. Aristotle (trans. 1925; Ryff & Singer, 2008) wrote extensively about eudaimonia, arguing that it was decidedly not about pleasure, wealth, honor, or satisfying one's appetites. Rather, as elaborated above, he viewed well-being as being the product of cultivating virtue. For Aristotle, the highest virtue was to achieve the very best within one's self.

Centuries later, other prominent philosophers continued to reflect on issues of well-being. John Stuart Mill (1893/1989), a leading utilitarian philosopher, observed that happiness would not be achieved if made an end in itself (Mill, trans. 1989). Instead, he

saw happiness as a by-product of other more noble deeds, such as caring about the improvement of mankind. Bertrand Russell (1930/1958), in turn, emphasized that happiness is not something that happens without effort; it is something for which we must strive – i.e., it is a conquest that demands zest, active interest, and engagement (Russell, 1958). These formulations offer a kind of blend of hedonia and eudaimonia by emphasizing what one must do to feel happy.

The contemporary empirical science includes diverse measures of both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Quantitative/structural analyses have documented that these two approaches constitute taxonomically distinct (but related) components of well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). Hedonia encompasses assessments of positive and negative affect as well as global life satisfaction, while eudaimonia examines perceived thriving vis-à-vis the existential challenges of living – pursuing meaningful life goals, growing and developing personal capacities, establishing quality ties to others, knowing oneself, and following one's own convictions. For present purposes, a key question is how these diverse aspects of well-being might be linked to meditative practice. We suggest that both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are relevant concomitants or outcomes of meditation, depending on the type of practice involved. In the remainder of this section we discuss different families of meditation, highlighting important psychological mechanisms in each family and the pathways through which they might impact specific facets of well-being.

The Attentional Family: Meta-awareness and the Training of Attention

As mentioned above, cultivating the capacity to bring awareness to one's thoughts, emotions, and perceptions is a central practice in Buddhism, as well as in various strands of Greco-Roman philosophy. Although this capacity is strengthened in all forms of meditation to some degree, only in the attentional family is this enhanced attentional capacity the primary aim of training. The attentional family is thus primarily concerned with regulating the scope and stability of attention while strengthening a heightened awareness of present-moment experience. This heightened awareness, referred to as "meta-awareness" in a scientific context, may be thought of as an umbrella term for a family of processes that enable an individual to reflect on, or be aware of, his or her own thoughts, behaviors, emotions, and perceptions (Schooler, 2002).

Meta-awareness is considered essential to the cultivation of well-being in that it allows one to monitor and regulate one's actions and psychological processes. In terms of hedonic well-being, the capacity to monitor and regulate the mind and behavior enables one to recognize and strengthen adaptive, healthy, and positive psychological states and actions, and simultaneously to reduce the incidence, duration, and impact of destructive or maladaptive states and behaviors. Such heightened awareness may also impact eudaimonic aspects of well-being. For instance, the capacity to regulate attention and monitor what is happening in the mind could affect the quality of one's relationships by strengthening the capacity to listen, to notice periods of distraction or

emotional reactivity, and to be more attentive to the needs and emotional states of others. It may also foster a sense of growth by enabling one to identify one's unique capacities and skills and to set personal goals and monitor progress. Indeed, stable self-awareness and the ability to regulate attention are viewed as necessary prerequisites for the cultivation of a broad range of qualities tied to both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.

The regulation of attention, as well as the monitoring and regulation of other cognitive and affective processes, is based on the presence of meta-awareness. Meta-awareness occurs frequently in everyday experience, for instance when one suddenly notices a period of distraction or recognizes a moment of emotional reactivity. The presence of meta-awareness enables one to redirect one's attention and/or to regulate an emotional or cognitive response. Although instances of meta-awareness are frequent, they are generally short-lived. One may notice that the mind has become distracted while talking to a friend and then bring one's attention back to the conversation, for example, but typically the heightened awareness of one's mental state will then fade and the mind will return to a state of attentiveness without meta-awareness.

Meta-awareness is thus distinct from attentiveness. While the opposite of attentiveness is inattentiveness, or distraction, the opposite of meta-awareness is experiential fusion, the automatic and unintentional process whereby one becomes absorbed in the contents of experience. An example illustrates this process. When

reading a novel, one may become distracted and lose touch with the flow of the narrative. The eyes might scan an entire page while the mind wanders elsewhere, oblivious to the meaning of the words that are seen. Such periods of distraction reflect a state of inattentiveness.

At a certain point, one might “wake up” and recognize that one was distracted. In that moment, one is aware of the quality of one’s own mind, knowing that in the previous moment one was distracted and that now one is alert and aware. This state of heightened awareness affords the opportunity to redirect attention back to the story. In this brief moment, meta-awareness is present, but once attention is directed back to the story, one will likely become engrossed in the storyline again and meta-awareness will fade.

Before it does, however, there may be a short period where meta-awareness and attentiveness coincide. When this happens, words on the page may appear more vividly and awareness of one’s own subjective presence may linger for a few moments. Once absorbed in the story, one no longer notices the quality of awareness and is instead simply attentive to the flow of the narrative. This period reflects the absence of meta-awareness (i.e., experiential fusion) along with sustained attentiveness. Thus, the experience of being absorbed in an activity such as reading does involve sustained attention, but only sporadic occurrences of meta-awareness.

In attentional meditation practices, cultivating meta-awareness involves sustaining this brief moment of heightened awareness, the flicker of wakefulness when

one is in touch with the quality of one's own mind and at the same time attentive to what one is doing. Attentional training – as found in various forms of meditation – involves familiarizing oneself with meta-awareness by repeatedly initiating and sustaining this process until it stabilizes and occurs automatically. There is a broad range of attentional meditations, with a variety of objects and different configurations of attention (Dahl et al., 2015).

For instance, one could practice bringing awareness to the breath as a means to stabilize meta-awareness and to strengthen one's capacity to regulate the scope and orientation of attention. A common method involves paying attention to the sensations felt in the nostrils with each inhalation and exhalation. In this practice, the aim is not to become absorbed in these sensations, but rather to remain fully in touch with both the sensations of the breath as well as with awareness itself, that is, with the subjective experience of being attentive. This heightened awareness of attentional processes allows one to alter the scope and intensity of focus, to notice potential distractors, and to monitor one's state of mind. When meta-awareness is lost and/or attention wavers from the breath, one first notices this occurrence (this noticing itself marks the presence of meta-awareness) and then redirects attention back to the breath. In the early stages of meditation, periods of both experiential fusion and distraction – which often occur simultaneously – may frequently occur and continue for minutes before being noticed. Over time, their frequency and duration will gradually diminish as meta-awareness and attentional stability increase and stabilize.

Periods of distraction and experiential fusion may seem inconsequential when they occur in paying attention to the breath, but they are thought to have a profound impact on a variety of factors related to well-being. Learning to notice when the mind is distracted can help one to notice the incidence of unhealthy thoughts and destructive emotions, for instance, or to keep important values and personal goals at the forefront of one's mind. It can also enable one to explore and strengthen one's natural strengths and abilities. Attentional meditations can thus be thought of as practices that bolster skills that are important for well-being. These practices are typically practiced in periods of formal meditation and also in everyday life.

The Constructive Family: Strengthening of Healthy Qualities of Mind

The presence of meta-awareness developed by attentional meditational practices creates an attentional workspace that can be used in various ways. In the constructive family of meditation, the regulatory capacity created through the presence of meta-awareness is used to strengthen healthy qualities of mind (Dahl et al., 2015).

Meditation practices in this family take many forms. Some are designed to cultivate qualities like patience and equanimity that inoculate the mind against the stressors of daily life and which may thereby foster a sense of mastery and competence in relation to one's environment and circumstances. Others, such as contemplations on death and mortality, aim to bring about a restructuring of priorities and values and a reorienting of the mind toward what is truly meaningful in life. This group of practices may impact

important facets of eudaimonic well-being, such as feelings of autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth. A third group in this family addresses interpersonal relationships – another key facet of eudaimonic well-being – by nurturing pro-social qualities like kindness and compassion. The constructive family of meditation may thus improve hedonic well-being by increasing the occurrence and duration of positive emotional states and also eudaimonic well-being by enhancing self-knowledge, self-growth, and self-acceptance, and also by strengthening skills that contribute to healthy interpersonal relationships.

Constructive meditations work at the level of both thought and emotion to systematically alter one's response to the shifting circumstances of daily life. In practice, this often involves cultivating the capacity to identify, and then change, one's interpretations of experience such that one's response to them is transformed. Another important element is the capacity to alter one's perspective, either by projecting oneself into the past or future and thereby gaining a new perspective on one's present situation, or by taking the perspective of another individual. These two capacities are referred to, respectively, as cognitive reappraisal and perspective taking.

Both perspective taking and reappraisal are automatic psychological processes that occur frequently in day-to-day life. However, in constructive family practices, these processes can be consciously cultivated in specific ways to strengthen healthy qualities of mind, much in the same way that meta-awareness is intentionally cultivated in attentional practices. In compassion-oriented practices, for instance, one may employ

cognitive reappraisal to reframe how one views another person in order to extend feelings of care and concern to them that might ordinarily be felt only for a loved one (Salzberg, 2002). Similarly, one might use perspective taking to imagine what it would be like to share the experience of a distressed individual as a way to generate compassion (Makransky, 2007). In some forms of compassion training, both of these might be employed.

One common method to cultivate compassion in the Buddhist tradition is to use the affection that one typically feels for a loved one as a basis for cultivating compassion for others (Makransky, 2007; Salzberg, 2002; Wallace, 2010). As with all meditation practices, when training in this style of meditation one would begin with the cultivation of meta-awareness, which is a necessary prerequisite for any meditation practice. With a heightened awareness of what is happening in the mind, one then brings to mind a loved one – such as a child, a spouse, or a parent – and notices the feelings of warmth, care, and affection that naturally arise. To strengthen and sustain such feelings, one might imagine that they are present and then repeat a phrase in the mind, such as “May you be free from suffering and difficulties. May you be happy, healthy, and at ease.” As with the breath meditation outlined above, when one notices that the mind has wandered or that one has become lost in thoughts, one returns to the meditation, feeling the presence of the loved one and again repeats the aforementioned phrases.

Once the feeling of care and concern for this loved one is stable, one can bring to mind a stranger, or even someone that is disliked. At first, there may be no feelings toward this person, or feelings of aversion or resistance. To extend the feeling of compassion toward this individual, one would imagine this person as one's mother, child, or spouse. By reframing the relationship, the feeling of warmth felt for a loved one begins to arise for the other. As before, feelings of warmth and affection can be reinforced using the phrases mentioned above. Over time, the typical boundaries of affiliation and affection can be systematically eroded, to the point where compassion is felt for all beings.

This expansive feeling of affiliation and concern is not likely to occur instantaneously. At early stages, it may take considerable time and effort to break down habitual patterns and recondition the mind to respond with compassion. For the novice meditator, the process of re-evaluating the situation and/or changing one's perspective will therefore need to be engaged repeatedly. Once one has become adept in the training, however, these initial steps are no longer needed. Eventually, compassionate responses become so ingrained that they no longer need to be re-initiated, but instead occur spontaneously.

As with the attentional family, the cultivation of compassion and other constructive meditations are meant to be practiced not only in formal periods of meditation, but also in the midst of daily life. They are thus meant to foster an attitude of engagement with the world and its problems, and also to strengthen the skills that

help individuals and societies deal effectively with personal challenges and global issues. The practice of compassion, for instance, is thought to decrease self-interest and greed, to undermine various forms of bias, and also to increase the willingness to engage in helping behaviors. We can see the influence of such practices in contemplatives like Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and the Dalai Lama.

Constructive meditation practices of this nature may thus impact a variety of factors related to well-being. The cultivation of compassion may increase the occurrence of positive emotions – in this case, feelings of affiliation, affection, and caring – and disrupt the incidence and duration of negative emotions like antipathy and aversion. It may also improve different aspects of eudaimonic well-being. In addition to improving the quality of interpersonal relationships, the process of identifying an important personal value like compassion and then systematically cultivating that quality naturally leads to a sense of personal growth and to a feeling that life has purpose and meaning. It may also foster self-awareness and self-acceptance by enabling one to recognize one's unique strengths and capacities, while also viewing past and present circumstances as opportunities to develop and extend compassion. The constructive family of meditation may thus have far reaching effects in improving both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.

The Deconstructive Family: Self-inquiry and Self-knowledge

In the same way that meta-awareness allows for the systematic cultivation of healthy qualities like appreciation and compassion, it also sets the stage for the process of cultivating self-knowledge and insight through self-inquiry. In both Buddhism and Greco-Roman philosophy – as well as in many other contemplative traditions and contemporary psychotherapeutic interventions – various forms of self-inquiry are practiced as a way to gain insight into the nature of experience and to thereby eliminate unhealthy beliefs and attitudes. These practices may thus indirectly impact hedonic well-being by reducing the psychological factors that promote destructive emotions and also by fostering attitudes and mental states that lead to positive emotions. This form of practice is even more important in relation to eudaimonic well-being. Inquiring into the workings of the mind, the dynamics of experience, and the nature of the self naturally leads to a reflective state of mind. This mind set enables one to question one's own beliefs and assumptions, to reflect on societal norms and pressures, and to evaluate one's own thoughts, emotions, and actions in light of one's most deeply held values. This family of practices may therefore promote a variety of psychological factors related to eudaimonic well-being.

Although self-inquiry can take many forms, in Buddhist meditation there are two primary styles, one involving logical analysis and another that employs direct observation of subjective experience (Karr, 2007). In the former, one begins by identifying a particular belief or concept and then investigates the logical consistency of the idea. This form of analytical meditation involves thinking through the implications of

one's beliefs and performing thought experiments to challenge their validity. The second form of meditation is less concerned with the logical consistency of ideas and concepts than with their validity in light of direct experience. In this style of practice, one might take the same idea or belief, but instead of thinking through its logical implications, one instead observes personal subjective experience to see if the belief has experiential validity. Both forms of meditative inquiry ideally lead to a moment of insight, a sudden shift in perspective that alters understanding of oneself and the world.

One common form of meditation in this family involves an inquiry into the nature of the self. In this practice, different aspects of present moment experience are observed and one brings awareness to sensations in the body, the contents of thoughts, and any emotions that are present. This serves to induce a state of meta-awareness. Next, one inquires into the relationship between these experiences and the subjective sense of self. For instance, one might notice that thoughts are influencing how one sees the self, relationships with others, and the world. In noticing the influence of thoughts, one may then observe them and notice that they are often disconnected from what is being experienced in the present moment. Thoughts may be noticed as constantly changing, and getting caught up in the flow of thoughts may render them accurate depictions of reality, thus, becoming the lens through which the world is experienced. Perhaps most importantly, one begins to see that the words and images that constitute thoughts are conditioned habits of mind and are not the "I" in any objective sense.

Although this form of self-inquiry may seem abstract and far removed from the challenges of everyday life, such practices are seen as potent methods for cultivating important skills related to well-being. When encountering adversity, for instance, one may have little or no control over one's environment. Although one may be unable to change, or even influence, external conditions, one's response to these conditions can be altered by training the mind. Contemplative perspectives suggest that adversity may lead to growth and insight when it is used as a basis for self-inquiry. In the Buddhist tradition, for instance, a distinction is made between forms of suffering that are inevitable, such as the physical pain associated with aging and illness, and the states of psychological distress that accompany periods of adversity (Bodhi, 2005). Psychological distress is thought to be based on beliefs and attitudes, and may therefore be decreased by identifying and uprooting the conceptual frameworks that underlie it. For this reason, Buddhists believe that self-inquiry is a particularly effective way to decrease psychological distress and promote well-being.

We can also see the transformative impact of self-inquiry embodied in individuals like Nelson Mandela and Victor Frankl, who experienced tremendous hardship, yet were able to gain great insight through the adversity they encountered. Describing his experience while imprisoned, Mandela once wrote:

"You may find that the cell is an ideal place to get to know yourself, to search realistically and regularly the process of your own mind and feelings. In

judging our progress as individuals we tend to focus on external factors such as one's social position, influence and popularity, wealth and standard of education... but internal factors may be even more crucial in assessing one's development as a human being: honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, purity, generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve your fellow men—qualities within the reach of every soul—are the foundations of one's spiritual life... At least if nothing else, the cell gives you the opportunity to look daily into your entire conduct to overcome the bad and develop whatever is good in you. Regular meditation, say of about fifteen minutes a day before you turn in, can be very fruitful in this regard. You may find it difficult at first to pinpoint the negative factors in your life, but the tenth attempt may reap rich rewards. Never forget that a saint is a sinner who keeps on trying.”(Sampson, 2012)

The practice of self-inquiry is thus not meant to be a merely intellectual exercise, but rather a deep investigation of one's subjective experience. This investigation contributes to well-being by dislodging inaccurate beliefs that underlie maladaptive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It also fosters a relationship to experience that is increasingly informed by direct experience and therefore less susceptible to beliefs that are not in line with what can be experientially validated. The insights that arise through self-inquiry are thus meant to inform one's life and relationships, and to equip one to deal with challenges of everyday life.

Toward a Science of Human Flourishing

We can see from the preceding discussion that the cultivation of well-being is a central topic of interest in Buddhism, as well as in the roots of Western philosophy and psychology. We can also see that these traditional perspectives suggest that well-being can be learned, and that contemplative practices such as meditation may play an important role in the regulation of attention, in the strengthening of healthy qualities of mind, and in the cultivation of insight. These practices, moreover, were not meant to remove us from the world, but to equip us with the skills needed to cope with adversity and to strengthen important constituents of both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.

To date, the preponderance of scientific research has focused on the ways in which meditative practices – and mindfulness in particular – might be used to alleviate psychological disorders and states of distress. This emphasis mirrors a long-standing trend in scientific research to focus on psychopathology rather than healthy minds, flourishing, and states of optimal well-being. This focus stands in stark contrast to Buddhist, Greco-Roman, and other traditional frameworks that address the question of suffering and adversity within the wider context of human flourishing.

These frameworks suggest a potential for states of well-being far beyond those currently considered in modern science. They also contain a multitude of practices designed to target specific psychological processes and clear proposals concerning the relationship between these processes and well-being. In our concluding section of this article, we draw on these frameworks to call attention to questions and topics that may

inform future research. In particular, we highlight the importance of training attention, cultivating virtue, and gaining wisdom in traditional formulations of well-being and discuss the far reaches of human flourishing that are proposed in a variety of contemplative traditions.

The Benefits of Being Aware

In the preceding discussion, we learned about traditional practices that strengthen meta-awareness and enhance our capacity to pay attention to what is happening in the mind, body, and behavior in the present moment. We also learned that this capacity was considered a critical element in the training paradigms of both Buddhism and Greco-Roman philosophical schools. Why might this be the case? Both traditional perspectives and a growing body of scientific research suggest that mindfulness meditation and other attentional practices may bolster well-being directly by fostering a state of equanimity and inner calm, and indirectly by enhancing the capacity for various forms of self-regulation, including the regulation of thought processes, emotion, and behavior.

Research is beginning to shed light on the role that mindfulness and other attentional practices play in reducing suffering and fostering well-being (Goyal et al., 2014; Lutz et al., 2015; Y.-Y. Tang et al., 2015). Research on mindfulness meditation, for instance, has been shown to decrease instances of mind wandering and periods of distraction, and to increase positive affect (Levinson, Stoll, Kindy, Merry, & Davidson,

2014; Mrazek, Smallwood, & Schooler, 2012). Studies have also shown that mindfulness practices impact various attentional processes and corresponding networks in the brain (Brefczynski-Lewis, Lutz, Schaefer, Levinson, & Davidson, 2007; J. a Brewer et al., 2011; N. a S. Farb et al., 2007b; Jha, Krompinger, & Baime, 2007; Y.-Y. Tang et al., 2007).

Nevertheless, we still understand quite little about the precise function of meta-awareness and other attentional processes in relation to well-being. Contemplative perspectives suggest that one important way in which these practices bolster well-being is through eliciting a state of equanimity (Burckhardt & Chittick, 2008; Savin, 2001; Wallace, 1999). Recent research corroborates this view, indicating that adults spend nearly half of their waking life in a state of distraction, and that they tend to feel less happy when distracted, even when doing something unpleasant (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). What is not clear is the respective roles that meta-awareness and specific attentional processes, such as increased attentional stability and enhanced capacity to recognize and release distractors, play in eliciting states of equanimity. Is it, for instance, that the experience of inner calm reflects a stabilization of meta-awareness, or is equanimity the product of another attentional process, or a combination of attentional processes? Future research may seek to disentangle meta-awareness and other attentional processes to assess the manner in which they differentially impact subjective experiences related to happiness, equanimity, and decreased feelings of stress.

It is important to note that in the contemplative traditions discussed earlier in this article, the strengthening of meta-awareness and other attentional processes is considered an end in itself because it calms the mind and elicits a state of deep equanimity, but it is also viewed as a foundational practice that aids in the cultivation of virtue and wisdom (Gethin, 1998; P. Hadot, 1995). In the practice of virtue, meta-awareness allows for the monitoring and regulation of psychological states that are thought to impede virtuous conduct (for example, malice and greed), and also the strengthening of qualities like kindness and honesty that support the practice of virtue. A heightened awareness of present moment experience is also instrumental in what is traditionally thought of as wisdom, or insight. In this context, meta-awareness and the regulation of attention allow for an exploration of the mind and its processes. The desired end in these practices is therefore not the state of heightened awareness itself, but rather wholesome states that promote positive interpersonal relationships, ethical behavior, self-knowledge, and other factors tied to eudaimonic well-being.

The relationship between the regulation of attention and the cultivation of virtue and self-knowledge has received little attention from the scientific community. The study of these related areas of contemplative practice might therefore yield insights into the nature of eudaimonic well-being and how it can be cultivated. For example, does the capacity to initiate and sustain meta-awareness influence one's capacity to act with kindness, or to recognize and reduce the influence of bias and prejudice? Does the capacity to regulate attention alter one's ability to observe and gain insight into one's

own thoughts, beliefs, and emotions? And if so, how might these practices impact discrete facets of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being? Similarly, does the attentional stability brought about through attentional practices allow for the stabilization of virtuous qualities, or of the insights elicited through self-inquiry? And how does the stability of these experiences impact their respective impact on both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being?

Another area that calls for further research is the synergistic effects of different styles of meditation. In Buddhism, for example, the regulation of attention, the cultivation of virtue, and the practice of self-inquiry all mutually inform and reinforce one another. Stabilizing meta-awareness, for example, enables one to recognize and strengthen virtuous qualities and to avoid falling prey to impulses that undermine virtue. The practice of strengthening virtue, in turn, further strengthens these same attentional processes, creating a beneficial loop. The same is true for attention regulation in relation to the practice of self-inquiry. Thus, studying the way in which different styles of meditation practice interact with one another, and mutually enhance different aspects of well-being, may be a fruitful area to explore in scientific research.

Cultivating Virtue: Strengthening Healthy Qualities of Mind

As noted above, training in attention facilitates the cultivation of positive, or virtuous, psychological qualities. Such practices are commonplace in a broad range of humanistic and contemplative traditions (Fadiman, 1999; Gethin, 1998; P. Hadot,

1995). Although the construct of virtue is defined differently in these traditions, there is broad agreement that virtuous qualities are desirable and that they play an important role in the cultivation of well-being. Aristotle, for instance, in his classic *Nicomachean Ethics*, wrote, “What really matters for happiness are activities in accordance with virtue, and for the contrary of happiness, the contrary kind of activities” (Aristotle, trans. 2000, p. 17). Buddhist contemplative frameworks similarly construe virtues as qualities or actions that are conducive to well-being, and of well-being as the product – in large part – of the practice of virtue (Keown, 2005).

Although the cultivation of positive qualities is nearly universal in the world’s contemplative and humanistic traditions, this topic has received little attention from the mainstream scientific community. The vast majority of studies have instead focused on maladaptive mental states and psychopathology. This focus has led to great insights into the nature of mental illness and how to treat it, but it has left a gap in understanding concerning the other end of the psychological spectrum. If we are to fully understand the nature of well-being, therefore, we must understand the varieties of suffering and psychological dysfunction, but also the many qualities that lead to a state of flourishing and optimal levels of well-being.

The study of healthy, or virtuous, psychological qualities lends itself naturally to the topic of eudaimonic well-being. Qualities like integrity, kindness, patience, and humility appear to be constitutive of important aspects of psychological well-being, such as personal growth, positive relationships, and self-acceptance, yet few studies have

sought to study such factors and their relationship to human flourishing. Indeed, current research on qualities that would traditionally be thought of as “virtues” is surprisingly limited. There are isolated pockets of research on specific qualities, such as gratitude and forgiveness (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991), as well as efforts to catalogue positive qualities found across the world’s major religions (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005), but there has yet to emerge a coherent body of research that identifies important virtues and their relationship to different facets of eudaimonic well-being.

It may also be that there is a direct connection between many classically defined virtues and hedonic well-being. Virtuous qualities are not only thought to be instrumental in bringing about the subjective sense that life is meaningful and fulfilling; they are also positive mental states that are pleasurable and nourishing in and of themselves. We may therefore study virtues in the same manner that we have identified a wide range of destructive mental states and examined their role in states of psychological distress and disorders of the mind. It may be that the process of studying virtuous qualities and their impact on both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being will teach us a great deal about what it means to live a fulfilling, meaningful life.

One important starting step in this endeavor is to map the terrain. At present, efforts to understand and classify different aspects of human flourishing are few in number relative to ongoing efforts to delineate and define physical and psychiatric disorders. If we are to understand the nature of human flourishing, we will need to

identify important qualities that define optimal levels of well-being and decompose them into their component parts and processes. The world's contemplative traditions are a great source of information in this regard. In classical Buddhist psychology, for instance, fifty-two primary mental processes are enumerated, some of which undermine well-being, some of which enhance well-being, and some of which are basic cognitive functions that underlie more complex psychological phenomena (Bodhi, 1999). Buddhist meditation literature presents nuanced accounts of well-being by explaining different training paradigms, which psychological processes they target, and the facets of well-being that are impacted as a result.

These frameworks may provide valuable insights to guide future research. A virtue such as kindness, for example, is likely to involve a complex constellation of psychological, physiological, interpersonal, aesthetic, and contextual factors, all of which may be worthy candidates for scientific study. In Buddhist literature, the nature of kindness and the process whereby it can be cultivated are explained in great detail. Buddhist psychological texts, for instance, define kindness as the wish for another's well-being and note that its presence necessitates the absence of malice and ill-will (Bodhi, 1999). In clarifying the process of cultivating kindness, Buddhist meditation literature delineates the role of specific mental factors such as meta-awareness – which is needed at all stages of the meditative process – and other processes that are utilized intermittently. For example, some phases of meditating on kindness may involve processes related to memory retrieval to arouse affective states of affection and

affiliation, attentional processes to sustain these states, or factors like reappraisal and perspective taking to extend feelings of kindness to an ever-widening circle of individuals (Wallace, 2010). Classical meditation manuals describe this progression in great detail, outlining the psychological factors that are relevant at each stage of practice and their respective functions. Future research may therefore mine the literature of these traditions to identify important virtues, to outline the process of cultivating them, and to clarify the manner in which their cultivation might impact well-being.

Know Thyself: Self-inquiry and the Cultivation of Wisdom

The practice of inquiring into the nature of self – as we find in the deconstructive family of meditation – is another important thread that runs through many of the world’s contemplative traditions. In both the Buddhist and Greco-Roman traditions, inquiring into the nature of the self and its place in the world is considered of central importance, with important implications for both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Gethin, 1998; P. Hadot, 1995). This style of meditation is thought to undo unhealthy conceptions of self, and to thereby uproot the distal causes of maladaptive cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns. In fostering a flexible, healthy sense of identity, therefore, these practices indirectly contribute to an increase in positive affect and a corresponding decrease in negative affect, and also promote various forms of self-knowledge and self-actualization.

Given the importance of self-inquiry and deconstructive forms of meditation in a variety of philosophical and contemplative traditions, it is noteworthy that these practices have received little attention from the scientific community, especially in relation to well-being. There are, however, related areas of research that may provide helpful pointers for future studies. One such area is the large body of research on cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). CBT is based on Aaron Beck's cognitive model, which postulates that depression and other forms of psychopathology are rooted in maladaptive conceptions of self (Aaron T Beck, 2011). According to this model, implicit self-schema serve as the basis for interpretations of experience and underlie thoughts and emotional patterns (A. T. Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979). When these schema become distorted, they give rise to cognitive errors and maladaptive cognitive and affective patterns. In extreme cases, they lead to depression, anxiety, and other forms of psychopathology.

Adaptations of CBT have been used to treat a variety of psychiatric conditions by targeting self-related thought patterns and maladaptive self-schema. The efficacy of this treatment has been demonstrated in relation to depression (Gloaguen, Cottraux, Cucherat, & Blackburn, 1998), anxiety (Hofmann & Smits, 2008), and a range of other conditions (Butler, Chapman, Forman, & Beck, 2006). Together, the large body of research on CBT highlights the central role that self-related cognitive processes play in psychopathology, suggesting that interventions that alter these processes may play a central role in the alleviation of suffering and the treatment of psychiatric disorders.

Despite the growing scientific interest in the self and self-related processes in both clinical psychology and cognitive science, there has been little research on deconstructive contemplative practices that are designed to alter self-related processes. The vast majority of scientific research to date has focused on mindfulness and other meditation practices from the attentional family. Although a few pioneering studies have investigated deconstructive practices, especially in relation to patterns of brain activity (Cahn, Delorme, & Polich, 2010; Hölzel et al., 2007; Josipovic, 2013; Lutz, McFarlin, Perlman, Salomons, & Davidson, 2013; Manna et al., 2010), systematic efforts to identify the primary psychological mechanisms in this family of practice are lacking, as are efforts to understand the manner in which deconstructive styles of meditation may impact well-being. Research on this family of meditation practices may therefore be of great benefit in helping us to understand the nature of the self and the way in which altering self-related processes may lead to human flourishing.

Conclusion

Meditation and other contemplative practices that have traditionally been practiced in small segments of society are now being taught in a broad range of settings. Secular meditation practices are now taught in public schools, in the healthcare system, in corporations, and prisons. Although there is still much we do not understand about the nature of these practices and the mechanisms through which they may impact well-being, emerging evidence suggests that they may prove effective

in helping equip us with the tools we need to cope with stress and adversity, and to strengthen the healthiest qualities of the human mind.

Throughout history, these practices have been widely practiced throughout the world's religious, philosophical, and humanistic traditions. In these traditions, well-being has been viewed as more than the mere absence of stress and suffering. Although there is no universal model for human flourishing, there is a broad consensus that well-being can be trained, and that we are not born with fixed capacities to regulate attention or experience positive psychological qualities, but that these skills can be systematically strengthened. It may be that the far reaches of well-being extend beyond current scientific models and constructs.

If we are to understand the nature of well-being, therefore, we must look to exemplars of human flourishing and learn from the accumulated knowledge of the world's contemplative and humanistic traditions, especially those that have survived through the ages and continue to be taught and practiced. A true science of human flourishing might therefore bring together the rigorous methods of empirical science with the practical methods and phenomenological frameworks of our contemplative heritage. In this paper we have attempted to make a few tentative steps in this direction. Although our effort leaves many questions unanswered, our hope is that the confluence of empirical science and contemplative practice will help us to better understand the nature of well-being and how it can be cultivated.

Chapter 3

Cognitive Mechanisms in the Three Family Model of Meditation Practice

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Abstract

Scientific research highlights the central role of specific psychological processes, in particular those related to the self, in various forms of human suffering and flourishing. This view is shared by Buddhism and other contemplative and humanistic traditions, which have developed meditation practices to regulate these processes. Building on a previous paper in this journal, we propose a novel classification system that categorizes specific styles of meditation into attentional, constructive, and deconstructive families based on their primary cognitive mechanisms. We suggest that meta-awareness, perspective taking and cognitive reappraisal, and self-inquiry may be important mechanisms in specific families of meditation and that alterations in these processes may be used to target states of experiential fusion, maladaptive self-schema, and cognitive reification.

Cognitive Mechanisms of Meditation Practice

Well-being is a complex phenomenon that is related to a variety of factors, including cultural differences, socio-economic status, health, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and specific psychological processes (Diener et al., 1999; Ryff, 2014). While mindfulness (see Glossary), compassion, and other forms of meditation are increasingly being studied as interventions to alleviate suffering and promote well-being (Davidson et al., 2003; Goyal et al., 2014; Hoge et al., 2013; Leiberger et al., 2011; MacLean et al., 2010; Sedlmeier et al., 2012; Y.-Y. Tang et al., 2015; Teasdale et al.,

2000), it is not yet clear how different styles of meditation affect specific cognitive processes, nor how alterations in these processes might impact levels of well-being. Here, we address this question from the perspective of psychology and cognitive neuroscience to better understand how changes in well-being are mediated by alterations in distinct cognitive processes and in the structure and functioning of corresponding brain networks.

In a previous article in this journal, we proposed a preliminary framework to discuss commonly practiced forms of mindfulness meditation (Lutz, Slagter, et al., 2008). Recent theoretical models have advanced our understanding further by attempting to identify potential cognitive and neural mechanisms in different forms of meditation and to classify different forms of contemplative practice (Austin, 2013; Josipovic, 2013; Kozhevnikov et al., 2009; Nash & Newberg, 2013; Fred Travis & Shear, 2010; Frederick Travis, 2014). While some models have proposed specific cognitive and biological processes that inform the practice of mindfulness meditation (Holzel et al., 2011; Lutz et al., 2015; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012), theoretical accounts of other families of meditation are lacking, especially models that identify important mechanisms in other styles of practice. Thus, while these pioneering efforts provide crucial insights for the scientific study of meditation, rigorous efforts to examine the psychological processes involved in different families of meditation are needed to understand the precise manner in which they might impact various aspects of well-being.

In this article we expand our original framework to accommodate a broader range of traditional and contemporary meditation practices, grouping them into

attentional, constructive, and deconstructive families. According to this model, the primary cognitive mechanisms in these three families are (1) attention regulation and meta-awareness, (2) perspective taking and reappraisal, and (3) self-inquiry, respectively. To illustrate the role of these processes in different forms of meditation, we discuss how experiential fusion, maladaptive self-schema, and cognitive reification are differentially targeted by these processes in the context of Buddhist meditation, integrating the perspectives of other contemplative, philosophical, and clinical perspectives when relevant. The mechanisms and targets we propose are drawn from cognitive science and clinical psychology. Although these psychological processes are theoretically complex, as are the meditation practices that target them, we propose this novel framework as a first step in identifying specific cognitive mechanisms to aid in the scientific study of different families of meditation and the impact of these practices on well-being.

The Attentional Family: Meta-awareness and Experiential Fusion

The group of meditative practices that we refer to here as the *attentional family* trains a variety of processes related to the regulation of attention. These include the capacities to manipulate the orientation and aperture of attention, to monitor, detect and disengage from distractors, and to re-orient attention toward a chosen object (Hasenkamp, Wilson-Mendenhall, Duncan, & Barsalou, 2012; Jha et al., 2007; Lutz et al., 2015; Y.-Y. Tang et al., 2007). We propose that a shared characteristic of all

meditation practices in this family is the systematic training of the capacity to intentionally initiate, direct, and/or sustain these attentional processes while the strengthening the capacity to be aware of the processes of thinking, feeling, and perceiving.

In scientific literature, the term *meta-awareness* has been used to describe the cognitive function of being aware of the processes of consciousness (Smallwood, McSpadden, & Schooler, 2007). In the absence of meta-awareness, we become experientially "fused" with what we experience. We may be aware of the objects of attention, yet unaware of the processes of thinking, feeling, and perceiving. This state of experiential fusion has been referred to using a variety terms in the study of meta-cognition, including "cognitive fusion" and "object mode" (Hayes, 2004b; Wells, 2000).

To illustrate the difference between meta-awareness and experiential fusion, let us consider an example. Imagine that you are watching an enthralling movie. In one moment, you might be experientially fused with the movie, to the point when you are no longer consciously aware that you are sitting in a movie theater. In the next moment, you might suddenly become aware of your surroundings and the fact that you are viewing images on a screen. In both moments you may be attentive to the movie, but only in the second moment are you also aware of the process of watching the movie.

In this example, paying attention to the images and sounds that constitute the movie is a form of awareness. If someone tapped you on the shoulder and asked you what just happened in the movie, you could answer. However, if you were asked

whether or not you were conscious of sitting in a movie theater in the moment before being asked, you would probably answer no. The awareness that you were watching a movie, in this case, would only be retrospective. Across a range of traditional and contemporary contemplative traditions, the absence of meta-awareness is viewed as an impediment to various forms of self-monitoring, self-regulation, and self-inquiry (Gethin, 2011; P. Hadot, 1995; McCracken, Barker, & Chilcot, 2014).

Forms of Attentional Meditation

In both traditional and clinical contexts, the capacity to sustain a heightened awareness of thoughts, behaviors, emotions, and perceptions is thought to be a central feature of mindfulness meditation (Bishop, 2004; Capurso, Fabbro, & Crescentini, 2014; Gethin, 2011; Holzel et al., 2011; Lutz et al., 2015; Shapiro et al., 2006). Though there is considerable discussion concerning the exact nature of mindfulness practice and its relationship to the construct of mindfulness in traditional Buddhist frameworks (Dreyfus, 2011; Dunne, 2011; Gethin, 2011; Olendzki, 2011; Sharf, 2014), there is general agreement that the cognitive process that we refer to here as meta-awareness plays a central role across a broad spectrum of meditation practices. Following our prior categorization (Lutz, Slagter, et al., 2008), here we propose two main categories of attentional meditation, along with two new subcategories that allow for a more nuanced discussion of different styles of practice in this family.

Focused attention (FA) practices involve a narrowing of attentional scope and the cultivation of one-pointed concentration on a single object (Brefczynski-Lewis et al., 2007; Lutz, Slagter, et al., 2008). The presence of meta-awareness distinguishes the attentional stability achieved through this form of meditation from other forms of absorption, such as the stable attentiveness that occurs when one is engaged in an engrossing conversation or playing an interesting game. *Open monitoring* (OM) practices similarly involve the cultivation of meta-awareness, but they do not involve selecting a specific object to orient one's attention. Rather, attentional scope is expanded to incorporate the flow of perceptions, thoughts, emotional content, and/or subjective awareness. OM meditation can be further divided into *object-oriented open monitoring*, which involves directing one's attention to whatever thoughts, percepts, and sensations enter the field of awareness, and *awareness-oriented open monitoring*, referring to the sustained recognition of the knowing quality of awareness itself. Both forms of open monitoring meditation are similar in many ways to practices discussed below in the context of the deconstructive family. What distinguishes them from deconstructive forms of meditation is that their primary objective is the stabilization of meta-awareness in relation to a particular attentional configuration. As we will see below, in the deconstructive family a similar configuration of attention may be employed, but for different purposes (such as the cultivation of insight into the nature of sensory experience, for example).

Experiential Fusion and the Training of Attention

The inability to regulate attentional processes has been linked to ADHD (Castellanos, Sonuga-Barke, Milham, & Tannock, 2006), addiction (Waters, Marhe, & Franken, 2012), and other forms of psychopathology (Cohen, Lohr, Paul, & Boland, 2001; Van Bockstaele et al., 2014), as well as to abnormalities in brain structure and function (Castellanos & Proal, 2012). Experiential fusion in particular has received a great deal of attention in a number of contemporary therapeutic interventions. Although associated with overlapping constructs, including "cognitive distancing," "cognitive defusion," and "decentering," reversing states of experiential fusion through the cultivation of meta-awareness is considered to be especially important in the cultivation of mental health (Butler et al., 2006; Hayes, 2004b; Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Linehan et al., 1999; Segal et al., 2012).

Clinical studies have shown that a diminished ability to step back and observe one's internal processes of thinking and feeling plays an important role in a variety of psychiatric conditions, including depression (Lo, Ho, Yu, & Siu, 2014) and anxiety (Hoge et al., 2014). In one recent study, authors found that decreases in psychological processes related to experiential fusion were found in patients undergoing treatment for depression who received training in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy but not in control groups, and that these changes were associated with positive changes in depressive symptomology (Bieling et al., 2012). Similar findings have been found in relation to the treatment of addiction (J. A. Brewer et al., 2012). A study on smoking cessation, for example, demonstrated that mindfulness practice attenuated cigarette

smoking, in particular by altering the relationship between addictive craving and the behavior of smoking (Elwafi, Witkiewitz, Mallik, Iv, & Brewer, 2013).

As recently reviewed, mindfulness-related practices have been shown to train many of the attentional processes described above and to induce functional and structural changes in attention-related networks in the brain (Fox et al., 2014; Y.-Y. Tang et al., 2015). For instance, there is growing evidence that attentional stability increases with mindfulness training, as measured by reduced response time variability and EEG brain response variability during continuous performance tasks (Lutz et al., 2009; MacLean et al., 2010). Similarly, intensive meditation training has been shown to reduce both behavioral and EEG markers of attentional blink, a phenomena that reflects the propensity for attention to become fused with a perceptual target (Slagter et al., 2007). This effect is also modulated by different forms of meditation, with enhanced reductions in attentional blink in relation to open monitoring meditation relative to focused attention practices (Van Vugt & Slagter, 2014). Reducing experiential fusion with emotional experiences should facilitate the regulation of emotions by decreasing their perseveration. This prediction is in line with findings that expert meditators exhibited less amygdala activity in response to negative emotional stimuli relative to controls (Brefczynski-Lewis et al., 2007). A similar effect was found when patients with anxiety disorders underwent a training in mindfulness meditation (P. Goldin & Gross, 2010).

One avenue through which meta-awareness might impact well-being lies in its relationship to mind wandering. Mind wandering has been found to consume as much

as 50% of our waking life and is tied to our sense of well-being (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). If training in attentional forms of meditation does strengthen meta-awareness, we might expect this to impact both the incidence and impact of mind wandering. Recent studies have indeed found that meditation training alters patterns of task-unrelated thought, showing that even brief trainings in mindfulness meditation decrease the behavioral indicators of mind wandering (Levinson et al., 2014; Mrazek et al., 2012). Although meta-awareness and self-referential processes are difficult to operationalize, a few recent studies seem to indicate that brain regions associated with self-referential processing (Christoff, Gordon, Smallwood, Smith, & Schooler, 2009; Fox, Spreng, Ellamil, Andrews-Hanna, & Christoff, 2015; Mason et al., 2007), such as the medial prefrontal cortex and the posterior cingulate cortex, may be down-regulated by mindfulness-related practices (J. a Brewer et al., 2011; N. a S. Farb et al., 2007a). In one of these studies, this pattern was linked to enhanced coupling between these midline regions and attentional brain networks associated with executive function, such as the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex (J. a Brewer et al., 2011). In the other, this pattern was linked to a decreased coupling between the medial prefrontal cortex and an interoceptive region, the insular cortex (N. a S. Farb et al., 2007a). It was speculated that these patterns reflected decreased self-referential thought and enhanced present-centered awareness (J. a Brewer et al., 2011; N. a S. Farb et al., 2007a). These interpretations require further investigation, particularly because mind-wandering recruits multiple brain regions, some of which may also play roles in attention and interoception (Fox et al., 2015). It is also unclear how

meta-awareness affects one's ability to use the constructive aspects of mind wandering more effectively, and how activation patterns in brain regions associated with self-referential thought change when periods of mind wandering coincide with meta-awareness.

The Constructive Family: Reappraisal, Perspective Taking, and Self-Schema

The style of practice that we refer to as the constructive family includes a variety of meditation practices that strengthen psychological patterns that foster well-being. We propose that one avenue through which these practices may affect well-being is by targeting maladaptive self-schema and replacing them with more adaptive conceptions of self. In cognitive psychology, latent beliefs and conceptions about the self, referred to as self-schema, are thought to underlie and inform thoughts and emotions (Aaron T Beck, 2005) and to impact patterns of brain function (Disner, Beevers, Haigh, & Beck, 2011). In contrast to attentional practices, which often focus on simply monitoring cognitive and affective patterns, constructive meditations involve systematically altering the content of thoughts and emotions. Some constructive practices are designed to cultivate qualities like patience and equanimity that safeguard the mind from the stressors of daily life. Others aim to bring about a restructuring of priorities and values and a reorienting of the mind toward what is truly meaningful in life. Still more address interpersonal relationships by nurturing pro-social qualities like kindness and compassion.

The wide variety of practices in this family, as well as their individual complexity, makes identifying core cognitive mechanisms challenging. Nevertheless, a number of processes appear to be central to a broad spectrum of constructive meditations. Two mechanisms that appear to be especially important in this family are cognitive reappraisal and perspective taking. Cognitive reappraisal refers to the process of changing how we think about situations and events in such a way that our response to them is altered (Gross, 2001). Reappraisal is an important strategy in the regulation of emotion (Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012) and recruits brain regions related to cognitive control, including the dorsomedial, dorsolateral, and ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, as well as the posterior parietal cortex (Jason T Buhle et al., 2013). In a study of reappraisal in those with social anxiety disorder (SAD), for example, results showed that the use of reappraisal reduced negative affect in both patients with SAD and healthy controls, but that in healthy controls different patterns of activity in regulatory brain regions were associated with reduced amygdala activity compared to SAD patients (P. R. Goldin, Manber-Ball, Werner, Heimberg, & Gross, 2009).

The second core process that we propose to be central in many constructive meditations is that of perspective taking, the act of considering how oneself or another would feel in a particular situation (Lamm, Batson, & Decety, 2007). Perspective taking is especially important as a contributor to the experience of social emotions (Perrine Ruby & Decety, 2004). As a critical component of healthy interpersonal relationships, for instance, it is found to be diminished in psychopaths (Decety, Chen, Harenski, & Kiehl, 2013) and also a central mediator in reducing intergroup prejudice (Pettigrew &

Tropp, 2008). Imaging studies indicate that there is no single neural mechanism related to perspective taking, but rather that differences in perspective (imagining oneself experiencing pain versus another experiencing pain, for example) recruit different brain networks (Perrine Ruby & Decety, 2004).

In constructive meditation practices, cognitive reappraisal and perspective taking are hypothesized to be important mechanisms used to target maladaptive or neutral psychological processes and replace them with more adaptive patterns. One common example is the transformation of empathy into compassion. Hearing a crying baby on an airplane, for example, might first elicit a feeling of distress followed by aversion. This experience can be transformed by taking the perspective of the baby's mother, thereby triggering a sense of warmth and compassion, and also by reinterpreting the sound of the baby's cries, viewing the experience as an opportunity to cultivate kindness and concern rather than an impediment to one's own well-being. By systematically cultivating compassion in this manner, responding to aversive stimuli with altruistic concern may eventually become automatic. Such changes may thus be studied within the framework of habit formation, which is associated with various facets of physical and psychological well-being (Lally & Gardner, 2013).

To date, constructive meditation practices have received less attention than other forms of meditation in scientific research, though a few studies have begun to explore practices related to this family, including the cultivation of compassion (Klimecki et al., 2014; Mascaro, Rilling, Tenzin Negi, & Raison, 2013) and imagination-based meditations (Kozhevnikov et al., 2009). The precise role that reappraisal and

perspective taking play in constructive styles of meditation is therefore not yet known, nor is it clear how these processes relate to the recruitment of specific brain networks. Nevertheless, investigations of the cultivation of compassion, a widely practiced style of meditation in this family, provide useful information regarding the cognitive and neural mechanisms of constructive meditations. Preliminary findings indicate that this practice may affect the regulation of emotion and corresponding brain networks. Though further work is needed to clarify the role of reappraisal and perspective taking in other forms of constructive meditation, these data suggest one possible mechanism through which specific forms of meditation may impact well-being.

Ethics and Forms of Constructive Meditation

The cultivation of virtuous qualities is a common pursuit in many contemplative and philosophical traditions (Eifring, 2015; Gethin, 1998; P. Hadot, 1995). The constructive family of meditation is one important method that allows for this cultivation. While practices in this family necessitate the presence of meta-awareness, and also serve to strengthen and sustain meta-awareness, the approach taken in this family is markedly different from practices in the attentional family, insofar as this style of practice involves actively changing cognitive and affective content, as opposed to simply observing or noting the presence of thoughts, emotions, and perceptions.

Though there are many different styles of constructive meditation, we have identified three important subgroups, which we refer to as the relationship orientation,

values orientation, and perception orientation. The *relationship orientation* emphasizes nurturing harmonious relationships with others. In Buddhist meditation, this style of practice often involves the extension of kindness and compassion first to specific individuals, and eventually to all beings (Salzberg, 2002). This subgroup of meditation may impact specific psychological factors, by decreasing in-group bias, for example (Kang, Gray, & Dovidio, 2014), and thereby enhance important dimensions of well-being such as positive relationships and meaning in life (Ryff, 2014).

Practices in the *values orientation* subgroup involve the integration of ethical frameworks or values into one's ongoing perspective. One common practice in this subgroup is the contemplation of one's own mortality, which is found in Buddhist practice as well as in Greco-Roman philosophy. In Platonic philosophy, for example, contemplations of death functioned to bring the individual into contact with a sense of self that transcends the boundaries and needs of the physical body (P. Hadot, 1995), while in Buddhism contemplating the fragility and fleeting nature of life is often intended to re-orient the mind toward what is truly meaningful in life (Y. M. Rinpoche, 2014).

Practices that involve a *perception orientation* aim to alter perceptual habits as a way to induce shifts in implicit self-schema. A common practice in Tibetan Buddhism, for example, is the so-called "development stage" (Lingpa, 2007), a form of meditation that aims to alter both the perception of sensory objects as well as the subjective perspective itself. This perceptual shift may be instantiated by imagining oneself to be the embodiment of compassion, for instance, and viewing other individuals and one's

environment from that perspective. Preliminary data suggests that this practice may enhance one's ability to access heightened visuospatial processing resources (Kozhevnikov et al., 2009).

Empathy, Compassion, and the Brain

One of the most widely studied practices in the constructive family is the cultivation of compassion. Compassion training is held to alter core self-related processes, initiating a shift from self-oriented cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns to patterns that are oriented toward the well-being of others (Ricard, 2015). In the field of psychology, empathy is characterized as the ability to understand or resonate with another's emotional state (Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987; Jackson, Meltzoff, & Decety, 2005; Preston & Waal, 2002; Singer & Klimecki, 2014) and compassion as a concern for the suffering of another accompanied by the motivation to help (Keltner & Goetz, 2006; Singer & Klimecki, 2014). In the absence of compassion, empathic distress can lead to negative affect (Klimecki, Leiberg, Lamm, & Singer, 2013; Lamm et al., 2007), while compassion is associated with well-being and positive emotions (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Klimecki et al., 2013).

Research into the neural correlates of empathy have found that similar regions, including the insula, the anterior and mid-cingulate cortices, and the supplementary motor area, are activated across various forms of empathy (de Vignemont & Singer, 2006; Fan, Duncan, de Greck, & Northoff, 2011; Jackson et al., 2005). By way of

contrast, compassion is linked to regions associated with reward, positive affect, and feelings of affection, such as the ventral striatum and medial orbitofrontal cortex (Klimecki et al., 2013, 2014). Studies of compassion training have also found increased activation in regions associated with executive function, including the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (Weng et al., 2013) and the anterior cingulate cortex (Klimecki et al., 2014; Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, & Davidson, 2008). Though further research is required to determine the unique roles that each of these regions plays in the development of compassion, these preliminary findings suggest that cultivating compassion strengthens multiple networks, each of which may affect distinct psychological processes and thereby contribute to well-being in different ways.

Empathy and compassion also affect the peripheral biology of the human body. Perceiving stress in another individual has been linked to elevated cortisol levels, a relationship that is more robust in those with high trait empathy (Buchanan, Bagley, Stansfield, & Preston, 2012), whereas compassion has been linked to lower levels of cortisol reactivity (Cosley, McCoy, Saslow, & Epel, 2010). Preliminary studies of compassion training have found associations between the amount of time spent engaging in compassion training and inflammatory biomarkers, with more compassion training leading to decreased levels of both C-reactive protein and interleukin (IL)-6 (Pace et al., 2009, 2013). These findings suggest that the mind can be trained to orient itself toward the well-being of others and that this shift from self- to other-orientation impacts both the brain and the peripheral biology of the body, and in particular the way the body responds to environmental stressors. Further research is required to elucidate

the precise mechanisms through which these states affect the body, and also to investigate how changes in peripheral biology reciprocally impact psychological processes and the relationship between these processes and well-being.

Deconstructive Family: Self-inquiry and Insight

The group of meditations that we refer to as the deconstructive family aims to undo maladaptive cognitive patterns by exploring the dynamics of perception, emotion, and cognition and generating insights into one's internal models of the self, others, and the world. We propose that a central mechanism in the deconstructive family is *self-inquiry*, which we define as the process of investigating the dynamics and nature of conscious experience. Though self-inquiry has received little attention as a subject of scientific research, various forms of inquiry are employed across a range of contemplative traditions (Buddhaghosa, 1991; Karr, 2007; Maharshi, 1985). Self-inquiry may involve discursive analysis or a direct examination of conscious experience, and often involves explorations of self-related processes. Discursive analysis might entail identifying the assumptions that underlie the reification of a particular object or experience and subsequently thinking about and questioning the logical consistency of these assumptions. If you are anxious, for example, you might identify the fearful assumptions that underlie the emotion and then inquire into the rational basis for your beliefs. Another approach would be to directly examine your experience, for example by dissecting the feeling of anxiety into its component parts and noticing how the

thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations that comprise the emotion are constantly changing. In the context of Buddhist meditation, this process of inquiry is often applied to beliefs about the self, though it can similarly be applied to the nature and dynamics of perception, to the unfolding of thoughts and emotions, or to the nature of awareness.

In the deconstructive family, self-inquiry is practiced in order to elicit insight. Insight has been framed as a shift in consciousness, often sudden, that involves a feeling of knowing, understanding, or perceiving something that had previously eluded one's grasp (Kounios & Beeman, 2014). Scientific studies of this phenomena have focused on the burst of understanding that can occur in relation to solving simple mathematic or semantic problems (Bowden & Jung-Beeman, 2003). Research has found that this form of insight is linked to hemispheric differences in the brain, with recent studies demonstrating that facilitatory direct current stimulation of the right frontal-temporal cortex along with inhibitory stimulation of the corresponding region in the left hemisphere greatly enhanced insight-based problem solving capacity (Chi & Snyder, 2011, 2012). To date, the scientific study of insight has not investigated forms of insight that may arise through self-inquiry, nor has there been a systematic investigation of the relationship between insight and well-being. This is an area that calls for future research, especially since a variety of meditative traditions hold that specific forms of insight, such as insight into the nature of the self, are of particular importance when it comes to the cultivation of well-being (P. Hadot, 1995; Harvey, 2004; Maharshi, 1985).

In Buddhist meditation practice, insights that would ordinarily be fragile and fleeting are systematically stabilized and integrated with one's experience, first in formal meditation and subsequently in daily life. The heightened awareness of present-moment experience cultivated through attentional meditations and the self-inquiry carried out in deconstructive meditations are thus considered important, though distinct, processes (Gethin, 1998). To give an example of the relationship between these two processes, consider the feeling of being overcome by anger. When your sense of self is fused with the presence of anger (i.e., the feeling "I am angry"), the arising of anger is not seen clearly, but instead forms the lens through which you view experience. Attentional family practices train the capacity to recognize the occurrence of anger and other states of mind, enabling one to notice the presence of angry thoughts, physiological changes, and shifts in affective tone.

This process of sustained recognition allows for the investigation of the experience of anger, an approach taken with deconstructive meditations. With this added element, one is not merely sustaining awareness of the experience of anger, but also investigating its various components, inquiring into its relationship with one's sense of self, and/or uncovering the implicit beliefs that inform the arising of anger and then questioning the validity of these beliefs in light of present-moment experience. This investigation of conscious experience is said to elicit an experience of insight, a flash of intuitive understanding that can be stabilized when linked with meta-awareness. Thus, meta-awareness sets the stage for self-inquiry and allows for the stabilization of the insight it generates while nevertheless being a distinct process.

To date, only one study has investigated the relationship between meditation training and insight. Though the form of meditation used in the study was not deconstructive in nature, results showed that short-term meditation training increased creative problem solving relative to training in progressive muscle relaxation (Ding et al., 2014). This difference, moreover, was linked to heightened activation in a variety of brain regions, including the right cingulate gyrus, insula, putamen, and inferior frontal gyrus, and the bilateral middle frontal gyrus, inferior parietal lobule, and superior temporal gyrus (Ding et al., 2014). Further study is needed to determine if specific forms of meditation, and deconstructive meditations in particular, enhance the capacity to arouse and sustain insight, and also to investigate the psychological and biological correlates of insight experiences. Thus, studying the relationship between different forms of meditation and well-being calls for a more comprehensive account of the varieties of insight, their neural correlates, and the conditions and interventions that may facilitate their occurrence.

Cognitive Reification and Forms of Deconstructive Meditation

The deconstructive family represents a range of meditation practices that employ self-inquiry to elicit insight into the nature and dynamics of conscious experience. We have identified three subgroups of the deconstructive family: object-oriented insight, subject-oriented insight, and non-dual-oriented insight. *Object-oriented insight* practices employ self-inquiry to investigate the objects of consciousness. This may involve, for

example, investigating physical sensations and noting how they are constantly changing (Olendzki, 2011). *Subject-oriented insight* practices involve inquiries into the nature of thought, perception, and other cognitive and affective processes. In this style of practice one may, for instance, dissect thoughts and emotions into their component parts (Karr, 2007). *Non-dual practices* are designed to elicit an experiential shift into a mode of experiencing in which the cognitive structures of self/other and subject/object are no longer the dominant mode of experience. These practices often emphasize the importance of releasing attempts to control, direct, or alter the mind in any way and also serve to undo the reification of a witnessing "observer" that is separate from the objects of awareness (Dunne, 2011; Josipovic, 2013). The goal of all three styles of practice in the deconstructive family is not simply to maintain awareness of different aspects of experience, as we find with the attentional family, but rather to gain direct, experiential insight into the nature and dynamics of experience.

Though deconstructive meditations are used to inquire into many facets of conscious experience, the nature of the self is a topic of inquiry in a broad range of contemplative and philosophical practices. To give two important examples, examining the self is linked to the highest good in ancient Greek philosophy (P. Hadot, 1995) and as the key to undoing the cycle of suffering in Buddhism (Harvey, 2004). In Buddhist meditation, the primary target of many self-inquiry practices is cognitive reification, the implicit belief that thoughts, emotions, and perceptions are accurate depictions of reality (Emmanuel, 2013). Deconstructive practices in this tradition are especially concerned with the view that the self is enduring and unitary, since a reified sense of

self is believed to be the primary cause of suffering and states of discontent (Harvey, 2004). Buddhist deconstructive practices, therefore, often involve exploring the experience of subjectivity by inquiring into the various components that comprise the self (Buddhaghosa, 1991), or by examining the relationship between the self as agent or observer and the objects it interacts with (Roberts, 2011).

Self-related Processing and the Brain

As noted above, inquiring into the nature of the self is an important practice in a variety of contemplative traditions, including both Buddhist meditation and Greco-Roman contemplative exercises (P. Hadot, 1995; Harvey, 2004). One of the most compelling aspects of our sense of self is the ongoing personal narrative that weaves together the various aspects of our lives into a coherent, unified experience. This inner interpreter has been linked to activity in the left cerebral hemisphere in split brain patients (Gazzaniga, 2005) and to activity in the medial prefrontal cortex and posterior cingulate cortex in brain imaging research (J. a Brewer, Garrison, & Whitfield-Gabrieli, 2013; Denny, Kober, Wager, & Ochsner, 2012; Lemogne et al., 2011). The narrative self can be contrasted with the first person subjective experience that is not extended in time. This aspect of selfhood has been referred to as the “minimal self” (Gallagher, 2000) and “minimal phenomenal self” (Blanke & Metzinger, 2009) and has been hypothesized to be instantiated in cortical activity in regions related to interoception, such as the anterior insula (Craig, 2009; Critchley & Seth, 2012; Seth, 2013), in the

temporo-parietal junction (Ionta et al., 2011), as well as in the hypothalamus, brainstem, and other subcortical regions associated with homeostatic functioning (Damasio, 2012).

As there is still a paucity of empirical evidence relating to deconstructive meditation practices and their impact on neural processes, this is an area that calls for more intensive study in the future. Some data highlight the possibility of using meditation to willfully manipulate core aspects of identity (J. a Brewer et al., 2011; Josipovic, Dinstein, Weber, & Heeger, 2011; Lutz et al., 2004), though it is not clear whether insight into the nature of experience disrupts rigid and/or maladaptive self-related processes, nor is it clear how alterations of these processes might be instantiated in the brain. Nevertheless, there does appear to be some overlap between the insights that are said to arise in forms of meditation that explore the nature of the self and recent research in the arena of cognitive neuroscience, which suggests that self-processing in the brain is not instantiated in a particular region or network, but rather extends to a broad range of fluctuating neural processes that do not appear to be self-specific (Gillihan & Farah, 2005; Legrand & Ruby, 2009). Future studies may explore this convergence by using contemplative practices, and specifically those from the deconstructive family, to probe the malleability of self-related processes, their instantiation in the brain, and their relationship to both suffering and well-being.

Concluding Remarks and Future Directions

Scientific research on the effects of meditation is in the very early stages. Though preliminary findings suggest that meditation and other forms of mental training may produce demonstrable changes in subjective experience, behavior, patterns of neural activity, and peripheral biology, rigorous studies are still needed to uncover the precise mechanisms that underlie these changes. In particular, randomized trials, active control groups, and longitudinal studies that examine within- and across-subject changes over time, as well as across-practice comparisons, will be especially important in determining the efficacy of meditation training paradigms. In addition, subjective, behavioral, and clinical correlates of meditation-related neural changes are needed to assess the impact of different styles of meditation.

The framework presented here highlights the need to expand the scope of scientific research to include a broad range of meditation practices. In the same way that the study of mindfulness meditation has provided a unique window into the training of specific forms of attention, and the impact of attentional training on emotion regulation, learning and memory, and various forms of psychopathology, other forms of meditation may similarly yield important insights into the regulation of self-related processes and their import for well-being, health, and peripheral biology.

It is important to note that here we have explored these families through the lens of cognitive neuroscience and clinical psychology, focusing our attention on the primary cognitive mechanisms and phenomenological targets of specific forms of meditation. If, however, we are to fully understand these practices, it will also be important to study the wider context within which these practices are engaged. This

context includes, but is certainly not limited to, issues of ethics, embodiment, interpersonal dynamics, cultural setting, and the role that belief and expectation play in shaping subjective experience. In providing this framework, inadequate though it may be, we hope to spur further discussion about the nature of contemplative practice and how scientific study of meditation may help us better understand the causes and conditions of human flourishing.

Supplementary Materials

Part 1: Typology of Meditation Practices and Related Clinical Interventions

This typology groups commonly practiced forms of meditation and meditation-based clinical interventions into subcategories of each of the three families. Please note that while many practices contain elements of all three families, categorizations in this framework are based on the primary mechanisms of individual practices. Given the complexity of each practice listed here, we present this system as an initial step in the long process of studying the diversity of meditation practices. See supplementary materials for descriptions of individual practices and relevant citations.

Attentional Family Practices

Focused Attention (FA)

- Jhana Practice (Theravada)
- Breath Counting (Zen)
- Body Awareness Practices (Zen/Tibetan)
- Shamatha/Calm Abiding with Support (Tibetan)
- Mantra Recitation (various traditions)

Open Monitoring (Object-orientation: OM-O)

- Cultivation of Attention (Greco-Roman Philosophy)
- Choiceless Awareness (Tibetan)
- Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (Clinical)

- Dialectical Behavior Therapy-Mindfulness Component (Clinical)
- Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy-Mindfulness Component (Clinical)
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy-Mindfulness Component (Clinical)

Open Monitoring (Subject-orientation: OM-S)

- Shamatha/Calm Abiding without Support (Tibetan)

Constructive Family Practices

Relationship Orientation (C-R)

- Loving-kindness and Compassion (Theravada, Tibetan)
- Bodhichitta/Bodhisattva Vow (Tibetan/Zen)
- Centering Prayer (Christian)
- CCARE Compassion Cultivation Training (Clinical)
- Cognitively-based Compassion Training-Compassion component (Clinical)

Values Orientation (C-V)

- The Six Recollections (Theravada)
- The Four Thoughts (Tibetan)
- Contemplations of Mortality (Theravada, Tibetan, Zen, Greco-Roman philosophy)
- Well-being Therapy (Clinical)

Perception Orientation (C-P)

- Development stage (Tibetan)
- Meditation on Foulness (Theravada)

Deconstructive Family Practices

Object-oriented Insight (OO-I)

- Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy - Cognitive Component (Clinical)
- First and Second Foundations of Mindfulness (Theravada, Tibetan)
- Vipassana/Insight (Theravada)
- Analytical Meditation (Tibetan)
- Koan Practice (Zen)

Subject-oriented Insight (SO-I)

- Cognitive Behavior Therapy (Clinical)
- Third and Fourth Foundations of Mindfulness (Theravada, Tibetan)
- Mahamudra Analytical Meditation (Tibetan)
- Dzogchen Analytical Meditation (Tibetan)
- Koan practice (Zen)

Nondual-oriented Insight (NO-I)

- Muraqaba (Sufi)
- Mahamudra (Tibetan)
- Dzogchen (Tibetan)
- Shikantaza (Zen)
- Self-inquiry (Advaita Vedanta)

Part 2: Descriptions and Citations for the Typology of Meditation Practices and Related Clinical Interventions

The following descriptions correspond to meditation practices and clinical interventions listed in Part 1 of the Supplementary Materials. For illustrative purposes, we have provided one relevant citation for each item. Please keep in mind that many practices listed below are hybrids and therefore include elements of multiple families. This classification system groups practices according to their *primary cognitive mechanisms*. The inclusion of individual practices in specific families is not meant to indicate that they are exclusively related to attention, to the cultivation of particular qualities, or to the deconstruction of maladaptive cognitive and/or affective patterns.

Attentional Family – Focused Attention (FA)

- **Jhana practice** is a form of meditation found in classical Buddhism and widely practiced in Theravada school. This form of meditation involves sustained concentration on a single object such as the breath, or an affective state such as compassion. (Gunaratana, 1995)
- **Breath counting**, widely practiced in many Buddhist traditions, entails sustained attention on the movements of the breath while mentally counting inhalations and exhalations. (Aitken, 1982)
- **Body awareness practices** involve directing the attention toward specific areas of the body, such as the point beneath the navel, and sustaining awareness in that area for extended periods of time. This form of practice is commonly found in many schools of Buddhism. Note: this form of practice is

distinct from body awareness practices that involve scanning the body rather than sustaining focus on one point or area. (Loori, 2002)

- **Shamatha (a.k.a. calm abiding or tranquility) with support**, a common form of meditation training in Tibetan Buddhism, involves resting attention on a specific aspect of experience. This object could be a sensory percept, such as a visual object or physical sensation, a thought (such as a mentally repeated word or sound, such as a mantra), or an emotion, such as compassion. This form of meditation is similar in many regards to the aforementioned jhana practice. (Swanson & Rinpoche, 2010)
- **Mantra recitation** is practiced in most major religions and involves the repetition of a sacred word or phrase, through which the mind becomes increasingly still and subtle aspects of consciousness are accessed. This style of meditation is perhaps most widely practiced in Transcendental Meditation (TM), though TM also involves elements of the deconstructive family (Yogi, 1995).

Attentional Family – Open Monitoring (Object-orientation: OM-O)

- The **Cultivation of Attention** was considered a foundational exercise in various forms of Greco-Roman philosophy, especially in the Stoic school, where it was referred to as *prosoche*. Like the practice of choiceless awareness described below, the cultivation of attention often involved bringing awareness to various aspects of present moment experience (P. Hadot, 1995).

- **Choiceless Awareness**, a practice found in Tibetan Buddhism, entails releasing attentional focus on a specific object and maintaining awareness of whatever thoughts, feelings, or percepts arise as objects within the field of awareness. (Swanson & Rinpoche, 2010)
- **Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction** is a clinical intervention that employs a variety of attentional practices with deconstructive elements, with the intention of cultivating a non-judgmental, present-moment awareness of the various facets of psychophysiological experience. (Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2013)
- **Dialectical Behavior Therapy** is a clinical intervention designed to aid in the treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder. Present moment awareness of experience is one of four main components of this approach. (Linehan et al., 1999)
- **Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy** is a clinical intervention that employs elements of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (included in the deconstructive family) along with meditation-related practices that foster present-moment awareness of cognitive, affective, and perceptual processes. (Segal et al., 2012)
- **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy** is a therapeutic process that includes the cultivation of present moment awareness as one of its primary components. (Hayes et al., 2006)

Attentional Family - Open Monitoring (Subject-orientation: OM-S)

- **Shamatha (a.k.a. calm abiding or tranquility) without support**, also referred to as “open awareness” meditation, is a common form of meditation training in Tibetan Buddhism. This practice involves releasing the orientation of attention toward an object and instead sustaining awareness of the process of knowing itself. (Swanson & Rinpoche, 2010)

Constructive Family – Relationship Orientation (CR)

- **Loving-kindness and compassion**, commonly practiced in Tibetan and Theravada Buddhism, involves systematically cultivating and sustaining the active care and concern to alleviate the suffering (compassion) or nurture the happiness (loving-kindness) of the object of one’s meditation, which may be oneself, another being, or all beings. (Salzberg, 2002)
- **Bodhichitta** meditations are a body of practices, commonly practiced in both Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, that revolve around cultivating both the aspiration and active commitment to help all beings achieve complete freedom from suffering and dissatisfaction and to fully embody wisdom and compassion. (Y. M. Rinpoche, 2014)
- **Centering Prayer** is a contemporary practice drawn from the Catholic mystical tradition that involves repeating a sacred word to connect to the presence of the divine (Keating, 2012).

- **Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT)** is a program that employs contemplative practices designed to improve resilience, interpersonal relationships, and well-being. (Jazaieri et al., 2013)
- **Cognitively-based Compassion Training**, rooted in Buddhist contemplative practices, is a secular training program that includes elements of all three families. The main emphasis in this approach is to help individuals to train their minds so that compassionate responses become automatic. (Reddy et al., 2013)

Constructive Family – Values Orientation (CV)

- **The Six Recollections** are a traditional Theravada Buddhist practice that involves contemplating a series of topics, including recollections of the positive qualities of virtue and generosity, in order to calm and stabilize the mind. (Buddhaghosa, 1991)
- **The Four Thoughts** are a traditional Tibetan Buddhist practice that involves contemplating the preciousness of human life, death and impermanence, the principle of causality, and the pervasive nature of suffering and dissatisfaction. The main goal of these contemplations is to promote a prioritization of pursuits that will lead to long-term well-being, rather than short-term gain. (Y. M. Rinpoche, 2014)
- **Contemplation of Mortality** is a practice common to many forms of Buddhism in which an individual contemplates the fragility of life, the many circumstances that can bring an end to life, and other topics that aim to put the meditator in

touch with his or her own mortality. There are various aims for these practices, including a calming of the mind and a stabilizing of attention, but one of the primary objectives is to reorient the mind toward what is truly meaningful and of lasting benefit. (Halifax, 2009)

- **Well-being Therapy** is a psychotherapeutic strategy designed to enhance well-being. It is based on Carol Ryff's model of psychological well-being, which is comprised of six domains: environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy, self-acceptance and positive relations with others. (Fava, Rafanelli, Cazzaro, Conti, & Grandi, 1998)

Constructive Family – Perception Orientation (CP)

- **Development stage** is a form of meditation commonly practiced in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition that employs the imagination and creative visualization. One common technique is to imagine oneself as an enlightened being who fully embodies wisdom and compassion. The aim of these practices is to disrupt perceptual processes that are oriented toward undesirable qualities and circumstances and to cultivate a view that sees the world and other individuals as embodiments of wisdom and compassion. (Ray, 2002)
- **Meditation on Foulness** is a form of contemplation from the early Buddhist tradition and currently practiced in the Theravada tradition. The main objective of this practice is to undermine lust and sensual desire by imagining the human body in various states of decay and also by mentally dissecting the body into its

component parts. This is often practiced by celibate monks and nuns in order to help maintain their monastic vows. (Buddhaghosa, 1991)

Object-oriented Insight (OO-I)

- **First and Second Foundations of Mindfulness** are classical Buddhist practices common to all forms of Buddhism, but most widely practiced in the Theravada School. In the first two of the four foundations, the emphasis is on bringing awareness to various aspects of the body and to feeling states in order to realize, for example, their transient nature. (Goldstein, 2013)
- **Vipassana/Insight Meditation** is a general term for a class of meditations, widely practiced in Theravada Buddhism, that aim to generate experiential insight into the nature of experience. This class of meditations often includes elements of both object-oriented and subject-oriented insight practices (Goldstein, 2003)
- **Analytical Meditation**, commonly practiced in Tibetan Buddhism, refers to a form of contemplation in which one either experientially investigates and/or logically analyzes ontological beliefs and views, especially concerning the nature of the self. (Lama, 2014)

Subject-oriented Insight (SO-I)

- **Cognitive Behavior Therapy** is a form of psychotherapy that focuses on alleviating symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other psychological problems

by helping clients change their thinking, behavior, emotional responses, and the maladaptive self-schema that underlie them. (Aaron T Beck, 2005)

- **Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy**, mentioned earlier in the attentional meditation section, employs both mindfulness techniques and aspects of Cognitive Behavior Therapy. (Segal et al., 2012)
- **Third and Fourth Foundations of Mindfulness** are classical Buddhist practices common to all forms of Buddhism, but most widely practiced in the Theravada School. In the third and fourth of the four foundations, the emphasis is on bringing awareness to various states of consciousness and to the elements of psychophysiological experience (dharmas). (Goldstein, 2013)
- **Dzogchen and Mahamudra Analytical Meditation** are Tibetan Buddhist practices, both of which employ experiential investigations of awareness to ascertain its essence and nature. (D. P. Rinpoche, 2003)

Nondual-oriented Insight (NO-I)

- **Muraqaba** is a contemplative practice found in the Islamic Sufi tradition in which one's sense of individual identity dissolves and one merges with the divine. In practice, this form of meditation proceeds in stages that involve gaining access to increasingly subtle aspects of consciousness (Azeemi, 2005).
- **Mahamudra** is a Tibetan Buddhist practice through which a student is guided to a direct experience of the non-dual essence of awareness, in which the sense of being a perceiver or agent that stands apart from the objects of consciousness is

absent. Following this introduction, the primary practice involves returning to this recognition over and over again until it stabilizes and can be integrated with various activities and psychological states. (K. T. Rinpoche, 2003)

- **Dzogchen** is, like Mahamudra, a Tibetan Buddhist practice that emphasizes effortlessly resting in the non-dual essence of awareness. (T. U. Rinpoche, 2000)
- **Koan practice**, commonly practiced in Zen Buddhism, employs paradoxical stories and phrases to demonstrate the inadequacy of concepts and to elicit a direct experience of non-conceptual wisdom. (Kapleau, 1980)
- **Shikantaza** is a Zen Buddhist practice in which the simple act of sitting, without effort or contrivance, expresses the awakened presence of mind, a non-conceptual experience in which the dualistic framework of consciousness falls away. (Dogen, 2004)
- **Self-Inquiry** is a practice from Advaita Vedanta, a Hindu tradition of contemplative practice, that involves cultivating a sustained awareness of the sense of personal identity until it falls away altogether, leading to an experience of non-dual awareness. (Maharshi, 1985)

Glossary of Terms

Attentional Family: A class of meditation practices that strengthen the self-regulation of various attentional processes, especially the ability to initiate and sustain meta-awareness. Some forms of meditation in this family involve a narrowing of attentional

scope, while others involve releasing attentional control and bringing awareness to whatever enters the field of consciousness.

Cognitive Reification: The experience of thoughts, emotions, and perceptions as being accurate depictions of reality, and in particular the implicit belief that the self and objects of consciousness are inherently enduring, unitary, and independent of their surrounding conditions and circumstances. In the Buddhist tradition, cognitive reification is a primary target in deconstructive styles of meditation.

Constructive Family: A family of meditation practices that allow one to cultivate, nurture, or strengthen cognitive and affective patterns that foster well-being. Practices in this family may aim to promote healthy interpersonal dynamics, to strengthen a commitment to ethical values, or to nurture habits of perception that lead to enhanced well-being. Perspective taking and cognitive reappraisal are important mechanisms in this style of meditation.

Experiential Fusion: An automatic process whereby one becomes absorbed in the contents of consciousness, leading to a diminished capacity to monitor and/or regulate psychological processes. In attentional styles of meditation this process is systematically undermined through the cultivation of meta-awareness and the regulation of attention. Experiential fusion is also indirectly undermined in the constructive and deconstructive families.

Deconstructive Family: A family of meditation practices that employs self-inquiry to foster insight into the processes of perception, emotion, and cognition. Deconstructive

meditation practices may be oriented toward the objects of consciousness or toward consciousness itself.

Insight: A shift in consciousness that is often sudden and involves a feeling of knowing, understanding, or perceiving something that had previously eluded one's grasp. In deconstructive meditation practices, insight is often elicited through self-inquiry and pertains to specific self-related psychological processes that inform well-being.

Meta-awareness: Heightened awareness of the processes of consciousness, including the processes of thinking, feeling, and perceiving. Along with the regulation of the scope and stability of attention, the cultivation of meta-awareness is an important objective in attentional styles of meditation practice. It is also strengthened indirectly in the constructive and deconstructive families.

Mindfulness: A term that is defined differently in Buddhist and contemporary contexts, but which often refers to a self-regulated attentional stance oriented toward present-moment experience that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance. In some traditional Buddhist contexts, mindfulness is equivalent to the psychological process that we refer to here as meta-awareness.

Perspective Taking: The process of considering how one or another would think or feel in a particular situation.

Re-appraisal: The process of changing how one thinks or feels about situations and events in such a way that one's response to them is altered.

Self-inquiry: The investigation of the dynamics and nature of conscious experience, particularly in relation to thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that pertain to one's sense of self. Self-inquiry may be an important mechanism in deconstructive meditations due to its role in facilitating insight.

Self-schema: Mental representations of the self that synthesize information from sensory, affective and/or cognitive domains. Constructive styles of meditation often involve developing and/or strengthening adaptive self-schema.

Questions for Future Research

1. How do the various forms of training found in the three families interact with one another? Is there an optimal sequence or does it depend on the individual? What are the order effects of individual practices?
2. To what extent do the effects of specific meditations rest on the frameworks, beliefs, and worldviews that underlie these practices?
3. How do self-schema arise over the course of ontogeny, what function do they serve, and how are they related to different facets of well-being?
4. Is meta-awareness distinct from related constructs such as psychological distancing and introspection? How does it relate to other forms of attention, such as ordinary attentiveness? What are its neural and behavioral markers?
5. How does meta-awareness mediate changes in other processes, such as emotion regulation, executive function, and the unlearning of habits?

6. How do compassion training and other constructive family practices affect specific self-related processes? How might changes in these processes enhance different domains of well-being?

Chapter 4

Healthy Minds: A Program for the Cultivation of Well-being

Curriculum Design Document

Objectives and Scope

The rising popularity of online programs like Lumosity and in-person programs like Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction signal a growing interest in meditation and other forms of mental training. Mirroring this groundswell of popular interest, a growing body of scientific evidence suggests that meditation may impact both psychological and physical health, including our capacity to cope with stress and our ability to bolster various aspects of well-being. This cultural paradigm shift calls for impactful well-being training programs that are accessible and based in rigorous science.

Healthy Minds teaches scientifically-informed practices and principles that facilitate the cultivation of well-being. In the same way that exercise and diet contribute to physical health, meditation and other forms of mental training may be equally beneficial in contributing to mental health and psychological flourishing. Lasting well-being, however, cannot be achieved by short-term interventions. Enduring changes in the mind must be systematically cultivated and sustained. This can be accomplished by incorporating simple meditation exercises into one's daily routine and supporting these practices at home and in the work place.

Healthy Minds has brought together experts in the fields of science, meditation, and digital design to create a comprehensive program that will support individuals in the cultivation of well-being over the course of their lifespan. The training is pragmatic and experiential, integrating scientific insights with secular meditation practices that are easy to learn. These practices teach important skills that underlie the cultivation of well-

being, including mindfulness and the regulation of attention, purpose and meaning in life, kindness and other qualities that underlie healthy relationships, and a healthy sense of self. This core training is supported by online and mobile apps, in-person programs led by senior scientists and meditation experts, and a variety of resources to reinforce the benefits of the training.

Healthy Minds is the first program of its kind to incorporate rigorous scientific assessments into the very fabric of the training. Our program is designed to further our understanding of the nature of well-being, how it can be cultivated, and the relationship between well-being and a variety of real-world outcomes. Participants and partner organizations will therefore have the opportunity to participate in groundbreaking research and to assess the effects of the program through hardnosed scientific research.

Why is the Healthy Mind Program necessary?

There is increasing demand for simple, accessible programs to cultivate well-being.

Such programs should include:

- Practices that can be integrated with daily life and that won't take a lot of time
- Principles and practices that don't ask one to adopt a new belief system, religion, or ethical framework
- Principles and practices that are rooted in science and give individuals the opportunity to contribute to scientific research

- Practices that have already been developed and refined over time by communities of practitioners
- Opportunities to connect with other people to support one's practice and training
- Resources that support daily practice and that are interesting and helpful enough to be used over long periods

How is it unique?

Healthy Minds is a systematic program that:

- Provides an accessible, comprehensive, systematic, and secular path of meditation practices designed to foster well-being
- Is rooted in a scientific understanding of the mind and behavior, and especially of well-being
- Features content from leading scientists and meditation teachers
- Is designed in collaboration with world leaders in digital design and program development
- Can be used as a basis for further scientific research on the nature and cultivation of well-being
- Contains tools that will enable users to track their own development in well-being related variables
- Is rooted in historically validated practices that are purported to enhance well-being

What's in the program?

The "Getting Started" program will include:

- seven short teachings by Dr. Richard Davidson on important insights related to the science of well-being
- Accessible practices, ranging in length from 5 to 10 minutes, to introduce the kinds of exercises that are featured in the program
- Engaging scientific assessments that will provide data for future research and which will also be provided to the user as a "personal well-being profile"

The four modules of the core program target important aspects of well-being:

- Mindfulness and the regulation of attention
- Purpose and meaning in life
- Healthy capacity to connect with others
- Healthy sense of self

Each of the four three-month core modules includes:

- Weekly teachings on important scientific insights and principles related to the cultivation of well-being by Dr. Davidson and leading scientists and contemplative experts
- Daily practices and exercises that can be practiced in formal sessions or "on the go" in daily life
- Scientific assessments that inform the user about how their "well-being profile" changes over time and which provide scientists with important data concerning the nature and cultivation of well-being

What are its objectives?

- To create a *standardized and multi-faceted well-being training program* that incorporates a range of meditation practices that can be implemented in a broad range of settings
- To create a standardized and multi-faceted set of self-report, experience sampling, and behavioral measures designed to assess well-being that can be utilized in a broad range of settings
- To educate program participants in basic *scientific and contemplative principles* related to the cultivation of well-being
- To teach program participants *practical skills* that will enable them to cultivate specific facets of well-being
- To support program participants over the course of their lives as they continue to practice skills that contribute to well-being

Who is it for?

Version 1.0 is designed for the adults in workplace settings, especially those who:

- Are interested in the cultivation of well-being
- Are open to engaging in meditation practices
- Are drawn to scientifically-based programs
- Are comfortable with technology

- Future adaptations will be designed for the general public, and also with partner communities and organizations in the fields of education, healthcare, and other fields.

How will it be offered?

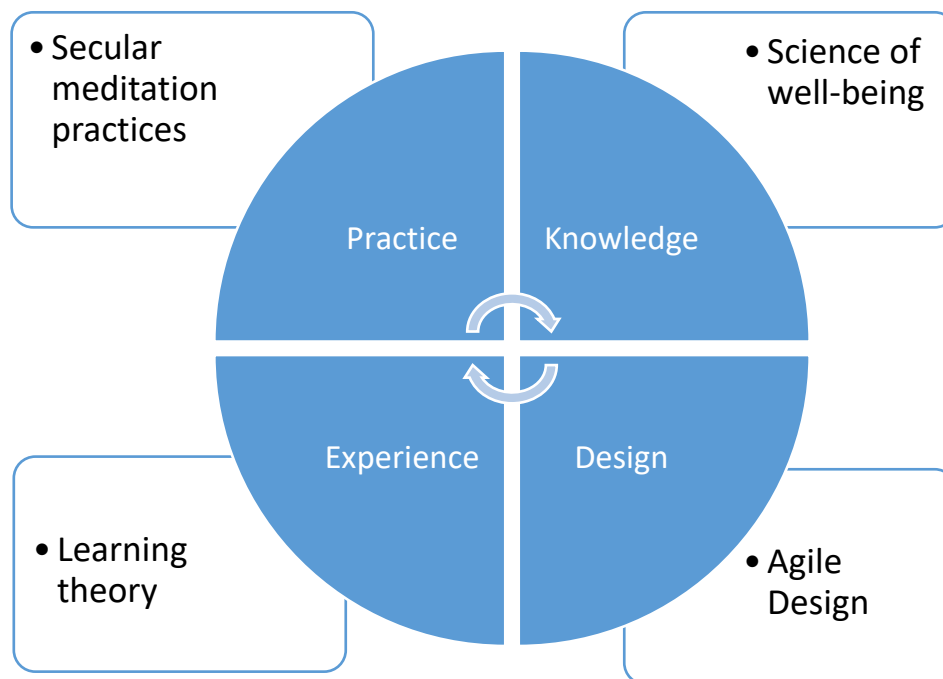
- Version 1.0 will be offered as a yearlong browser- and app-based online program
- Periodic live events may be held to support community of users
- Future versions may include a live component that could feature trained facilitators in a variety of settings, both for the general public and/or specific settings

Who is involved?

- The team that designs, builds, and implements Healthy Minds will consist of meditation experts, research scientists, designers and programmers, and an administrative support team.
- Richard Davidson will oversee the development and implementation of the program; he will also be the lead scientific teacher in the program itself.
- Cortland Dahl will be the lead architect of the program and its content and will serve as the primary teacher of the meditation practices and principles that are used in the program.
- Elena Patsenko and Matt Hirshberg will be the primary scientific consultants and will be responsible for designing the scientific assessments used in the program; they will also consult on the design of the curriculum.

- SY Partners and Ideo will oversee the design of the program and will consult on program content.
- Leading meditation teachers and scientists from outside CIHM will contribute their expertise on modules related to their area of expertise.

Program Theory



The Healthy Minds program represents a unique integration of four domains: contemplative practice, the science of well-being, learning theory, and design thinking. At the core of the program are secular meditation practices that are based on classical practices and principles from the world's contemplative traditions. These practices are contextualized in a scientific framework that integrates existing knowledge and measurements from the fields of well-being research, contemplative science, positive psychology, and the science of behavior change. The presentation of these contemplative practices and scientific principles will be informed by the theory of situated cognition – which postulates that knowing and learning is based on action and

experience – and will be produced by the process of design thinking and agile design, which rely heavily on rapid prototyping and user-informed refinements.

Secular meditation practices

At the core of the Healthy Minds is a comprehensive program of secular meditation practices. Practices of this nature have been used for centuries in many of the world's spiritual and philosophical traditions. In these traditions, there are styles of meditation that are commonly practiced in a broad range of traditions, such as those related to attention and awareness, to the cultivation of virtue, to interpersonal dynamics, and to self-inquiry and self-knowledge.

Healthy Minds features simple, secular meditation exercises that have been adapted from classical meditation practices. These practices are presented in a variety of lengths and formats, and can thus be used by a variety of people, in a variety of settings and circumstances.

Key sources:

- Fadiman, J. (1999). *Essential Sufism*. HarperOne.
- Gethin, R. (1998). *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Opus.
- Hadot, P. (1995). *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Laird, M. (2006). *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation*.

The science of well-being

Another core feature of the Healthy Minds program is the incorporation of current research on the science of well-being, and also rigorous scientific assessments that will allow for the study of the program and its impact on a variety of variables related to well-being. The scientific findings included in the program will be offered to users in the form of short, accessible weekly teachings. The content of these teachings will be drawn from a number of fields, including cognitive science, well-being research, the science of behavior change and habit formation, positive psychology, and contemplative science. These short teachings will be presented to help users understand their own mind and to gain insight into the process of cultivating well-being.

Healthy Minds will also feature a comprehensive tool kit of scientific assessments. These assessments will feature self-report, experience sampling, and behavioral measures, and will be presented entirely online, and primarily through tablets, phones, and other portable devices. These measures will thus not only enable us to assess the impact of program itself, but also to explore the opportunities and limitations of using of these technologies in scientific research.

Key sources:

- Dahl, C. J., Lutz, A., & Davidson, R. J. (2015). Reconstructing and deconstructing the self: cognitive mechanisms in meditation practice. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 19(9), 515–523.

- Davidson, R. J., & Kaszniak, A. W. (2015). Conceptual and methodological issues in research on mindfulness and meditation. *American Psychologist, 70*(7), 581–592.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2006). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: an introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9*(1), 1–11.
- Lutz, A., Jha, A., Dunne, J. D., & Saron, C. D. (2015). Investigating the Phenomenological Matrix of Mindfulness-related Practices from a Neurocognitive Perspective. *American Psychologist, 70*(7), 632–658.
- Rothman, A. J., Gollwitzer, P. M., Grant, A. M., Neal, D. T., Sheeran, P., & Wood, W. (2015). Hale and Hearty Policies: How Psychological Science Can Create and Maintain Healthy Habits. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 10*(6), 701–705.
- Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*(4), 719–27.

Learning theory

The style of training presented in the program will be experiential in nature, drawing not only on traditional meditation practices but also contemporary theoretical frameworks related to learning and education. In particular, the training is based on experiential paradigms that emphasize the application of theoretical principles and embodied learning, as opposed to focusing on the learning and retention of information.

Key sources:

- Brown, J. S., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher*, 18, 32–42.
- Collins, A., Brown, J. S., & Holum, A. (1991). Cognitive Apprenticeship: Making Thinking Visible. *American Educator*, 15(3), 6–11.

Agile design

The program itself will be designed and built by a collaborative of scientists, meditation experts, and leaders in the field of digital design. The design process itself will help shape the program, and in particular the model of agile design – an influential design process commonly used in software design – will be used to refine the program. This model advocates a highly iterative design process with rapidly created prototypes that can be used and tested in real world settings, and then making adjustments and refinements based on user feedback.

Key sources:

- Plattner, H., Meinel, C., & Leifer, L. (Eds.). (2010). *Design thinking: understand–improve–apply*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Martin, R. C. (2003). *Agile software development: principles, patterns, and practices*. Prentice Hall PTR.

Program Components

My Healthy Mind Profile

At the core of the program, and one of its defining features, is a comprehensive portrait of the user's well-being. This well-being profile will be based on scientifically validated self-report, behavioral, and experience sampling measures and will present different facets of individual well-being in relation to norms in the wider population. This profile will also track changes over time, so users will be able to see how the training impacts important variables related to well-being. This program will be available as a stand-alone suite that can be used with other interventions and scientific studies.

Program Content

The content of the program will be delivered in a series of modules, with an introductory module, three modules that present the core training, and advanced modules for those who wish to deepen their practice. The following presents a brief outline of the core modules of the program.

Getting started module

A 7-day self-guided course that presents the basic principles that inform the cultivation of well-being presented in the HM and teaches a simple practices that users can easily implement in their lives. Each day of this module includes a short teaching on the science of well-being and a meditation practice.

Core training modules

Each of the core modules is three months long and contains monthly sub-modules. Each week of the program contains a short weekly scientific teaching, a short contemplative teaching, and daily guided formal and daily life practices of varying lengths.

- **Module 1: A calm mind** – A twelve-week self-guided course that teaches the importance of mindfulness and the regulation of attention as a component of well-being and provides thorough instruction in mindfulness practices that use the senses, thoughts, emotions, and awareness as supports in meditation
- **Module 2: A sense of purpose** – A twelve-week self-guided course that presents a systematic training in practices that help participants to recognize their mostly deeply held values and to integrate these values with their lives and pursuits
- **Module 3: A kind heart** - A twelve-week self-guided course that teaches simple practices that foster healthy interpersonal relationships, focusing on the cultivation of qualities like appreciation, empathy, kindness, and compassion
- **Module 4: A healthy sense of self** – A twelve-week self-guided course that teaches the practice of self-inquiry, a form of meditation that involves exploring the nature and workings of the mind, emotions, and perception

Advanced training modules

For those who have completed the core training modules, a series of advanced modules on a variety of topics will be offered, with new modules being added incrementally over time. These modules will feature leading meditation teachers and scientists offering instructions on their particular area of expertise.

Scientific Assessment

A unique and integral feature of the program will be the integration of rigorous scientific assessment tools into the fabric of the program. These assessments, featuring self-report, experience sampling, and behavioral measures, will allow researchers to use the diverse components of the program as a basis for serious scientific research into the nature and cultivation of well-being. In addition to providing researchers with data for use in studies, some data will also be provided to users in an accessible format to show them how the program has affected different cognitive and affective processes related to well-being.

Content Delivery

In version 1.0, the program will be delivered in an integrated fashion primarily by browser-based and mobile apps. Users will be able to seamlessly move between browser and mobile apps to access content. Live programming will also be available to generate interest in the program and to support program participants. Future iterations

of the program may include additional in-person programming and/or the training of instructors to disseminate the program in real-world settings.

Community

An essential part of the program will be its emphasis on building and nurturing relationships, both as a means to support the cultivation of well-being and to integrate the skills and insights developed in the training with everyday life. Users will be encouraged to participate in the program with friends and family, to discuss what they've learned and share their experience in putting the teachings into practice. Concrete recommendations and guidance will be given to help people learn and practice together.

Community mode

When in community mode, the user interface will be designed for use by a group facilitator. Suggested session formats of varying lengths (30/60/90 minute sessions) for each topic will include guided meditations, questions for discussion, and suggestions for home practice. Groups will be able to pick a specific module and work through it point by point, much as an individual would.

Practice with friends program

When new users sign up, they will be given the option of sharing the program with a family member or friend so they can participate at the same time. For those who take advantage of this option, suggestions will be given to use the relationship as a support for the training provided in the program

Practice at work program

For those who want to practice with others in a professional setting, an option to share the program with co-workers will be provided, with guidance for practicing as a group in the community mode.

Getting Started Module Overview

Summary: The seven-day “getting started” program is designed to introduce participants to basic principles related to the science of well-being, as well as the contemplative practices and concepts that form the core of the program. Each day includes a three to five minute teaching on a scientific or contemplative principle, and a five to ten minute practice. The practices alternate between formal practices (i.e., sitting meditation) and daily life practices that can be done while engaged in another activity, such as commuting to work or doing chores at home. The primary objective of this introductory module is to give participants a sense of what the full program entails and to inspire them to take the next step and begin the first three-month module.

Teachings:¹

- Welcome to Healthy Minds (page 183 in appendix 2)
- What is well-being? (page 187 in appendix 2)
- Well-being is a skill (page 191 in appendix 2)
- Training the mind (page 196 in appendix 2)
- Ingredients of a healthy mind (page 200 in appendix 2)
- Many drops (page 205 in appendix 2)
- Global well-being (page 211 in appendix 2)

¹ Full scripts for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in “Appendix 2: Content Outline for the Getting Started Module of the Healthy Minds Program.”

Practices:

- Tuning into the breath (page 193 in appendix 2)
- Learning to be (page 197 in appendix 2)
- Awareness and the senses (page 202 in appendix 2)
- Setting intention (page 207 in appendix 2)
- Appreciation (page 213 in appendix 2)

Module References

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Module 1 Overview

A Calm Mind (Months 1-3)

The first module of the Healthy Minds program focuses on the strengthening of present moment awareness and the regulation of attention. These attentional processes are central to various facets of well-being, including positive emotion, the self-regulation of cognition and affect, resilience, and healthy relationships. The training of these attentional processes involves recognizing and cultivating specific components of attention that occur regularly in everyday life, such as mindfulness, the intentional orienting and sustaining of attention, and the capacity to notice and release distractions. The capacity to release attentional control and to rest in a state of open receptivity is also a key skill that is learned in this module.

The first month of the program begins with an introduction to foundational skills that inform the entire Healthy Minds program: the capacity to arouse interest and inspiration, intention setting, directed action, and self-discovery. After this introductory month, a month is spent introducing the experience of important attentional processes and practices that use sensory perception to strengthen them. The final month of the program is designed to further strengthen these processes, especially in relation to thoughts and emotions. The aim of this third month is to facilitate resilience and self-regulation by teaching practical skills that enable one to monitor thoughts, emotions, and behavior.

Symptoms of deficits in attention and mindful awareness: When our capacity to be fully aware in the present moment and to regulate attention is underdeveloped, we are easily distracted and often feel restless, anxious, and stressed out. At home and with friends, we may have trouble being a good listener and being fully present for those we care about, or we may struggle to balance our work like life, relationships, and other pursuits. At work, we may have trouble staying focused, or we may lack creativity, feel blocked, and be unable to be productive. The main symptom of an underdeveloped capacity for awareness and attention is a persistent feeling of restlessness, of needing to be stimulated or distracted to feel content.

Qualities strengthened in this module: Mindfulness and the capacity to regulate attention

Core skills learned in this module: Noticing and strengthening mindfulness, directing, sustaining, and relaxing attentional focus, noticing and releasing distractors

Month 1: Beginning the Journey

Summary: To sustain meaningful change we need to make a routine of actions that support the cultivation of well-being. Building a regular routine is facilitated by (1) feeling inspired and motivated, (2) forming clear intentions, (3) following those intentions with actions, and (4) noticing and reflecting on the insights and experiences brought about by the actions we take. This month we will learn important skills that help us to form and maintain new habits. Over the course of the month, we will learn about these four factors and related insights from scientific research, and also practice simple contemplative exercises that help us to link these principles with our day-to-day lives.

Contemplative teachings:²

- The importance of inspiration (page 219 in appendix 3)
- Intention and motivation (page 221 in appendix 3)
- Taking action (page 224 in appendix 3)
- Discovering what we already have (page 226 in appendix 3)

Contemplative practices:

- Finding inspiration + open awareness and the breath (page 220 in appendix 3)

² Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in “Appendix 3: Content Outline for Module 1 of the Healthy Minds Program.”

- Intention setting and feeling the movements of the breath (page 222 in appendix 3)
- Short times, many times + open awareness and the breath (page 226 in appendix 3)
- Resting in the space between breaths (page 226 in appendix 3)

Scientific teachings:

- The far reaches of well-being (page 220 in appendix 3)
- Forming healthy habits (page 223 in appendix 3)
- Forming healthy habits, part 2 (page 225 in appendix 3)
- Capacity for self-transformation (page 227 in appendix 3)

Month 2: Attention and Awareness of the Senses

Summary: Learning to be mindful and attentive is the foundation of cultivating a healthy mind. A mindful mind is calm, clear, and steady, and a calm, clear, and steady mind is inherently nourishing...it feels better to be aware. It also improves our capacity to build new habits, to let go of old ones, and to explore the mind to gain insight and understanding. The process of training in mindfulness involves singling out some basic psychological qualities that we use all the time, and strengthening them. The most essential quality is mindfulness, which enables us to direct or redirect our attention, to notice and let go of distractors, to sustain our attention, and to release our attention and rest in a state of relaxed receptivity, which we call open awareness.

Contemplative teachings:³

- Inner calm (page 230 in appendix 3)
- Inner clarity (page 233 in appendix 3)
- Inner steadiness (page 236 in appendix 3)
- Mindfulness and attentiveness (page 240 in appendix 3)

Contemplative practices:

- Inner calm + mindfulness of the body (page 231 in appendix 3)
- Inner clarity + mindfulness of the body (page 234 in appendix 3)

³ Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in “Appendix 3: Content Outline for Module 1 of the Healthy Minds Program.”

- Inner steadiness + awareness of a visual object (page 238 in appendix 3)
- Recognizing distraction + awareness of sound (page xx in appendix 3)

Scientific teachings:

- Attention and mindfulness (page 232 in appendix 3)
- Mindfulness and the brain (page 235 in appendix 3)
- Mindfulness and the training of attention (page 239 in appendix 3)
- Mind wandering (page 242 in appendix 3)

Month 3: Working with Thoughts and Emotions

One of the greatest gifts we have as human beings is the capacity to think and reason, to reflect on our life and circumstances and to explore the world of emotions. Yet this gift can feel like a curse at times. We may feel like we can't turn our thoughts off, even when they create more stress in the body and agitation in the mind. And our feelings and emotions can easily get out of control, to the point that they can get in the way of healthy relationships and block our creativity and resilience. In our most challenging moments, our thoughts and emotions may feel like our worst enemies.

This month, we're going to learn how to relate to our thoughts and emotions. Though it often feels like thoughts and emotions themselves are the problems, when we are grounded in mindfulness, we can experience their creative energy without feeling hijacked by them. The practice is really quite simple. We use thoughts and emotions as a support for mindfulness in the same way that we use the breath, or a sound. What we find is that thoughts and emotions are constantly shifting and changing, and that they have many different components. There are words and sounds in the mind, especially the inner voice that comments and narrates our experience, and also mental images. Another important component of emotions in particular are bodily sensations. And all of these words, images, and sensations come with a feeling tone. That is, we find them to be pleasant and we want more of them, or unpleasant and we try to avoid them or make them stop. And many are simply neutral. We don't care about them one way or another.

In conducting this exploration we see that our thoughts and emotions do not define us, and that it is our struggle to control them that often creates tension in the body and distress in the mind. This capacity to step back and observe our thoughts and feelings gives us the capacity to savor and strengthen healthy emotions and thoughts, and to let go of unhealthy habits of mind. We can even transform the many neutral experiences we have into sources of insight, connection, and creativity.

Contemplative teachings:⁴

- The power of thought (page 245 in appendix 3)
- Stepping out of the river (page 248 in appendix 3)
- Exploring emotion (page 251 in appendix 3)
- Inner freedom (page 255 in appendix 3)

Contemplative practices:

- Exploring the inner landscape (page 246 in appendix 3)
- Observing thoughts (page 249 in appendix 3)
- Exploring emotion (page 252 in appendix 3)
- Relaxing with the flow + observing feelings (page 256 in appendix 3)

Scientific teachings:

- The default mode of the mind and brain (page 247 in appendix 3)

⁴ Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in “Appendix 3: Content Outline for Module 1 of the Healthy Minds Program.”

- Mindfulness and the default-mode network (page 250 in appendix 3)
- Emotion regulation and the brain (page 254 in appendix 3)
- Mindful emotion regulation (page 257 in appendix 3)

Module References

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Module 2 Overview

A Sense of Purpose (Months 4-6)

One of the most important aspects of a healthy mind is to have a sense of purpose and direction in life. When we lack purpose, we feel restless, uninspired, and view life as devoid of meaning. Things that were interesting in the past lose their luster, and it becomes difficult to stay motivated at home, at work, and sometimes even in our relationships with friends and loved ones. When we have a clear sense of purpose, even mundane circumstances can be interesting, and challenges are seen as opportunities for learning and growth. Our life and pursuits feel meaningful and our relationships bring us joy and contentment. Although it often seems as though purpose and meaning come solely from the things we do and the people we're with, we can feel a sense of inner purpose and resolve when we're engaged in mundane things that may not hold any inherent meaning or purpose for us. This month we will learn important skills that enable us to recognize and strengthen our sense of purpose and direction, and to apply these skills in a variety of contexts.

Symptoms of a deficient sense of purpose in life: Lacking a sense of purpose and meaning in life can manifest as a feeling that nothing matters, as a lack of inspiration, creativity, and enthusiasm for one's life, relationships, and pursuits.

Qualities strengthened in this module: Sense of purpose and direction; sensitivity to the impact of one's attitudes and actions, and the importance of values and ethics

Skills learned in this module: Motivation setting, different forms of perspective taking (noticing personal strengths and attributes, viewing present from a future-orientation)

Month 4: Positive Outlook

Summary: The assumption many of us bring into the world is that we are missing something important. It's not always clear what that something is, but there is a nagging sense that our relationships should be better, our health or body should be different, we should be more successful, and on and on. This sense of lack drives many of our behaviors, and some of the time the best we can do is distract ourselves so we don't have to feel this hole in our life. This month we'll explore our experience to uncover qualities of the mind that help us to feel a sense of contentment and purpose that do not depend on external circumstances. Along the way, we'll learn to clarify our mostly deeply held values and how we can integrate them at work, in relationships, and in the midst of the ups and downs of everyday life.

Contemplative teachings:⁵

- Noticing the positive (page 260 in appendix 4)
- Home base (page 261 in appendix 4)
- The seeds of kindness (page 265 in appendix 4)
- The inner voice of wisdom (page 269 in appendix 4)
- Be the change you want to see in the world (page 272 in appendix 4)

Contemplative practices:

⁵ Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in "Appendix 4: Content Outline for Module 2 of the Healthy Minds Program."

- The gap between breaths (page 263 in appendix 4)
- Seeds of kindness (page 266 in appendix 4)
- Discovering wisdom (page 271 in appendix 4)
- Awareness in action (page 274 in appendix 4)

Scientific teachings:

- Psychological well-being – self-acceptance (page 264 in appendix 4)
- Psychological well-being – positive relations with others (page 268 in appendix 4)
- Psychological well-being – autonomy (page 272 in appendix 4)
- Psychological well-being – environmental mastery (page 275 in appendix 4)

Month 5: Clarifying deeply held values

Summary: When we think of the most important periods of our life, they are often times that we felt a deep sense of purpose and meaning, when our pursuits and relationships were aligned with our values and goals. This month, we will explore the qualities of mind that contribute to a healthy sense of purpose in life and sharpen the skills that bolster this quality. In particular, we'll learn how a shift in perspective can help us clarify our most deeply held values and how reflecting on our motivation can keep these values front and center in our life and relationships.

Contemplative teachings:⁶

- The importance of motivation (page 276 in appendix 4)
- Our most important relationship (page 277 in appendix 4)
- Shifting perspective (page 280 in appendix 4)
- Finding meaning at work (page 283 in appendix 4)
- Making an impact (page 285 in appendix 4)

Contemplative practices:

- Discovering inner values (page 277 in appendix 4)
- Inner priorities (page 279 in appendix 4)
- Discovering interpersonal values (page 281 in appendix 4)

⁶ Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in "Appendix 4: Content Outline for Module 2 of the Healthy Minds Program."

- Discovering values at work (page 284 in appendix 4)
- Discovering global values (page 286 in appendix 4)

Scientific teachings:

- Psychological well-being - personal growth / growth mindset (page 279 in appendix 4)
- Generosity and well-being (page 282 in appendix 4)
- Hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (page 285 in appendix 4)
- Psychological well-being - purpose in life (page 287 in appendix 4)

Month 6: Embodying values and ideals

Summary: Being clear about our values and priorities in life is not enough. We need to embody them. When we know what our values are but we fail to live by them, there is tension in the mind, and this tension can create unhealthy habits and behaviors. The skills we've been learning over the past few months can help us to embody our values. This month we'll link practices related to attention and awareness with perspective taking skills we worked on last month. The new skill we'll learn this month is self-monitoring. You can think of this as a sort of mental check-up in which we reflect on what we are doing, thinking, or feeling and see how it lines up with our inner values. As we strengthen this capacity, it becomes easier to embody our values in everyday life.

Contemplative teachings:⁷

- Feeding the mind (page 288 in appendix 4)
- Tending to our inner environment (page 290 in appendix 4)
- Having a positive influence on others (page 294 in appendix 4)
- Think globally, act locally (page 296 in appendix 4)

Contemplative practices:

- The inner ripple effect (page 288 in appendix 4)
- The ripple effect with others (page 294 in appendix 4)

⁷ Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in "Appendix 4: Content Outline for Module 2 of the Healthy Minds Program."

- The global ripple effect (page 297 in appendix 4)

Scientific teachings:

- Neuroplasticity revisited (page 290 in appendix 4)
- Self-monitoring and habit formation (page 293 in appendix 4)
- The science of empathy (page 296 in appendix 4)
- Well-being and purpose in life (page 298 in appendix 4)

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Module 3 Overview

A Kind Heart (Months 7-9)

Summary: The third module of the Healthy Minds program is designed to strengthen qualities that underlie healthy connections with others. Our relationships have a profound impact on our sense of well-being. Trusting, caring, and harmonious relationships help us to feel confident, creative, and resilient, and when things are not going well in our relationships, we often feel overly sensitive and easily overwhelmed. Although we can't control everything that happens in our relationships, there are some simple skills that can help us to relate to others in a healthy way.

Over the next few months, we'll learn some of these skills and explore how they contribute to healthy relationships. We'll focus on strengthening our capacities for appreciation, kindness, and compassion, and learn how to integrate these qualities in everyday life. Nurturing these qualities involves some of the same skills we've learned in previous months, including mindfulness and attention, and also perspective taking and cognitive reappraisal. What we'll learn through this process is that we all have an innate capacity to build and maintain healthy connections with others, and that we can recognize and nurture this capacity by learning to see the positive in ourselves and others, to feel kindness and compassion, and to express these qualities in our lives and relationships.

Symptoms of deficits in kindness and compassion: When we feel disconnected with others and our capacity to experience appreciation, kindness, and compassion is

underdeveloped, our relationships with others are often unstable and tumultuous. We may withdraw from relationships and experience loneliness and alienation, or we may find ourselves in conflict with others on a regular basis or easily overwhelmed, very sensitive, or feeling unappreciated or unloved.

Qualities strengthened in this module: Appreciation, kindness, compassion

Skills learned in this module: Different forms of perspective taking (positive outlook, seeing from another's perspective, noticing commonly shared characteristics) and cognitive reappraisal (changing the stories we tell about specific people and relationships)

Month 7: Positive Outlook

Summary: One of the most powerful ways we can strengthen healthy connections with others is the practice of appreciation. Each of us does countless things throughout the day to care for ourselves, to help others, and to contribute to society. Each of us possesses unique strengths and gifts, and there are universal qualities that we all have in abundance. Yet we usually take all this for granted. The practice of appreciation helps us to notice the positive in life, and this shift in attitude can make an immediate and profound difference in our life and relationships.

Contemplative teachings:⁸

- Positive outlook toward ourselves (page 301 in appendix 5)
- Positive outlook toward those we like (page 303 in appendix 5)
- Positive outlook in challenging times (page 306 in appendix 5)
- Positive outlook toward our surroundings (page 309 in appendix 5)

Contemplative practices:

- Seeing the positive in oneself (page 302 in appendix 5)
- Seeing the positive in others (page 305 in appendix 5)
- Noticing the positive in strangers and those we don't like (page 307 in appendix 5)

⁸ Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in "Appendix 5: Content Outline for Module 3 of the Healthy Minds Program."

- Noticing the positive in the world around us (page 310 in appendix 5)

Scientific teachings:

- Optimism and positive thinking (page 303 in appendix 5)
- The science of positive outlook (page 306 in appendix 5)
- Growth through adversity (page 308 in appendix 5)
- Gratitude and well-being (page 310 in appendix 5)

Month 8: Kindness

Summary: Appreciation creates a positive connection between us, the people we're with, and our surroundings. We can strengthen this positive connection further by cultivating kindness. Kindness is the natural impulse we all have to want someone to be happy. That someone might be a loved one, a stranger on the street, or even ourselves. This impulse is with us all the time. Every time we move toward an experience that we think will bring us happiness and contentment, we experience the movement of kindness. In the practice of kindness, we learn to notice this basic movement of the heart and mind, to nurture it, and gradually to extend it to others. Strengthening our impulse to be kind impacts how we relate to others and puts us in touch with a feeling of abundance and confidence.

Contemplative teachings:⁹

- Seeds of kindness (page 312 in appendix 5)
- Extending kindness (page 315 in appendix 5)
- Kindness in challenging situations (page 318 in appendix 5)
- Universal kindness (page 321 in appendix 5)

Contemplative practices:

- Being kind to ourselves (page 313 in appendix 5)
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⁹ Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in "Appendix 5: Content Outline for Module 3 of the Healthy Minds Program."

- Just like me (page 316 in appendix 5)
- Kindness toward people we find challenging (page 319 in appendix 5)
- Universal kindness (page 322 in appendix 5)

Scientific teachings:

- Social capital (page 314 in appendix 5)
- Strengthening social connections (page 317 in appendix 5)
- The effects of kindness (page 321 in appendix 5)
- Debiasing the mind (page 324 in appendix 5)

Month 9: Compassion

Summary: One of the most powerful forces in the world is compassion. In its most elemental form, compassion is simply the wish to alleviate suffering. Like kindness, the movement of compassion is always present in our experience, though it often goes unnoticed. When we move away from discomfort, or feel the impulse to help someone in need, that is compassion. Even mundane experiences like wanting to eat when we feel hungry, or rest when we feel tired, contain the seeds of compassion. Compassion is a highly engaged state. When we feel compassion, we are prepared to act, to do something if and when the opportunity arises. Compassion is also a nourishing experience. When we tune into suffering – either our own or the suffering of those around us – it can be overwhelming, but compassion puts us in touch with a source of inner strength and confidence that helps us to navigate challenges and difficulties. This month we'll learn to recognize the presence of compassion and strengthen it, and eventually to extend our wish to be free from suffering and distress to others.

Contemplative teachings:¹⁰

- Seeds of compassion (page 325 in appendix 5)
- Extending compassion (page 328 in appendix 5)

¹⁰ Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in “Appendix 5: Content Outline for Module 3 of the Healthy Minds Program.”

- Compassion in challenging situations (page 332 in appendix 5)
- Universal compassion (page 335 in appendix 5)

Contemplative practices:

- Caring for ourselves (page 326 in appendix 5)
- Just like me (page 329 in appendix 5)
- Compassion toward those we find challenging (page 332 in appendix 5)
- Universal compassion (page 336 in appendix 5)

Scientific teachings:

- The benefits of compassion (page 327 in appendix 5)
- Empathy and compassion (page 331 in appendix 5)
- Compassion and the stress response (page 334 in appendix 5)
- The science of altruism (page 337 in appendix 5)

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Module 4 Overview

A Healthy Sense of Self (Months 10-12)

In this module, we will learn about another important aspect of well-being: self-knowledge. When we talk about self-knowledge, we are not referring to theories or concepts, but rather a direct, experiential knowledge of the mind and how it works. We are the only ones who truly understand ourselves, but rarely do we take the time to inquire into the dynamics of our own inner landscape, to learn how our beliefs and expectations shape our experience, and about all the factors that come together to create our sense of identity. The self – and how we can undo patterns that lead to an unhealthy sense of self – is our main topic of exploration for the next few months. We will learn some simple practices that help us to gain insight into the workings of the mind, and the nature of the self. These insights help us to let go of unhealthy patterns and to have a more fluid, flexible sense of self.

Symptoms of deficits in self-understanding: When we lack self-knowledge, unexamined beliefs and expectations can have an undue influence on our lives and relationships. We can get stuck in rigid patterns of thought, or unhealthy behaviors, and feel powerless to change them. We can also misunderstand what leads to lasting well-being and make poor choices, often without realizing that we are doing so.

Qualities strengthened in this module: Self-knowledge (insight into the workings of the mind, and perceptions, emotions, and thoughts); a fluid, resilient sense of self (an

increased capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and to let go of unhealthy habits)

Skills learned in this module: Different forms of self-inquiry (the capacity to question and inquire into the experience of perception, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, expectations, etc.)

Month 10: Getting to know the self

Summary: One of the most important ingredients of a healthy mind is self-knowledge – an understanding of how the mind works. When we understand our own mind from the inside out, we can see how our beliefs and expectations shape our experience. This insight helps us distinguish what we think and believe from what we directly experience, and also to tell the difference between what we experience and what is really going on. This month we'll learn some simple practices to explore our sense of self and to uncover unconscious beliefs about ourselves, about others, and about the world and our place in it.

Contemplative teachings:¹¹

- Self-inquiry and a healthy mind (page 340 in appendix 6)
- Living in a dream (page 343 in appendix 6)
- Expectations and reality (page 346 in appendix 6)
- At home in the world (page 349 in appendix 6)

Contemplative practices:

- Windows into the self (page 341 in appendix 6)
- What do I think about myself? (page 344 in appendix 6)
- What do I think about others? (page 347 in appendix 6)

¹¹ Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in "Appendix 6: Content Outline for Module 4 of the Healthy Minds Program."

- What do I think about the world? (page 349 in appendix 6)

Scientific teachings:

- Errors in perception (page 342 in appendix 6)
- Cognitive insight (page 345 in appendix 6)
- Thoughts are just thoughts (page 348 in appendix 6)
- The stories we tell ourselves (page 350 in appendix 6)

Month 11: The changing self

Summary: One of the most pervasive aspects of our sense of self is our gut feeling that there is some part of us that is enduring. On one level, we know that things change, and the fact that our bodies and minds are aging is sometimes painfully obvious, but at a deeper level we often harbor a belief that things will last, and this disconnect between our hope that things will stay the same – and the reality that they never do – can create tremendous stress in the body and mind. One way to loosen this tendency and to ease into a more fluid way of being in the world is to explore the dynamics of our subjective experience, to notice the shifting constellation of psychological processes and physical experiences that comprise our sense of self. Simply noticing the complexity of the body and mind – and how they are constantly changing – is itself an important insight, and one that helps us to respond to the ups and downs of life with a clear head and open heart.

Contemplative teachings:¹²

- Building blocks of the self (page 352 in appendix 6)
- Experiencing the body (page 355 in appendix 6)
- The inner landscape of thoughts (page 357 in appendix 6)
- The inner landscape of emotions (page 359 in appendix 6)

¹² Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in “Appendix 6: Content Outline for Module 4 of the Healthy Minds Program.”

Contemplative practices:

- Deconstructing the self (page 353 in appendix 6)
- Experiencing the body (page 356 in appendix 6)
- Exploring thoughts (page 358 in appendix 6)
- Exploring emotions (page 361 in appendix 6)

Scientific teachings:

- The manifold self (page 355 in appendix 6)
- Distorted views of the body (page 357 in appendix 6)
- Split-brains (page 359 in appendix 6)
- Primed by emotions (page 362 in appendix 6)

Month 12: Connections

Summary: One of the most basic qualities of our sense of self is our experience of being cut off from others – of being separate and independent from other people and the world around us. When we dig deeper, however, we begin to see that we are intimately connected to the people in our lives and to our environment, so much so that it can be difficult to tell where we end and the world begins. Indeed, our perceptions, our thoughts, and our emotions are so deeply conditioned by our interactions and relationships that our sense of being independent may be an illusion. This month we will explore these connections and see how our experience of the world is shaped by a constantly shifting web of relationships. We will end our journey by turning our attention to the basic question of well-being, and explore the idea that our individual quest for lasting happiness is intimately bound up with the well-being of others.

Contemplative teachings:¹³

- Seeing connections (page 363 in appendix 6)
- The self in relationship (page 365 in appendix 6)
- The self in context (page 368 in appendix 6)
- We're in this together (page 371 in appendix 6)

Contemplative practices:

¹³ Full scripts and references for the teachings and practices listed here can be found in "Appendix 6: Content Outline for Module 4 of the Healthy Minds Program."

- Noticing connections (page 364 in appendix 6)
- Noticing connections with others (page 366 in appendix 6)
- Noticing connections with your surroundings (page 369 in appendix 6)
- Who do I want to be in this moment? (page 372 in appendix 6)

Scientific teachings:

- The internet age and well-being (page 365 in appendix 6)
- The importance of caring relationships (page 368 in appendix 6)
- Biophilia and attention restoration (page 370 in appendix 6)
- World Happiness Report (page 373 in appendix 6)

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Chapter 5

Conclusion and Future Directions

In the preceding chapters we have inquired into the nature of well-being and its cultivation through various styles of meditation. We have sought to highlight the diversity of meditation practices found in traditional and contemporary settings and to propose specific psychological mechanisms that may play a role in different families of meditation. We have also presented a comprehensive curriculum that will serve as a basis for the design and implementation of a unique well-being training intervention that employs a diversity of secularized meditation practices that can be used as a basis for scientific research.

Future research will be needed to delve deeper into the psychological dynamics of different families of meditation. To this end, theoretical models and research into specific forms of meditation will help discern the unique cognitive and affective processes that constitute these practices, and to assess the way in which they impact different dimensions of well-being. Theoretical models will therefore be needed to propose mechanisms and outcomes in relation to specific practices, as will research that can test these models and provide a basis for their refinement. These intersecting lines of research may yield great benefits in helping us to understand both the unique and synergistic effects of different styles of meditation training, and the developmental process that unfolds in different training paradigms.

Future research efforts can also be used to inform and refine the interventions themselves. We may, for instance, inquire into the manner in which specific practices benefit different groups of people, and find ways to tailor interventions to individual

needs and psychological profiles. It may be the case that certain regimens of practice work well for some individuals and not at all for others, or that the order of practices impacts the efficacy of meditation-based interventions. It may also be that some practices have synergistic effects when paired with other styles of practice, beyond the impact of these styles of meditation individually. Research may thus help adapt these interventions for specific contexts, to make them more effective by those who use them, and to thereby advance our understanding of the nature and application of meditation practices.

Our work here has explored the practice of meditation from multiple viewpoints, and in particular through the lens of contemporary psychology and the science of well-being. The scope of our inquiry has thus been limited to a fairly narrow range of perspectives. To fully understand the nature of these practices, we must also consider issues of embodiment, inter-personal dynamics, and the complex social and cultural contexts within which these practices are engaged, to name but a few alternate perspectives. Although the theoretical model and training curriculum contained within these pages are limited in scope, our hope is that they will contribute to the ongoing efforts to understand the nature of human flourishing and the means by which it may be cultivated.

Appendix 1

Cognitive Mechanisms in the Cultivation of Compassion

Published as:

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In responding to our recent paper (Dahl et al., 2015), Engen and Singer raise important issues related to the constructive family of meditation practice, arguing against the central role of reappraisal and perspective taking and proposing instead that motivational and affective states are the main mechanisms in compassion-based meditations, and more broadly in the constructive family (Engen & Singer, 2015a). Although we agree that motivation and affect play an important role in compassion meditation, we disagree with the broader conclusions they draw. We contend that classical and contemporary sources present a developmental model of compassion training that critically involves both reappraisal and perspective taking, and that scientific data supports this view. Moreover, we propose that affect and motivation do not typically function as mechanisms in this family of meditation, but rather are best thought of as outcomes of the training process.

The Developmental Trajectory of Compassion Meditation

Traditional and contemporary sources outline a model of compassion training that typically begins with generating compassion for a specific individual, and then extending compassion until it becomes a natural response in all situations (Dahl, 2009; Salzberg, 2002; Wallace, 2010). This developmental process typically takes place in three stages: (1) the generation of compassion, (2) the extension of compassion, and (3) the globalization and stabilization of compassion. Top-down cognitive processes play a critical role in each stage of practice. The first stage often involves the intentional generation of memories and thoughts that induce a feeling of compassion. One

approach studied by the authors (Klimecki et al., 2014), for instance, recommends intentionally bringing to mind a loved one while silently repeating compassionate phrases as a way to stabilize attention (Salzberg, 2002). Other forms of meditation involve taking on the perspective of a suffering individual or imagining them to be one's child (Dahl, 2009). In the second stage, perspective taking and reappraisal are used to extend compassion to strangers and adversaries by altering the way they are regarded, for example by focusing on their suffering and hardship rather than on their negative actions or qualities (Wallace, 2010). The final stage involves extending compassion to all beings and repeating the process until it becomes an automatic response. A typical method for extending compassion to all beings involves recalling one's own desire to be free of suffering, and then recognizing that all beings share this same desire (Salzberg, 2002). This developmental process suggests that the affective and motivational state described by the authors is best thought of as the outcome of compassion training, with reappraisal and other cognitive processes functioning to arouse, extend, and stabilize this response.

Neuroscientific Research on the Cultivation of Compassion

The model outlined above suggests that cognitive, affective, and motivational processes are active at different stages of compassion training. Unfortunately, none of the studies cited by Engen and Singer provide a comprehensive account of the different stages of cultivating compassion. Moreover, none of the studies cited parsed the different stages of meditation with sufficient temporal precision and thus were not able

to clearly distinguish between the processes engaged to arouse, extend and stabilize the response versus the outcome or consequence of this initial engagement (Engen & Singer, 2015b; Klimecki et al., 2013, 2014; Weng et al., 2013). The conditions included in these studies thus provide valuable information about the effects of compassion training, but do not fully represent the training process itself.

Contrary to the interpretation presented by Engen and Singer, we believe that extant data indicates the role of multiple brain networks in compassion meditation, including those associated with cognitive functions, even outside of formal periods of practice. A study from our laboratory, for instance, showed increased connectivity in response to emotionally provocative images between the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex – a region commonly linked to cognitive functions such as reappraisal – and the nucleus accumbens, a central node in the reward network associated with positive affect (Weng et al., 2013) in those who underwent compassion training (Weng et al., 2013). Connectivity between these regions has been linked to the successful use of cognitive reappraisal in the regulation of emotion (Wager, Davidson, Hughes, Lindquist, & Ochsner, 2008). Another study cited by Engen and Singer (Engen & Singer, 2015b) showed heightened activation, also in response to emotionally provocative images, in brain regions such as the superior and inferior frontal gyri and the superior and inferior parietal lobules, which are typically activated in cognitive control processes like reappraisal (J. T. Buhle et al., 2014), and similarly in the supplementary motor area and posterior cingulate cortex, regions involved in perspective taking (P Ruby & Decety, 2001).

When paired with data highlighted by Engen and Singer, these findings suggest that cognitive, affective, and motivational networks all play a role in the cultivation of compassion. This interpretation aligns with traditional contemplative theories related to the constructive family, which often employ cognitive strategies to either up-regulate or down-regulate emotional responses. Future longitudinal studies will provide a more precise delineation of the processes that are engaged at specific phases of meditation training. At this early stage of scientific inquiry in this area, it is important to resist the temptation to equate specific forms of practice with particular discrete brain circuits and to remain open to the complexity of these practices and their corresponding neural correlates.

Appendix 2

Program Scripts for the Getting Started Module of the
Healthy Minds Program

Day 1 – Teaching: Welcome to Healthy Minds

Richie: Welcome to Healthy Minds!

My name is Dr. Richard Davidson – but everyone calls me Richie. I'm delighted that you've decided to join us for the next seven days to learn about the mind and the brain, and how we can train ourselves to experience more well-being.

I've spent my entire life studying the brain. One question that has always fascinated me is this: Why do we sometimes respond to life's slings and arrows with confidence and resilience, while at other times we fall prey to hopelessness or anxiety? And why is it that certain people are more vulnerable in the face of adversity and others more resilient? What I've come to learn over the past four decades is that we are not hardwired to be anxious or resilient. We might come into this world with certain predispositions, but we are also born with a remarkable capacity for change. In scientific terms, we refer to this as 'plasticity.' The human brain is by far more plastic, more amenable to shaping, than the brain of any other species. This has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, our capacity for change means that we can choose to transform our minds for the better. But for most of us, much of the time, our brains are being changed unwittingly. We go through life unaware of the forces that are constantly influencing our brains, pushing us toward certain habits of mind. When we become more aware of what's happening in our minds, we gain the power to more intentionally shape our brains.

In recent years, I've joined with other scientists around the world to unravel how we can harness the brain's capacity for change. Time and again, we have found that by turning the mind to positive thoughts and engaging in simple mental exercises, we can change the brain and cultivate a deep sense of well-being. This is an incredibly exciting time to be a neuroscientist, because for the first time we have the technology to measure what happens in the brain when we train ourselves to be more aware and attentive, more patient and kind. Our research shows that when we train the mind, we

change the way the brain functions. We can even change the structure of the brain itself. When we cultivate healthy habits of mind, we are essentially rewiring the circuits associated with well-being, creating new connections and potentially even new brain cells. These findings lead us to a simple but radical conclusion—well-being is a skill. And like any skill, it can be learned.

But it's not a matter of reading a textbook, or attending a lecture. Like most skills, well-being can only be learned through practice. In the world of neuroscience, we talk about two forms of learning—declarative and procedural. Declarative learning is learning about things. We can learn about the value of kindness, for example, but this won't necessarily make us kinder people. Procedural learning, on the other hand, is learning through doing. This is the key to skill acquisition. For example, consider riding a bike, or playing the violin. It doesn't matter how many lectures you attend or books you read. The only way to truly acquire these skills is through practice.

We believe the same is true for well-being. In this program, we'll guide you through a set of simple exercises, drawn from both ancient traditions and modern science, that have been found to change the brain and cultivate the fundamental elements of well-being.

This sort of mental exercise is good for the mind in the way that physical exercise is good for the body. Most of us understand the benefits of physical exercise. It makes our bodies stronger, healthier, and more resilient. Mental exercise does the same thing for our brains. It allows us to strengthen our minds and sustain a deep sense of well-being, one that will stay with us throughout our lives.

Through your participation in this program, you will have the opportunity to better understand your own mind. You will learn how small changes to your mind can physically transform the brain, and how simple forms of mental exercise can bring about powerful changes in your life.

So congratulations, by embarking on this journey you are taking an important step, not only for yourself, but also for our ongoing research into the skill of well-being. Together we can advance our understanding of how to nurture the seeds of well-being and cultivate richer, more inspired lives.

Cort:

Hi, my name is Cortland Dahl. I'm a scientist at the Center for Healthy Minds and the creator of the Healthy Minds program. Along with Richie, I'll be your guide for the next seven days. As you set out on your journey, I'll be here to walk you through some of the insights and practices related to the cultivation of well-being.

Richie's ground breaking work – and the research of many of the world's other leading scientists – suggests that we can train ourselves to experience greater levels of well-being. Cultivating well-being is a lot like learning to care for the body. There are simple things we can do, like eating healthy, exercising, getting enough rest, that dramatically change our physical health. The mind is really no different. We can learn to be more attentive and less distracted, and to experience a sense of inner calm that we can carry with us, no matter where we are and what we are doing. We can even learn simple skills that help us to feel a greater sense of purpose and meaning in life, to feel more connected to others, and to clear away the mental clutter so we can find solutions to the challenges we face. The best part is that we can practice these transformative skills at home, at work, and even in the midst of the most mundane, boring parts of our day. It's surprising that we don't usually learn these skills when we're kids. If you think about it, almost everything we do in life, we do because we think it will bring us happiness. But although we all want to want to lead rich, meaningful lives – although we all want to be happy and to avoid suffering – it isn't always clear how to find lasting happiness. It's almost as though someone forgot to give us the instruction manual for our own mind. From the time we are young, we are told to pay attention, to be kind

and caring, and to learn from our experience, but no one ever tells us *how* to pay attention; *how* to be kind and nurture healthy relationships; or *how* to be wise and insightful.

We all experience moments in our lives where these things happen naturally, but usually we don't know how or why they happened, and before long these moments of connection, creativity, and resilience fade away. Even when things are going well, we can still find ourselves feeling overwhelmed and stressed out; there are still times when we don't care for ourselves, or for others, as we would like.

Over the next seven days, you'll get a glimpse of the Healthy Minds program. We'll guide you through some simple practices and teachings that will allow you to find your way back to your best moments. This program isn't going to provide you with the instruction manual for life, but it will give you the tools you need to write your own manual. It will help you build the skills to cultivate the best parts of yourself and to let go of old habits that are holding you back

Each day you'll listen to a short teaching and do a simple exercise. Altogether, it won't take more than ten minutes of your time. If you choose, you can also donate your mind to science by taking part in scientific research on our program to help us learn more about the cultivation of well-being. Participating in our research is purely optional, but your involvement would be a wonderful contribution to the scientific understanding of the mind...and plus, you'll also get to see some really cool data about yourself. And don't worry, as scientists we are bound by law to not share your data with anyone without your consent, so if you choose to donate your mind to science, there is no risk at all to your privacy.

Once you finish these first seven days, I'm confident that you'll want to forge ahead and begin the full program. I'll tell you more about that later, but for now, you can take your first step by doing a simple practice that will only take a few minutes of your time. I'll see you on the next step of your journey!

Day 2 – Teaching: What is well-being? (CJD)

In everyday life, we often use words like happiness and contentment. We talk about wanting to reduce stress and find more balance in our lives. But what do happiness and well-being really look like??

It might be tempting to think of well-being as simply feeling good. But while we might be able to define happiness this way, well-being is a little trickier. What happens when we're with a friend who's going through a really tough time? Do we want feel "happy" at a time like that? What about when we're at work and we're on the top of our game? We feel focused and creative, capable of anything, but we might not think of ourselves as being "happy" or "unhappy." We're just getting stuff done.

So well-being is more complex than just feeling happy all the time. We certainly want to experience happiness and pleasure, but we also want to empathize and connect with others. We want to be able to focus and concentrate in some situations, and to be open and receptive in others. We want to experience strong emotions when the time is right, but we also want to be capable of letting go of those emotions when they aren't appropriate or helpful.

What this means is that well-being is not a specific emotion, but a combination of factors that help sustain us through the ebb and flow of life. We want to feel in control of our lives, and know that what we do is important and meaningful. We want to accept who we are, but also to feel as though we are growing. And we want to nurture healthy relationships – relationships built on empathy and kindness. This probably makes it sound like well-being is quite complicated, and in some respects it is. But there are simple things that we can do – simple skills that we can practice – that can make a big impact on our sense of well-being.

Let's take an example, like training our ability to pay attention. Research has shown that roughly half of our waking lives, we're not paying attention to what we're doing. And this holds true no matter where we are. We're distracted at work and when we're with friends. We're distracted when we're doing stuff we don't like, and even when

we're having fun. The worst part is that when we're distracted, we also tend to be less happy.

But imagine if you could decrease your level of distraction even 10%. In a single day, that adds up to almost an hour and a half, and that means an hour and a half of being more attentive with friends and loved ones, more focused at work, and more aware – and therefore more content – even when you're at home doing the dishes.

When you do your daily practices, you'll learn simple skills to help you do just that: to be more attentive and more aware. And you don't have to go anywhere to do it. All you need is your own mind.

Learning to be more attentive is just one example of a small change that can have a huge impact. We'll train many other skills along the way, and like attentiveness, you can practice these skills anywhere and anytime. You don't need a special gym membership. All you need is your own mind.

In fact, we all have a wealth of qualities – like attention – that we can strengthen and develop. When we haven't learned to recognize and train our natural strengths, life can often feel like a roller coaster. Typically, this is because we've tied our sense of well-being to things that lie beyond our control – to a job, a relationship, to our belongings and status, and so on. But when we learn to nurture our natural strengths, we slowly get in touch with a sense of well-being that comes from within. We become more creative and resilient, more capable of being there for others when they need us, and more confident in our ability to manage the situations that used to stress us out.

So keep this in mind as you do the next practice. These seemingly simple practices can transform your mind and even rewire your brain!

Day 2 – Guided formal practice: Tuning into the breath

In our first practice session, we used the breath to calm the mind. You might remember that there were two main points to this practice: We began by relaxing the mind and

then we noticed the sensations of the breath. When we do this, the mind tends to wander all over the place. If that's what happened for you, don't worry. The practice here is to bring the mind back when it wanders.

Today we'll try this again. You can begin by checking your posture. Start by sitting on a chair or cross-legged on a cushion on the floor. Keep your back straight and upright. If you're in a chair, make sure your feet are not crossed and keep them planted firmly on the ground. Let your body be loose and relaxed, not uncomfortable or rigid. Rest your hands on your thighs or in your lap, and keep your eyes gently closed.

Now tune into your breath. Take a deep breath in, and as you exhale, let your body and mind relax. When you bring awareness to the breath, this relaxation happens naturally. So you don't have to make yourself relax, or worry if you don't.

Take a few more deep breaths and then let your breathing return to normal.

...

Next, breathe naturally for a little while and let your mind rest. You don't have to control your thoughts or pay attention to anything. Just breathe and give your mind a little break. Let your mind do whatever it wants to do.

...

Hopefully you feel a little more settled now. If you're still feeling a bit tense, though, don't worry. Every time you do this practice will be different. The goal is to notice what's happening in your body and mind, not to feel a particular way.

Now we'll bring awareness back to the breath. Notice the presence of the breath. Remember, we don't need to concentrate or focus too intensely. We only need enough awareness to stay anchored in the present moment. For the next minute or so, let your awareness rest on the breath. All you have to do is know that you are breathing, and when your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the breath.

...

With each breath you become a little more relaxed, and a little more aware. And when you notice that your mind has wandered, bring it back. That's all there is to it.

Let's do this for another minute.

...

Good job! It might not seem like much happened here. Maybe you don't even feel more relaxed. But what you're really doing is training yourself to notice when the mind gets distracted. You might have noticed many moments of distraction. Maybe it even seemed like your mind was wandering more than usual. This is actually a profound insight, because the more you notice your mind wandering, the easier it becomes to bring it back. Over time, periods of distraction decrease and you naturally become more aware and attentive.

So congratulations on completing another day. In our next session, Richie will tell you a bit about the research on well-being, and the remarkable capacity we have to rewire the brain by training the mind. In the meantime, practice noticing the breath as much as you can throughout the day. See you tomorrow!

Day 3 – Teaching: Well-being is a skill? (RJD)

Perhaps the most revolutionary idea to emerge from modern neuroscience is neuroplasticity—the idea that the brain changes, either wittingly or unwittingly, in response to experience and training. Too often, this change happens unwittingly. We find ourselves in places we didn't mean to end up, on trails that we didn't notice we were following. Our goal for this journey is to learn how to change our brains intentionally. We want to create well-worn paths for our minds to follow, paths that lead us to places of contentment and inspiration. We don't often think of well-being as a skill, but all of the scientific evidence over the past 10 years leads us inevitably to this conclusion. The elements of well-being have been linked with different circuits of the brain. These circuits exhibit plasticity, which means they can be changed. And more importantly, it means that we can change them. It is by changing these neural circuits that we can make powerful, enduring changes in our experience of well-being. Many of the elements of well-being have been studied extensively. For example, in recent years scientists have come to a much deeper understanding of mindful awareness. When we cultivate this quality, we actually change the brain circuits associated with attention. These circuits include a key part of the brain--the prefrontal cortex--that is vital for many activities we consider to be characteristically human. Why is this so important? Well, we know that, on average, people only pay attention to what they're doing fifty percent of the time. But when people train themselves to be more attentive, they report higher levels of well-being. It makes sense, when you think about it. If distraction is emotionally toxic, then mindful awareness is our breath of fresh air. Research has found that with just three months of mindfulness training, we can see dramatic improvements in attention. And these improvements are associated with physical changes to the prefrontal cortex, changes that allow us to experience a deeper and more enduring sense of well-being.

Another key element of well-being is connection with the greater good and the recognition of our innate basic goodness. Again scientific research has uncovered new

information about brain circuits associated with this warm-hearted quality. We've found that it only takes a little practice (just a few minutes a day for a couple of weeks) to increase the activation of these brain circuits. And when we train these circuits, we increase our capacity to connect with the greater good. This is what allows us to feel a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives, and to reach out to the world around us. Because the circuits associated with this quality are plastic, we know that it is possible to make real, enduring changes that enhance our sense of well-being.

A third element of well-being is our insight into how our minds work, and particularly the nature of the self. We all maintain a fairly continuous narrative about our self that frames our experience. Modern scientific research has given us more insight into what this quality looks like. It turns out that when a person is placed in an MRI scanner without any explicit instructions, their patterns of brain activity seem to relate, at least in part, to the narrative we tell ourselves. Much of this narrative is focused on "me." My thoughts, my aches and pains, my calendar, my life. But this narrative too is plastic. With simple exercises that promote inquiry into how our minds work, we can transform our story of who we are. When we make this shift, we also change our "default mode" which refers to our patterns of brain activity when no specific task or instruction is given—our so called baseline state.

There are other elements of well-being that go hand-in-hand with some of the qualities described above. For example, resilience has a huge impact on how we navigate the obstacles in our lives. We can define resilience as the rapidity with which a person recovers from adversity. Some people recover slowly, and others more quickly. We can't prevent adversity from occurring, but we can control how we respond to it. Those who recover quickly report higher levels of well-being and lower levels of neuroticism than those who recover slowly. With simple exercises in mindful awareness, we can train ourselves to recover more quickly--to be more resilient through the twists and turns of life. By now, we know that well-being is not a feeling, but a skill to be cultivated. The mental exercises in this program strengthen our mind in the same way that physical exercise strengthens our bodies. We all know that it's not enough to exercise for several

weeks and stop as soon as we feel healthy. If we want the benefits of physical fitness, we have to keep exercising. Physical exercise becomes a life-long skill that sustains our physical health. In the same way, the mental exercises in this program provide life-long skills that can help sustain an enduring sense of well-being. Together, we'll walk through many different types of exercises, so that you can discover what works best for you and bring those practices to your everyday life. And through the impact that your training will have on those around you, you can help to spread well-being through ever widening circles and change the world for the better.

Day 3 – Teaching: Tips for daily life practice (CJD)

Today we're going to shift gears and do the same practice of bringing awareness to the breath, but this time we're going to do it in the midst of another activity. The point of these practices is to learn important skills that we can bring into every aspect of our lives. That's what we'll be working on today. To do this daily life practice, you'll need to find an activity that you'll be engaged in for at least ten minutes. It can be anything, but ideally it should be something that isn't too intellectually demanding and something that you can do alone. For instance, you can do this while you're out for a walk or doing a household chore. You can even practice while you're exercising. Just make sure that listening to me won't create any problems for people around you, or make it difficult for you to do whatever it is you're doing. If now is not the best time to begin, take a moment to decide when you will do the practice and set a reminder for yourself. If this is a good time, then let's go ahead and start the next session

Day 3 – Guide daily life practice: Tuning into the breath (CJD)

Alright, for this session we'll practice resting awareness on the breath as a way to stay present during an activity. I'm guessing by the fact that you're listening to me now that you have ten minutes to do this, so let's dive right in. You don't have to stop what

you're doing while you're listening or practicing. Actually, the whole point is *not* to stop what you're doing.

Let's start by noticing the sensations in your body right now. Feel the sensations in your feet...in your hands...in your belly or chest as you breathe...notice the muscles in your face and let them relax a bit.

For next minute or so, keep a light awareness on your body as you continue your activity.

...

Now let the mind relax. You don't have to pay attention to your body or anything else. Let your mind do whatever it wants or think whatever it wants, and just rest for a little while.

...

Next, notice your breath, like we practiced in previous sessions. Let your mind be relaxed and aware, aware as you breathe in, and aware as you breathe out.

...

When you notice that your mind has wandered off, bring it back to the breath. If it wanders off ten times, bring it back ten times.

...

Now relax your mind a bit, but keep up the activity. You don't have to pay attention to the breath, or anything else. Just let your mind do whatever it wants and see what happens.

...

Let's move back to the breath. Breathe a little deeper than normal and let your body and mind relax as you exhale. Do this a few times, then breathe normally and rest your awareness on the sensations of the breath.

...

For this last minute, relax your mind again and see where your attention naturally goes.

Does it stay with the breath? Are there thoughts? Just notice what's going on in your mind.

....

Well done! The session is over, but see if you can keep practicing. Bring your attention back to the breath whenever you remember. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

I'll see you again in our next session, when I'll tell you a bit more about how these practices help us to stay calm and centered, even when the world around is going crazy.

Day 4 – Teaching: Training the mind (CJD)

Welcome to day four. Congratulations on making it this far. Hopefully you've experienced what it feels like to relax your mind, and stay more present and aware. Today we'll continue our exploration of well-being, and especially what it means to cultivate or learn well-being. I thought I'd start by asking you a simple question: What makes you happy? Think about that for a moment. Don't worry about coming up with some profound answer. Just notice what comes to mind.

...

If you're like most people, you probably thought of spending time with friends and family. Maybe you thought of being out in nature, traveling, or doing your favorite hobby. These are the kinds of things we do to feel happy and fulfilled. But think about it, even our favorite things don't always make us happy. The people we love the most can drive us crazy at times. That beautiful hike in the mountains might have more moments of fatigue than feelings of elation. And perhaps even more often we might simply find ourselves distracted or in a bad mood, unable to appreciate the people and activities that usually bring us the most joy

The same holds for the situations and people that we don't like. We might not always enjoy them, but we can use them to learn and grow. There are times when we can find a sense of inner peace even in the midst of chaos, even in situations that bring up anxiety, anger, or crippling grief.

What we can see from all this is that our sense of well-being does not depend on the circumstances of our lives, but rather on what is happening in the mind. This is actually great news, because although we have very little control over the world around us, we can learn to manage how we respond to the ups and downs of life. We can develop simple skills to help us to manage our inner world much more effectively than we could ever hope to manage what happens around us. We may not be able to keep ourselves from ever getting sick, experiencing loss, or encountering challenges, but we can change the way we relate to these situations.

In this program, we'll journey through a series of simple practices that will help you to stay at the top of your game; to help you experience more insight and creativity, and more connection and kindness, and also to better understand your own mind, so that you understand *why* we get overwhelmed in some situations and experience resilience and growth in others.

As Richie mentioned in our last session, training the mind is very similar to training the body. We all know that some foods make us lethargic and more prone to illness, and that others promote a state of vitality and good health. The same goes for exercise. So you can think of this program as a practical way to nourish your mind, in the same way that eating healthy foods and exercising regularly can nourish your body. And the best part is that you don't need a gym membership to train the mind. The skills we'll teach you not only can, but should, be practiced in the midst of the stuff you already do every day.

This all may sound like you need to make some big, dramatic change in your life, but actually, what we're talking about here can best be thought of as a journey that is made up of many small steps. Each step might seem inconsequential on its own, but over time, these small steps will add up and lead to big changes in your habits and in the way you navigate the inevitable ups and downs of life. Eventually, these new habits will become second nature, as natural as brushing your teeth and combing your hair.

For the next step of our journey, we'll do another simple practice that will help you strengthen one the most important skills in training the mind - the capacity to focus and relax your attention. See you in the next session.

Day 4 – Guided formal practice: Learning to be

In this short practice, we're going to strengthen a few very basic functions of the mind, but ones that we don't often take the time to train. The skills we develop through this practice are the abilities to direct and sustain attention, and also the ability to let go and

rest in a state of open receptivity. This might sound a bit abstract, but don't worry. The practice is actually very simple.

To begin, notice how you feel right now. Do you feel tense or anxious? Calm and relaxed? Do you feel content...or restless?

Don't worry about changing what you're feeling, simply notice what's going on in your body and mind.

Now check in with your posture. As before, you can sit on a chair, with your feet firmly planted on the ground, or on the floor, perhaps on a cushion or mat. Keep your spine straight, your eyes closed, and let your hands rest in your lap or palms down on your thighs. The most important thing is to be upright and relaxed. Take a few moments to find a stable posture.

...

Next, bring your attention to the breath. As you breathe in and out, simply know that you are breathing. Let your body and mind relax with each breath, but remain aware and present

...

As you continue to rest your awareness on the breath, slowly count from one to five, counting one for each inhale and exhale. When you get to five, take a break for a few moments and then start again at one. Let's do this for next minute or so.

...

This time, when you get to five, let go of your focus on the breath and relax.

...

Don't try to pay attention to anything in particular. Let your mind rest naturally. Just let it do whatever it wants to do.

...

Now let's pick up the counting again. As you bring awareness to the breath, count each cycle of breathing. Count up to five, counting one for each cycle of breathing, and then go back to one and start again. We'll do this for another minute.

...

Like before, this time when you reach five, let go and rest the mind.

If thoughts come and go, that's perfectly fine.

You are still aware, but not trying to direct your attention or control the mind.

...

For the last few moments, notice how you feel right now. Is your mind agitated or relaxed?

Does your body feel tense or at ease?

The point is not to feel any particular way, but to notice what's happening in the body and mind. The more we notice, the more we strengthen our capacity to be mindful and aware.

...

This practice of focusing and relaxing your attention is especially helpful when your mind is scattered and filled with thoughts. In the next session, Richie will tell you a bit more about mindful awareness and other ingredients of well-being. In the meantime, practice this exercise as much as you can. Wherever you are and no matter what you're doing, bring your awareness to the breath and use it ground yourself in the present moment. If your mind is really busy, you can count from one to five while resting awareness on the sensations of the breath.

Good luck with the practice. We'll see you in the next session.

Day 5 – Teaching: Ingredients of a healthy mind (RJD)

Healthy Mind is innate but must be cultivated.

We can understand the cultivation of well-being in much the same way that we understand the learning of language. Most scientists agree that the capacity for language is something innate, a part of who we are as humans. However, for language to develop normally, we need to be part of a community to nurture its development. There are several documented cases of children raised in the wild without the benefit of a normal community. In these cases, language does not develop normally. So even though all humans come into the world with an innate capacity for language, it is just that---a capacity, but one that requires nurturing in order to develop.

Well-being, and the qualities that comprise it, are the same way. Scientific research shows that we all come into the world with an innate preference for well-being. We might be drawn to stories with a lot of drama, stories that show people under stress. But ultimately, we have a strong preference for everything to work out in the end. We all want the “Hollywood ending.” .However, in order to develop our innate capacity for well-being, we have to nurture it. Research suggests that even very young infants, from the age of 6 months or even earlier, prefer warm hearted, cooperative interactions to those that are selfish and aggressive.

These and similar findings suggest that the qualities we seek to nurture on this path are already very much present in our minds. We can even say that they’re part of our fundamental nature. But if we want those seeds to grow to their full potential, we have to cultivate them. What we’re doing in this program is providing some simple exercises to intentionally nurture those qualities. T Your training is not designed to fix anything. It is simply an invitation to discover qualities that are already there and to nurture these seeds.

So what are the ingredients of a healthy mind? Honestly, we still don't have a complete answer. Research into the cultivation of well-being has come a long way, but we still have a great deal to discover. However, we know that enduring well-being often comes with some important common components. This program will introduce you to three core components that we believe are universal ingredients in a healthy mind. We will provide you with simple tools to strengthen each of these components.

The first component is **awareness**. Awareness builds on attention skills, but it also goes a little deeper. It is attention with what psychologists refer to as meta-awareness....a heightened awareness of what we are thinking, feeling, or perceiving— noticing that we are aware. Meta-awareness provides a sense of openness and curiosity about what is present...about our lives and our experience. It allows us to ground ourselves even in the midst of chaos. For example, we can be on the New York City subway during rush hour, surrounded by noise and people, and yet still maintain a sense of calm and ease by resting in mindful awareness, noticing what is present and noticing what is going on in the mind.

The second component of well-being is the recognition of our **innate basic goodness** and the sense that our lives and pursuits are rewarding and meaningful. We all share the same basic wish to be happy and free from suffering. And we naturally prefer warm and kind-hearted interactions over those that are selfish and aggressive. When we can extend our care and concern to others, we tap into this innate goodness and experience something that is intrinsically rewarding. Care and concern for others provides us with a sense of purpose and meaning, a crucial part of well-being. It also gives us more confidence and helps to dissipate feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

When we harness our connection with the greater good, we can also nurture a positive outlook and a sense of generosity. Both of these qualities transform not only our own minds, but also the world around us. When we cultivate a positive outlook, we train ourselves to savor warm hearted feelings and let them infuse our social interactions. This in turn helps us to genuinely appreciate others and treat them with care and

respect. And then, of course, there's generosity. Research shows that acts of generosity are one of the most powerful and immediate ways to activate the brain circuits essential to well-being. By strengthening our connection with the greater good and learning to see the good in ourselves and in others, we cultivate the transformative qualities of positive outlook and generosity.

The third component of well-being is **insight**. By understanding how our minds work, we can break free from old habits that create negative emotions and suffering. For example, we often view thoughts that arise in our minds as "my thoughts." We create a personal narrative laden with worries about the future and ruminations about the past. By exploring how our minds actually work, we can see that our thoughts may not paint an accurate picture of what is actually going on. This insight loosens the grip of negative thoughts and creates more opportunity for fresh perspectives and change. Research shows that when we have this kind of insight, there are corresponding changes in the brain that are associated with decreased suffering. We might not be able to control the thoughts themselves, but we can transform our relationship with them, and in doing so, transform our minds.

In the next section, we will introduce some simple exercises you can do to strengthen each of these three core components of well-being.

Day 5 – Guided daily life practice: Awareness and the senses

In the last session Richie talked about mindful awareness and explained the scientific concept of meta-awareness, which is a fancy way of describing the capacity we all have to be aware of what we're thinking, feeling, or experiencing in the present moment. Today we'll continue our exploration of using the breath to rest the mind, but this time we'll link our practice to a daily life activity. For this session you don't have to sit down and stop what you're doing. As I mentioned a few sessions back, the whole point of these daily life practices is to bring mindful awareness to the routine of daily life.

Let's begin by relaxing.

Take a few deep breaths and as you breathe out, release any tension in your body.

Let the muscles in your face relax.

Let your shoulders drop.

And notice the sensations of the breath, perhaps in the belly or in your chest.

Now for the next few minutes, rest your awareness lightly on the body as you continue your activity and see if you can relax a little more every time you exhale

...

Now bring your awareness to the world around you. What are you looking at? Notice the texture and color of whatever is in your field of vision. Use your sense of sight as an anchor for awareness.

Let's do this for a minute or so.

...

Did you notice a heightened sense of awareness as you tuned in to the world around you? That simple quality of noticing what you are experiencing - and in this case, noticing what you are seeing - is what we mean by mindful awareness.

Next, let your mind rest for a little while. You don't have to pay attention to anything in particular. And you can let your thoughts come and go freely. Give your body and mind permission to do whatever they want. Just be natural, and notice whatever comes up.

...

OK. Let's bring awareness back to the world of the senses, but this time, we'll bring awareness to sound. Notice the richness of whatever you are hearing right now. If there's nothing but silence, let your mind rest in the silence. Take another minute or so to rest your awareness on sounds.

...

For the last step, let your mind take another rest. The key point here is that you don't have to *do* anything. This is a practice of letting go. So you don't have to focus or concentrate, but yet you are still aware...still present. For this last minute, see if you can notice a sense of effortless presence, a relaxed awareness, that's with you all the time. Let yourself rest in that open awareness.

...

Great job! You've now done five of these practices. In a way, what we're doing here is very simple. We're learning to direct our attention on purpose, and also how to focus and relax our attention. We're even learning how to tune into awareness itself.

Awareness is always present, but usually we're so caught up in our thoughts, our feelings, or our senses that we don't notice this ordinary awareness. But here's the thing: awareness itself is inherently nourishing. When we learn to rest in awareness, we can feel calm and clear headed - even when the world around us, or even our own mind - is going nuts. A big part of this program is learning to tune into this spacious quality of awareness no matter where we are, and what we're doing.

See if you can practice throughout the day. It can help to remind yourself to practice between activities. You can even put up little post-it notes or set reminders on your phone. The more you practice, the easier it is to drop into this quality of awareness.

In the next session, I'll talk a bit more about how to bring these practices to everyday life. Until then, keep up the good work. I'll see you soon!

Day 6 – Teaching: Many drops (CJD)

When we think about doing things that will make us happier, we tend to think of big life-changing decisions. New Year's resolutions are a great example. Think about all the times that you decided to give up a bad habit or to take up some important new activity, only to see your commitment fade after a few days, a few weeks, or a few months. One reason that we so often fall short when we make these big commitments is that we focus more on the goal than on the small steps that will get us there. Sometimes we don't know the right steps to take, or even which direction we want to go.

The same is true with well-being. Your journey will lead you to remarkable places, but to get there, you have to focus on the small steps that are right in front of you. The beauty of this journey is that the steps we take are pretty simple. Your success doesn't depend on one split-second decision, but rather on the combined force of many small acts that we often don't even notice we're doing.

Over the past few days, for instance, you've spent a few minutes each day training your attention and strengthening mindful awareness. Maybe you've become a little more present throughout the day, without even realizing it. These small steps are exactly what will keep you moving forward on the path to well-being. Think about it. Even a small increase in attention--especially with heightened awareness--can have a profound impact on your ability to manage your thoughts and emotions, and to clear up the mental clutter that gets in the way of creativity and insight. And there's also the fact that being present and aware just seems to feel better. Research shows that we're actually happier when we're not distracted.

The interesting thing is that when we're doing the practices that help us to strengthen these skills, it might seem like not much is happening. It might even seem like we're doing something wrong, because we start to notice how distracted our mind really is. But these mundane moments are exactly where the mind is being trained, and where new connections are being formed in the brain. Like tiny drops that eventually form a

small puddle, then gather into a stream, and finally become a powerful river, moments of awareness, of appreciation and kindness, and of insight - eventually link up and become a continuous thread that runs throughout our experience.

Our goal on the journey is to create paths that can lead us back to these moments, and then to travel these paths again and again until we know them like the back of our hand. Eventually, we'll find that our best moments--the moments when we feel the most connected to others, when we feel a sense of calm confidence even in the face of adversity, and when we feel open and creative - these moments become our baseline, and periods of stress, anxiety, and feeling blocked become the exception, rather than the norm. But we can only find our way there by taking many small steps. By cultivating the seemingly inconsequential moments when we remember to pay attention, to relax the mind, or to step back and appreciate the richness of the people we're with, or the things that surround us.

The key to all this is intention. Awareness is with us all the time, and our attention is always focused on something, but we aren't usually doing any of this on purpose. Our mind simply follows old, familiar habits. Here, we're taking our natural capacities - like the ability to be attentive and to recognize what's going on in the mind - and training them on purpose. Later in the course, we'll learn to recognize other qualities, such as our natural ability to experience empathy and our extraordinary capacity to generate insight and understanding, and we'll learn to strengthen these as well.

What I'm getting at here is that we need to start by recognizing these natural strengths that we all have. These are the ingredients of a healthy mind. The problem is that we usually think that understanding is enough, that once we've figured something out, our thoughts, feelings and behavior will naturally fall into line. Unfortunately, intellectual understanding doesn't help a whole lot when it comes to well-being. Reading books about attention won't make us more aware, and understanding theories about kindness won't transform us into nicer people.

Nurturing these qualities begins with intention. For instance, if we want to have a calm, peaceful mind, we need to form a clear intention *to be* aware and present, and we need to return to this intention as often as we can. We do it when we're making dinner and doing the dishes, when we're at work getting stuff done, or in a meeting, and when we're with our friends and loved ones...even when we're falling asleep or waking up first thing in the morning. There are thousands of moments each day when we can reconnect with our intention, and doing so brings a depth, a richness, and even a sense of purpose and meaning to whatever we're doing, no matter how mundane or challenging it may be.

Keep this in mind as we do our next practice, and as you keep practicing throughout the day. Every small moment of awareness is cause for celebration. It doesn't matter if that moment occurred in the midst of a day filled with distraction, or on a great day when everything seemed to be going your way. The only step that matters is the one right in front of you. The one that you can take right now. Everything will follow from this one step.

So as you go on to your next activity, pause for a short moment and form a clear intention to continue practicing. That intention is what shapes the experience that follows.

See you soon in our next session.

Day 6 – Guided formal practice: Intention (CJD)

In our last session we discussed the importance of intention - the simple act of choosing how we want to be in a particular moment. Let's keep working with that today.

One simple way to work with intention is to notice when the mind gets distracted and to reset your intention to be present and aware for whatever comes next. It helps to be very specific. For instance, instead of thinking "I'm going to be more mindful today,"

you can think, "I'm going to be aware for the next five breaths," or "I'm going to be aware while this person is talking to me." Then, once that period is up, reset your intention and begin again. After a while, this "re-setting" of the mind becomes automatic, and periods of awareness - or whatever skill you're practicing - become more stable and start to happen quite naturally.

So let's begin. Start by forming a clear intention to be aware of the sensations of the body for the few moments.

Notice your posture. See if you can find a position where your spine is straight, and then let your muscles relax a bit.

Let your face relax.

Let your shoulders drop.

Relax your arms, your hands, your legs, and your feet.

Notice any sensations in the body, any moments of tightness or tension.

...

Now reset your intention again. You can think to yourself, "I'm going to relax my mind and rest awareness on the breath for the next few minutes."

And now take a few deep breaths. As you exhale, let your body and mind open and release.

...

As you breathe in, simply notice that you are breathing in. You don't have to concentrate or focus too intently. Simply notice that you are breathing in.

....

And as you breathe out, let your body relax from deep within, and let your mind relax as well...almost as though you are letting go, giving yourself permission to rest, with each out breath.

...

Aware as you breathe in. Letting go as you breathe out.

With each breath, a little calmer, and also more aware and present.

...

If the mind gets distracted, as it inevitably will...don't worry. When you notice that you've been distracted, you are already back in awareness, back in the present moment. So all you have to do is notice, and then gently return to the breath.

...

Now let's reset our intention again.

Relax the mind for a few moments.

And form a clear intention to be aware as you bring your attention to the world of the senses.

...

Notice the presence of the body, as you breathe in and out.

...

Notice the temperature of the air against your skin.

...

Notice any sounds that are present. Let the sounds come to you...simply notice them.

...

Notice the play of light on your eyelids.

...

And slowly open your eyes.

Notice all the light and imagery around you.

...

For the last minute or so, rest naturally. You don't need to focus on anything in particular. Let your thoughts come and go freely. Let your attention move wherever it wants. Give yourself permission to be, as you are, right in this moment.

...

Great work.

Practice this as much as you can up until our next session. Whenever you remember, set a clear intention to be present and aware for the next short period, whatever you happen to be doing. It could be while you're reading an email, calling someone on your phone, or eating a meal. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, set your intention, be present and aware, and when you move on to another activity, reset and do it all over again.

In the next session, you'll hear from Richie about how these practices are changing the world, and how you can be part of our groundbreaking research.

See you tomorrow for day 7.

Day 7 – Teaching: Global well-being (RJD)

Welcome to Day 7!

Here at the Center for Healthy Minds, we're part of a global movement to promote the cultivation of well-being. We want people to know that well-being can be learned, that it's possible to nurture virtues such as kindness and compassion, and that, with this form of mental training on a widespread scale, we can bring profound change to the world.

To understand what's happening with these practices that train the mind, we can look back to the rise of physical exercise. Fifty years ago, not as many people exercised on a regular basis. But over time, more and more research showed the powerful benefits of exercise for our physical health. This research found its way into our culture, and the scientific findings became more widely disseminated and understood. Now, it's hard to imagine our culture without a deep emphasis on physical exercise. More and more people consider exercise an important part of their weekly routines. For many, it has become a part of their personal hygiene.

We envision a time when mental exercise will be as common as physical exercise is today. More and more research has shown how we can cultivate our best qualities, and how that cultivation leads to a deeper and more enduring sense of well-being. In modern culture, this kind of mental training is an important, and some would say, urgent, public health need...and one that can make a huge impact on our individual and collective lives. All around us, we can see the toxic toll that stress can take on our bodies and minds. And on top of that, we see the breakdown of civility, the hazards of bullying, and the destructive consequences of prejudice and bias in its many forms.

By participating in the Healthy Minds Program, you're not only nurturing a calmer mind and a warmer heart. You're also making a difference in the lives of everyone around you. Your families, co-workers and friends, the significant others in your life and even

those who may only be casual acquaintances will benefit from your well-being. Well-being is contagious and it spreads.

In addition to the obvious ways in which your journey will help others, you can also benefit others by choosing to contribute to our research study. If you choose to participate, you'll simply complete some fun assessment tools and answer short questions along the way. The assessment tools can be viewed as "fitbits for the mind"--fun to engage with, and capable of providing useful, motivating information. We'll never share your information with anyone. As scientists, we're bound by law to keep your data private. Your data will not only contribute to scientific understanding, but will also help you understand your own mind, and your own unique journey. When it comes to well-being, one size does not fit all, and even, in the course of your own journey, you might need different things at different points along the trail. The assessment tools can help you figure out which practices will be most helpful to you at a particular moment. On the basis of these assessments, you can receive specific recommendations and suggestions that you can continue to explore.

But your participation in our study reaches far beyond your own journey. Just by doing the assessments and answering a few questions, you'll be contributing directly to a global scientific experiment. Alongside thousands of people from around the world, you'll be helping us investigate the impact of this training on important skills, like the capacity to focus attention, or regulate emotion or express empathy. These skills are crucial to our understanding of well-being.

Your involvement in this pioneering experiment will enable this kind of program to be taught more widely and ultimately benefit many other people. It is thus a triple winner--you can improve your own well-being, you can positively benefit those in your immediate surroundings and you can directly contribute to scientific research that will benefit the well-being of millions and perhaps even billions of others!

Day 7 – Guided formal practice: Appreciation (CJD)

In this session we're going to take a slightly different approach by bringing in a sense of warmth and appreciation to our exploration of mindful awareness. The practice is simple, but can have a profound impact on how you relate to your own mind and body.

Let's begin by checking in with our posture. Find a balance between being upright and alert, and at the same time open and relaxed.

Take a few moments to find a stable posture.

Next, let's take some deep breaths. Breathe in, completely fill your lungs, and as you breathe out, let your body and mind relax.

...

Great. Now you can let your breath return to normal.

Notice how the body and mind seem to open and relax with each out breath.

You don't have to do anything to make this happen. It happens quite naturally.

For the next minute or so, rest your awareness on the breath as you inhale, and as you breathe out, let go and relax.

...

If your mind is very busy, you can gently count in your mind, counting one as you breathe in, and then relaxing as you breathe out. Once you get up to five, rest the mind for a breath or two, and then start again at one. Let's do this for another minute.

...

Now relax your attention and notice what's going on in the body right now.

The heart is beating.

The body is breathing all on its own.

The brain is processing a million tiny details, and all your organs are doing their job.

Even when you get sick or feel pain, the body does its very best to repair itself...to become well.

Take a moment to recognize what an amazing thing the body is.

You can do this by bringing your awareness to the body, with a sense of warmth and appreciation.

...

Next, let's do the same thing, but now appreciating the mind.

Notice what the mind is doing right now.

The mind can listen and understand.

Maybe there are thoughts, or reactions happening.

And then there is awareness itself...the simple fact that we can experience the world.

Again, recognize what an amazing thing the mind is. Notice what the mind is doing right now, but with warmth, with a genuine sense of curiosity and appreciation.

...

And now let go and rest the mind.

Don't worry if the mind is restless or calm.

You don't have to focus on anything, or control the mind in any way.

Let go of the impulse to do something, and simply let be.

...

Great work.

The most important thing with these short practices is not what happens when you do them. The most important point is that you simply do your best. We're not trying to have any particular experience, or to reach any goal. We are exploring the mind and seeing what we notice.

Today we got a taste for the practice of appreciation. We'll do a lot more with this practice later on in the program, but hopefully you got little glimpse of how learning to appreciate what's going on within and around us can transform the way we relate to our life and experience.

As you go about your day, reconnect with this practice as often as you can. As I mentioned before, it all starts with intention. Whenever you remember, form a clear intention to be aware and present - and to find one small thing to appreciate - in whatever activity you are doing. If you are in a meeting or spending time with someone, notice something good about them. Notice something nice or beautiful about your environment. Notice the richness of color...the smells...the array of sounds. And notice how the body quite naturally takes care of itself, how the mind organizes experience and allows you to navigate your world. This doesn't have to be anything complicated. Just notice one small thing wherever you are, and whatever you are doing, and see what happens.

Good luck with the practice.

Day 7 – Teaching: Your next step (CJD)

Congratulations on reaching the seventh day of our getting started program!

As Richie mentioned a few sessions back, taking a few moments out of your day to learn these important skills can make a profound impact on your life, and even on lives of the people around you. By taking part in this program, you are making an important contribution to our understanding of well-being and how we can learn to be more aware, more resilient and creative, and more connected to others. What we're doing here together has the potential to change the world.

In the next module of the training, you'll have the opportunity to tailor the pacing of the practice to your own life. If you have more time and enjoyed our formal practices over

the past few days, you can build a daily routine that involves these exercises, but if you feel like don't need another item on your to-do list - you can focus on the daily life practices. And you can always make adjustments as you go along. Plus, with the feedback built into this longer program, you'll be able to see how these practices are transforming your mind over time - how your attention, empathy, and insight are growing.

The next step in the program is simple. When you register for Healthy Minds you'll be able to get started on the first piece of the training. Every week there will be a few short teachings and daily practices - which you can tailor to meet your needs. Our first series will focus on bringing a regular practice to your daily routine. We'll learn how to strengthen our ability to pay attention, relax the mind, and rest in open awareness.

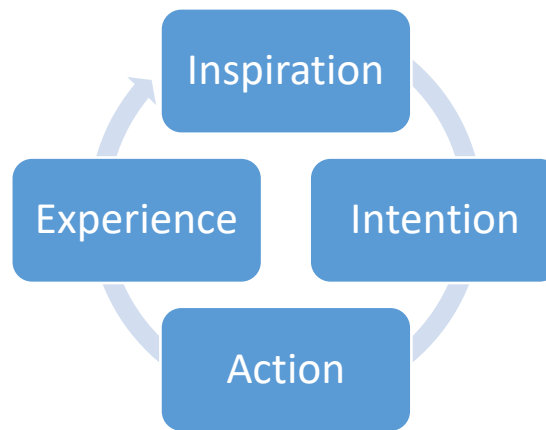
Please join us on this journey and take the next step toward a healthy mind.

Appendix 3

Content Outline for Module 1 of the Healthy Minds
Program

Program Script Outlines - Module 1: A Calm Mind

Month 1 – Beginning the Journey



Key point: To sustain meaningful change we need to make a routine of actions that support the cultivation of well-being. Building a regular routine is facilitated by (1) feeling inspired and motivated, (2) forming clear intentions, (3) following those intentions with actions, and (4) noticing and reflecting on the insights and experiences brought about by the actions we take.

1. Week 1: Beginning the journey

a. Opening teaching (3 min)

- i. This week you're going to get ready for our journey. You'll continue doing some of the practice you learned in the getting started series, but more importantly you will learn some basic points that will make the journey more powerful, and easier.
- ii. One of the pointers we'll discuss is the power of intention. You'll learn more about this later on, but for now I'll mention that setting a clear intention is a critically important part of the training.
- iii. You don't have to make a lifelong commitment, but you'll derive the most benefits if you can bite off a small chunk and commit to that.
- iv. For now, I'd like to ask you to make a plan for the next week. Can you do that?

- v. All you have to do is decide how much you want to practice each day, then check in for a few moments at the end of each day note how you're doing. It only takes a few moments to do, but you'll find that it will make a big difference.
- vi. In fact, this practice of setting a clear intention and following it up with a simple action is itself one of the most important steps on the path to well-being.

b. Contemplative principle: Inspiration (3 min)

- i. This month we'll begin our journey and explore some important qualities that will keep us on track. We'll cover lots of terrain, but in we'll focus on four points: inspiration, intention, action, and experience – spending a week with each one.
- ii. When we begin any important endeavor, we need to be committed to the journey, but most importantly, we need to be inspired; we need to have a sense of the transformative potential of what we are setting out to do.
- iii. There are many ways we could spend our time, and endless things we could learn, so why would we spend our time practicing these skills?
- iv. What we're learning to do in this program is to recognize the qualities and strengths we have that helps us to truly flourish, and to strengthen them.
- v. The things we do in our lives are often guided by our wish to be happy and fulfilled, and to avoid problems and suffering. The problem is that often times we don't have a clear understanding of what to do, and what to avoid, to bring this about.
- vi. It's like we really want take an important trip, but we only have a vague notion of where it is that we want to go, and even less idea how to get there.
- vii. So here, what we are doing is learning to recognize what true well-being looks like – what its most important qualities are – and then practicing the skills that strengthen these qualities.
- viii. To return to our metaphor of the journey, this is like finding our destination on a map, and learning how to recognize it when we arrive, and then figuring out how to actually get there.

- ix. The good news is that we already have all the qualities that support the cultivation of well-being. Here, we're simply learning to recognize and strengthen these qualities.
- x. So this is not a self-improvement program. This is a journey of exploration and discovery. What terrain we explore is the mind – our thoughts, emotions, perception, and even awareness itself. What we discover are natural qualities that we all have that, when strengthened, lead us to lasting contentment, creativity and resilience, and a deep connection with others and the world around us.

c. Contemplative practice: Inspiration + open awareness and counting the breath (10 min.)

- i. Practice begins with a short reflection on the benefits of learning to be more present and aware: we feel more grounded and relaxed; we clear away the clutter to feel more creative; more able to be fully present for others; more able to deal with challenges and find solutions to problems. This simple practice brings enormous benefits.
- ii. Next, bring awareness to your posture, then relax into the body with a few deep breaths.
- iii. Following this, bring a light awareness to the breath, simply noticing that breathing is taking place.
- iv. Now let your body and mind relax as you exhale. Try to feel a sense of opening, release, and relaxation, as though you just completed a big job and can finally let go.
- v. Now, begin to count each cycle of breathing, mentally counting after each out breath. Count up to five, and then start again at one.
- vi. Awareness rests lightly on noticing the breath, with counting in the background. Feel the exhalation fully.
- vii. After a minute of counting, let go and rest the mind without counting for a few moments.
- viii. Return to the breath and repeat, alternating one minute blocks of counting and short periods of resting in open awareness.
- ix. Conclude with a period of resting in open awareness.
- x. Suggestion to practice throughout the day

d. Scientific principle: The far reaches of well-being

- i. Scientists are only beginning to understand what it means to truly flourish. The truth is that for quite a while, scientific research has focused heavily on pathology and suffering. What we do know is that the mind and the brain can change, and that people who have devoted their lives to training the mind are different, both physically and mentally. We know, for instance, that expert meditators respond differently to physical pain, and that they exhibit much less distress than those who do not meditate. We can also see differences in the brains of people who are very altruistic, such as those who donate a kidney to a complete stranger. And it appears that even short term training has many beneficial effects. The breath counting exercise that you've learned, for example, resulted in higher levels of mindfulness and better mood. So there is hope for all of us that we can transform the mind and rewire the brain to experience optimal levels of well-being and positive emotions, and your participation in this program will help us investigate how this actually works.

1. Source: Kahn, P. H. (1997). Developmental Psychology and the Biophilia Hypothesis: Children's Affiliation with Nature. *Developmental Review*, 17(17), 1–61.
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2. Week 2: The power of intention

a. Contemplative principle: Intention + motivation

- i. Once we get inspired to embark on a journey, what clarifies the path ahead is intention and motivation
- ii. Intention is like the map we use: it highlights what steps we intend to take. This map can show us the next steps we're going to take

(our immediate intent) and also the milestones that we'll see along the way (our distant intent)

- iii. Motivation is like a postcard of our destination: it shows us where we want to end up.
- iv. In other words, motivation is the "why" and intention is the "how." Intention clarifies what we are going to do, and motivation clarifies why we are doing it.
- v. These two factors are critically important when it comes to well-being. Often times, we have a somewhat vague motivation (I want to be happy, successful, etc.), but we don't have a very clear picture of exactly what that looks like. More importantly, we don't have a clear map that takes us to our destination. It's as though we know that we want to visit Paris, but we don't really know what Paris is like or how to actually get there, but still, without our postcard or map, we walk out the door and hope for the best.
- vi. This week, we'll focus on the first of these – intention – so we can ensure that the steps we take will lead us to our destination
- vii. As an example, here we might start by recognizing that when we are more present and aware, we feel more content and grounded, are more creative and resilient, and have more caring, harmonious relationships. With this recognition, we can form the **motivation** to strengthen our own well-being, and also to make a positive impact on the world around us – and to bring this about, clarify an **ultimate intention** to be more present and aware throughout our lives, and an **immediate intention** to do this by bringing awareness to the breath.

b. Contemplative practice: Intention setting + feeling the breath (10 min.)

- i. Practice begins with a very brief reflection of the benefits of this training.
- ii. The second step involves forming a clear intention for the practice: Now I am going to spend this ten minutes strengthening mindfulness by resting my awareness on the breath.
- iii. Next, bring awareness to your posture, then relax into the body with a few deep breaths.
- iv. Following this, bring a light awareness to the breath, simply noticing that breathing is taking place.

- v. Now let your body and mind relax as you exhale. Try to feel a sense of opening, release, and relaxation, as though you just completed a big job and can finally let go.
- vi. Now, bring awareness to belly or chest as you breathe in and out. Feel the sensations associated with breathing. You don't have to focus intensely, let your awareness rest gently on the sensations just enough to keep you anchored in the present moment.
- vii. From time to time, let go and rest in open awareness, releasing any impulse to control the mind or to alter your experience in any way.
- viii. Then resume the practice of resting awareness on the sensations of the breath.
- ix. Conclude with a period of resting in open awareness.
- x. Pause for a moment before you conclude the practice to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few concrete situations and form the intention to bring awareness to the breath while you are in those situations.

c. Scientific principle: Habit formation

- i. The science of how to form healthy habits, and undo unhealthy ones, has intrigued researchers for many decades. Often times we want to make changes in our lives, but we don't know the path forward. The science gives us some helpful clues to understand how meaningful change happens.
- ii. We can think about the process of forming a new habit in four simple stages. In the first, we make a decision to make the change. We form a clear intention to take a particular course of action. This intention must then be translated into action. We then need to repeat the behavior over and over again.
- iii. This sounds pretty straightforward, but we all know that in practice, forming a habit is not as easy as it sounds.
- iv. There are some things we can do to make the process easier.
- v. One important factor is goal setting. When we have a very clear idea in mind concerning what we want to do, and when, it is easier to follow through with action.
- vi. Another thing that can help is self-monitoring. In other words, we don't set our goal and then call it a day. We return to our goal to check up on ourselves to see how we're doing. If we miss a day or

forget, we reaffirm our intention and start again. Self-monitoring is what keeps us on track.

- vii. It also helps to understand what we're doing and why it works. This kind of understanding motivates at the beginning, keeps our minds focused while we put our intention into practice, and clarifies our experience as we gain experience and begin to form healthy habits.
- viii. Most importantly, we need repetition...lots of it. The more we repeat a simple action, the quicker it becomes second nature and the less mental energy we need to stay the course.
 1. Source: Michie, S., Abraham, Charles; Whittington, C., McAteer, J., & Gupta, S. (2009). Effective techniques in healthy eating and physical activity interventions: A meta-regression. *Health Psychology, 28*(6), 690–701.
 2. Rothman, A. J., Gollwitzer, P. M., Grant, A. M., Neal, D. T., Sheeran, P., & Wood, W. (2015). Hale and Hearty Policies: How Psychological Science Can Create and Maintain Healthy Habits. *Perspect Psychol Sci, 10*(6), 701–705.
 3. Webb, T. L., Joseph, J., Yardley, L., & Michie, S. (2010). Using the internet to promote health behavior change: a systematic review and meta-analysis of the impact of theoretical basis, use of behavior change techniques, and mode of delivery on efficacy. *Journal of Medical Internet Research, 12*(1), 1–35.

3. Week 3: The next step

a. Contemplative principle: Taking action

- i. All the inspiration and clarity of intention in the world won't do us a bit of good if we don't actually walk out the door and begin our journey.
- ii. Once we have a clear picture of where we're headed we don't walk around staring at the postcard that inspired us, nor do we get so caught up in looking at our map that we tune out the beauty of the path. Once we know where we're going, we let go and focus on the journey.
- iii. Our focus is on the next step ahead of us, and especially on enjoying the trip.

- iv. This is critically important when we're building healthy habits, because if we focus too much on the result we lose touch with the next step, and eventually our plan to get to Paris ends up being a day dream.
- v. A powerful part of our training here will be to build a habit of taking many small steps, many that we hardly even notice, that lead us closer and closer to our destination.
- vi. We'll also learn firsthand how curiosity – which we'll talk about next week – helps us to enjoy the journey so much that the idea of arriving becomes an afterthought.

b. Contemplative practice: Short times, many times + open awareness and the breath (10 min.)

- i. Practice begins with a very brief reflection of the benefits of this training.
- ii. The second step involves forming a clear intention for the practice: Now I am going to spend this ten minutes strengthening mindfulness by resting my awareness on the breath.
- iii. Next, bring awareness to your posture, then relax into the body with a few deep breaths.
- iv. Following this, bring a light awareness to the breath, simply noticing that breathing is taking place.
- v. Now let your body and mind relax as you exhale. Try to feel a sense of opening, release, and relaxation, as though you just completed a big job and can finally let go.
- vi. As you breathe in and out, simply know that you are breathing. Don't worry about concentrating intensely. Just notice the presence of the breath.
- vii. From time to time, let go and rest in open awareness, releasing any impulse to control the mind or to alter your experience in any way.
- viii. Notice how the mind wanders off many times. That's natural. We notice, bring the mind back, wander off, and then bring it back again. In a single session, we might do this many times. That's the practice.
- ix. Conclude with a period of resting in open awareness.
- x. Pause for a moment before you conclude the practice to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few concrete situations and form

the intention to bring awareness to the breath while you are in those situations.

c. Scientific principle: Forming Healthy Habits, Part 2

- i. Last week I spoke about the science of building new habits. This week I'll take that discussion a bit further and explore some additional practical steps that we know contribute to forming healthy habits. One surprising point is that when we consider the needs and well-being of others, it helps motivate us to take action. Another practical step is to put our intention in writing. To spell out exactly what we plan to do and when. Another helpful factor is to find something that you already do as part of your daily routine, and tie the new habit to that existing pattern. And finally, we also need to watch out for old habits that get in the way of the new, healthier, behavior, so we can avoid the situations, contexts, and other factors that trigger the behavior we want to avoid.
 1. Source: Rothman, A. J., Gollwitzer, P. M., Grant, A. M., Neal, D. T., Sheeran, P., & Wood, W. (2015). Hale and Hearty Policies: How Psychological Science Can Create and Maintain Healthy Habits. *Perspect Psychol Sci*, 10(6), 701–705.

4. Week 4: Getting to know the mind

a. Contemplative principle: Discovering what's already here

- i. We get a lot of messages in our daily life that tell us that we are not enough, that we won't feel complete, or be living a full life, if we don't buy something, do something, go somewhere, or achieve something.
- ii. It's easy to get the impression that we are broken, and consequently we spend a lot of time trying to "fix" ourselves.
- iii. When it comes to cultivating a healthy mind, there is some really good news: you already have all the ingredients you need to live a full, meaningful life.
- iv. You have already begun the process of noticing some of the key ingredients of a healthy mind: the capacity to be fully aware of what's happening in your own mind, to notice periods of distraction and redirect attention, and to let go and relax the body and mind, resting in a state of open receptivity. You may not have actively trained them before, but you already have these qualities.

- v. Later, you'll learn to notice natural capacities that strengthen feelings of warmth and connection with others, that help you to feel a sense of purpose and meaning in life, and that lead to insight and creativity.
- vi. The key point is that there is no need for self-improvement. This may sound radical, but what I'm saying is that there is nothing to improve. You have all the essential ingredients of well-being, the only problem is that you may not know where to look to find them, to strengthen them, and to make the most of your natural potential.

b. Contemplative practice: Discovering what's already there + resting in the gap (10 min.)

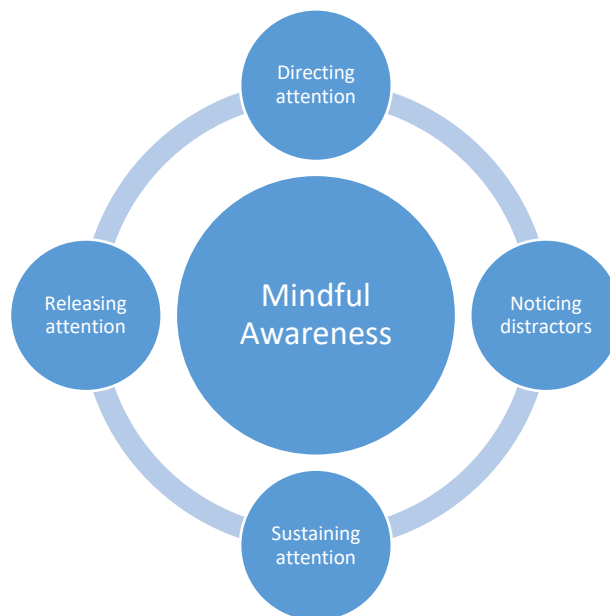
- i. Practice begins with a very brief reflection of the benefits of this training.
- ii. The second step involves forming a clear intention for the practice: Now I am going to spend this ten minutes strengthening mindfulness by resting my awareness on the breath.
- iii. Next, bring awareness to your posture, then relax into the body with a few deep breaths.
- iv. Following this, bring a light awareness to the breath, simply noticing that breathing is taking place.
- v. Now let your body and mind relax as you exhale. Try to feel a sense of opening, release, and relaxation, as though you just completed a big job and can finally let go.
- vi. Let your awareness merge with the breath, and when you breathe out, let your mind open and relax.
- vii. Notice the short gap at the end of the out breath. There's a small pause where the mind is very simple and uncomplicated. Let yourself rest in that space for a few moments between each breath.
- viii. Notice how the mind wanders off many times. That's natural. We notice, bring the mind back, wander off, and then bring it back again. In a single session, we might do this many times. That's the practice.
- ix. Conclude with a period of resting in open awareness.

- x. Pause for a moment before you conclude the practice to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few concrete situations and form the intention to bring awareness to the breath while you are in those situations.

c. Scientific principle: Capacity for self-transformation

- i. Synopsis: Neuroplasticity and epigenetics show us that as humans, we have an enormous capacity to transform ourselves
- ii. We used to think that we are hardwired to be a certain way, that the structure of the brain is set and
- iii. We now know that what we think, what we do, and what we surround ourselves with changes the brain: we call this neuroplasticity
- iv. We had a similar belief about our genetic heritage, but here too we are learning more and more that the way our genes are expressed can be shaped by experience
- v. This is good news, but it also highlights the importance of training the mind, because our capacity to change is neither good nor bad.
- vi. We need to harness this capacity for the good. To impact our own lives, and the lives of others, in positive and beneficial ways.
- vii. What we're doing here is giving you the tools so you can make the best use of the brain's capacity for change. So you can use even the most mundane experiences of daily life – and even challenges and roadblocks – to strengthen the most important qualities for well-being.
 1. Source: Busch, V., Schuierer, G., Bogdahn, U., & May, A. (2004). Changes in grey matter induced by training newly honed juggling skills show up as a transient feature on a brain-imaging scan. *Nature*, 427, 311–312.
 2. Davidson, R. J., & McEwen, B. S. (2012). Social influences on neuroplasticity: stress and interventions to promote well-being. *Nature Neuroscience*, 15(5), 689–95.
 3. Goldberg, A. D., Allis, C. D., & Bernstein, E. (2007). Epigenetics: A Landscape Takes Shape. *Cell*, 128(4), 635–638.
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Month 2 – Attention and Awareness of the Senses



Key point: Learning to be mindful and attentive is the foundation of cultivating a healthy mind. A mindful mind is calm, clear, and steady, and a calm, clear, and steady mind is inherently nourishing...it feels better to be aware. It also improves our capacity to build new habits, to let go of old ones, and to explore experience to gain insight and understanding. The process of training in mindfulness involves singling out some basic psychological qualities that we use all the time, and strengthening them. The most essential quality is mindfulness, which enables us to direct or redirect our attention, to notice and let go of distractors, to sustain our attention, and to release our attention and rest in a state of relaxed receptivity, which we call open awareness.

1. Week 1: Inner calm

a. Opening teaching (3 min)

- i. Congratulations! You've reached the second month and are well on your way to strengthening the very best parts of your heart and mind.
- ii. As you learned last month, clear intentions paired with simple actions are an integral part of cultivating a healthy mind.
- iii. Now that you've reached month two, it's a good time to step back and form a clear intention for the next month. In this series, you will learn some very important skills.

- iv. The first relates to attention. By the end of the month, you will know how to identify and strengthen some important qualities of attention, such as the capacity to direct, redirect, and sustain your attention, the ability to notice and let go of distractions, the difference between mindfulness and attention, and finally, the capacity to let go – to release attentional control and rest in a state of relaxed receptivity, which we call open awareness.
- v. Second, the skills you pick up this month will enable you to change the way you relate to your thoughts, emotions, and the world around you. You'll see that your response to even the most challenging circumstances, and even to old thoughts and painful emotions, can be transformed by shifting some basic qualities of attention. This will also help clear away some of the mental clutter so you have more space for creativity, connection, and insight.
- vi. So the benefits here are tremendous, but as before, the ball is in your court. So what do you want out of this month? Was the amount of practice you did last month a good fit? Take a few moments now to set a clear intention for the first segment of this month's program.

b. Contemplative principle: Inner calm

- i. This month is all about awareness. We're going to explore awareness and attention so we can pick out the qualities that are the most important for a healthy mind, and then we'll strengthen them.
- ii. Our journey will help us to get in touch with the calm, clear, and steady presence of mindfulness.
- iii. These are natural qualities of the mind. We're not improving the mind or fixing a problem. We're learning to recognize and strengthen basic qualities that we all have.
- iv. This week we'll focus on the experience of inner calm and relaxed presence that naturally occurs when we get in touch with awareness.
- v. The key point here is that awareness itself is calm, we don't need to make it calm.
- vi. Since this quality of awareness is always present, we can experience this sense of calm and ease when the world around us is chaotic. We can even feel grounded, relaxed, and calm when there is pain in the body or the mind is upset.

- vii. In practice, we do this by noticing what it feels like to rest in a state of open awareness, a state of relaxed receptivity, and then returning to this state of open awareness again and again until it becomes second nature.
- viii. Along with tuning into the calm, clear, and steady presence of mindfulness, we'll also learn to train some important components of attention.
- ix. In particular, we'll learn how strengthen our capacity to direct and sustain attention so we can remain present with loved ones, focused at work, and resilient in the face of challenges.
- x. We'll also learn to notice and let go of distractions. This is an important skill to have when it comes to building new habits and letting go of unhealthy patterns.
- xi. As with mindfulness, these are skills that we all have. We use them all the time. Over the next month, as we move deeper into the program, we'll learn to recognize these qualities, to strengthen them, and build them into our lives.

d. Contemplative practice: Inner calm + mindfulness of the body

- i. First, begin with a very brief reflection of the benefits of this training: Why am I doing this?
 - 1. I'm going to be more present with my friends and family
 - 2. More focused at work
 - 3. More able to manage my thoughts and emotions
 - 4. With more insight about how the mind works
 - 5. I'll experience more peace of mind and contentment, and less dependent on external circumstance to feel complete.
- ii. Second, set a clear intention: I am going to practice being mindful and attentive today, and as a step in that direction I'm going to devote the next ten minutes to strengthening these qualities.
- iii. In this session, we'll use the sensations in the body to notice the calm, spacious quality of awareness.
- iv. Start by bringing awareness to your posture, sitting in an upright, yet relaxed position, then relax into the body with a few deep breaths.

- v. Now let your breath return to normal, but stay connected with the body. You don't have to focus or concentrate. With each breath, let your body and mind relax and open. Simply notice the presence of your body and let go of any impulse to control the mind or alter your experience in any way.
- vi. There may be thoughts in the mind, feelings in the body, and emotions arising and passing away, but awareness is always present. When you notice the presence of awareness, you naturally drop into a state of calm receptivity.
- vii. This might be a brief moment at first. Don't worry, if it doesn't last long.
- viii. If the mind gets distracted, that's completely natural. When you notice, gently bring the mind back to the present and let your awareness rest with the body.
- ix. As you rest your awareness on the sensations of the body, let yourself be this calm awareness. This awareness is who you are. It's always with you.
- x. Conclude with a period of resting in open awareness.
- xi. Pause for a moment before you conclude the practice to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to notice the calm presence of awareness. Return to this state of open awareness as many times as you can throughout the day.

c. Scientific principle: Attention and mindfulness

- i. The mind is incredibly complex, as is the brain; there are many different functions, some of which are completely automatic, and some of which we have the ability to change.
- ii. Of all these different functions, some are of particular important when it comes to the cultivation of well-being.
- iii. Attention and mindfulness are especially important.
- iv. As scientists, we're very interested in breaking things down so we can better understand how they work. With attention, we tend to think about the mind's ability to direct itself to a particular object or experience, the capacity to sustain this attentional focus, and also the ability to notice when attention is being pulled away from its object, or to redirect our attention if we become distracted. These are all qualities that we'll learn to train in the coming weeks.

- v. Another important mental function is what we scientists refer to as meta-awareness, which you probably know as mindfulness. You'll be hearing a lot about mindfulness, but in short, what we're talking about is a heightened awareness of what is happening in the mind, the body, and the environment in the present moment.
- vi. These mental functions are used all the time. We need them to perform even the most basic task. But we don't usually learn how to explicitly train them, but there is an increasing body of scientific research that shows how important these skills are for well-being.
 1. Source:
 2. Lutz, A., Slagter, H. a, Rawlings, N. B., Francis, A. D., Greischar, L. L., & Davidson, R. J. (2009). Mental training enhances attentional stability: neural and behavioral evidence. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 29(42), 13418–27.
 3. Petersen, S. E., & Posner, M. I. (2012). The attention system of the human brain: 20 years after. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 35, 73–89.

2. Week 2: Inner clarity

a. Contemplative principle: Inner clarity

- i. Last week we started to explore some important qualities of awareness, and in particular the experience of being calm, clear, and steady that occurs quite naturally when we strengthen the quality of mindfulness.
- ii. Hopefully you've had a glimpse of the experience of inner calm. As I mentioned last week, the calm I'm talking about is not a state of physical relaxation, or even a particular state of mind. Rather, it is a natural quality of awareness itself. We don't make awareness calm; it is calm. When we notice this quality, we experience inner calm, even when the surface of the mind feels agitated or upset.
- iii. Another important quality is clarity. By clarity, I mean the knowing, aware quality of mind. This awareness is always present, but we are usually so focused on what the mind is attending to, that we forget about awareness itself. When we notice the knowing, clear nature of the mind, we experience a sense of inner clarity, of wakefulness, and of presence.

- iv. The clarity of mindfulness is more than being attentive – it's a heightened awareness of what is going on in your body, mind and surroundings in the present moment.
- v. An example is the awareness you have when you suddenly notice that you're watching a movie, versus the prior moment when you were absorbed in the story. With mindfulness, you may still be aware of the movie, but there's a richness to experience as well. You may notice the colors and textures of the world more acutely, and also be in touch with what's going on within your body and mind. The feeling of being mindful is one of being aware of your own presence as a conscious observer. You not only see, you know you are seeing. You not only hear, think, or feel, you know you are hearing, thinking, or feeling as these experiences unfold.
- vi. Let's connect to what this feels like right now. As you are listening to me right now, you may suddenly become aware that you are listening. You are not only aware of my voice, but also of the fact that you are present and listening. There might be a sense of being in your body, or of hearing the richness of the sound more clearly. You might notice that there are thoughts moving through your mind, or that you are feeling restless, calm, or agitated. Most importantly, when you feel fully aware and present, you can intentionally change the focus of your attention, or monitor your thoughts or emotions.
- vii. Most of the time, we're absorbed in the storyline of our thoughts and emotions. These stories occupy our minds, shaping our experience and perpetuating emotional habits and behaviors.
- viii. There are many benefits to the cultivation of mindfulness:
 - 1. It gives us the capacity to regulate our attention, thoughts and emotions.
 - 2. This, in turn, helps us to let go of old habits and strengthen and stabilize healthy habits.
 - 3. It also gives us the space to explore the mind and gain insight.
- ix. This calm clarity, which we refer to as mindfulness, is the foundation for all forms of training the mind. It gives us the inner workspace, like a clear desk, so we can manage our inner world effectively.

- x. The best news is that mindfulness is inherently nourishing. It feels good to be present and aware, just as it is draining and disruptive to have a crowded, busy mind.
- xi. You've been training in mindfulness throughout the program, but starting this week, hopefully you'll be clearer about what you are strengthening and why.

e. Contemplative practice: Inner clarity + mindfulness of the body

- i. First, begin with a very brief reflection of the benefits of this training: Why am I doing this?
 1. I'm going to be more present with my friends and family
 2. More focused at work
 3. More able to manage my thoughts and emotions
 4. With more insight about how the mind works
 5. I'll experience more peace of mind and contentment, and less dependent on external circumstance to feel complete.
- ii. Second, set a clear intention: I am going to practice being mindful and attentive today, and as a step in that direction I'm going to devote the next ten minutes to strengthening these qualities.
- iii. In this session, we'll use the sensations in the body to tune into the mind's natural clarity, the knowing quality of mind that is always present.
- iv. Start by bringing awareness to your posture, sitting in an upright, yet relaxed position, then relax into the body with a few deep breaths.
- v. Let's start by tuning into the calm, spacious quality of the mind. Here we're not talking about physical relaxation, but mental ease; a willingness to let go of our impulse to control or "fix" the mind. As you breathe, rest your awareness on the sensations in the body and tune into this feeling of letting go, of releasing, and rest in the calm presence of open awareness.
- vi. Along with the mind's natural calm is clarity. The mind is not only relaxed and calm, but clear and aware. You know what is happening in the mind and in the body. You are awake and present. Rest in the calm clarity of awareness for a few moments, using the sensations in the body as a support for your attention.

- vii. As you rest your awareness on the sensations of the body, let yourself be this calm, clear awareness. This awareness is who you are. It's always with you.
- viii. The mind will wander off. That's natural. When it does, gently bring it back. The more you bring it back, the stronger your mindfulness becomes.
- ix. Conclude with a period of resting in open awareness.
- x. Pause for a moment before you conclude the practice to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to notice the calm, clear presence of awareness. Return the presence of awareness as many times as you can throughout the day.

b. Scientific principle: Mindfulness and the brain

- i. There is no single area of the brain associated with mindfulness, but we are beginning to understand how the brain changes when we learn to be more aware.
- ii. Research shows that training the mind in this way activates networks in the brain that help us monitor and regulate our thoughts, emotions, and behavior.
- iii. We're also finding that mindfulness training decreases activity in networks linked to rumination and thoughts that are focused on the self.
- iv. We even see changes in the way that the brain responds to pain. An interesting finding is that people who are trained in these practices report that a painful event is less unpleasant than those who have not been trained. If you look at the brain, it appears that mindfulness doesn't change the direct experience of the painful event, but the way we anticipate what is going to happen and the way we recover once it is over.
- v. In short, the evidence points to likelihood that doing these practices improves our ability to manage our mind, emotions, and behavior, and changes the way we respond to challenging experiences for the better.
 - 1. Source: Fox, K. C. R., Nijeboer, S., Dixon, M. L., Floman, J. L., Ellamil, M., Rumak, S. P., ... Christoff, K. (2014). Is meditation associated with altered brain structure? A systematic review and meta-analysis of morphometric

- neuroimaging in meditation practitioners. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 43, 48–73.
2. Lutz, A., Jha, A., Dunne, J. D., & Saron, C. D. (2015). Investigating the Phenomenological Matrix of Mindfulness-related Practices from a Neurocognitive Perspective. *American Psychologist*, 70(7), 632–658.
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 4. Tang, Y.-Y., Holzel, B. K., & Posner, M. I. (2015). The neuroscience of mindfulness meditation. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 16(4), 213–225.

3. Week 3: Inner steadiness

a. Contemplative principle: Inner steadiness

- i. As mentioned in the previous week, we all have the natural capacity to be attentive and mindful. These qualities occur naturally all the time.
- ii. Our main training here is to recognize these qualities and to nurture them.
- iii. The way we do that is to come back to that heightened awareness of present moment experience again and again, and to grow familiar with the flow of mindfulness until it becomes our home, and as natural to us as our thoughts and emotions are right now.
- iv. The more we get in touch with the relaxed clarity of awareness, the more we feel the mind's innate steadiness. When we rest in mindfulness, we feel grounded. We feel centered and stable, like a massive mountain. It doesn't matter what happens on or around the mountain...the mountain remains steadfast and firm.
- v. When we rest in awareness, we have that same feeling. Even if there are many thoughts crowding the mind or strong emotions arise, we can still feel a sense of inner calm, an inner steadiness that isn't dependent on what is happening within or around us.
- vi. It might seem like we do this by forcing the mind to be present and aware, but actually all we need to do is recognize the presence of mindfulness, then let go and rest in that experience. This quality of stability and steadiness is a natural quality of mindfulness.

- vii. We can use a support, like the breath or the sensations in the body, as an anchor to help us to rest, but the practice is not the breath, it is the presence of mindfulness.
- viii. By coming back to mindfulness again and again in our practices sessions – and more importantly as much as we can in everyday life – we strengthen mindfulness and attentiveness.
- ix. We strengthen mindfulness by growing more familiar with what it feels like to be fully present.
- x. We strengthen attentiveness by learning to direct our mind a particular aspect of experience and to remain with that experience as long as we choose, and to resist the pull of distraction.
- xi. This last point, noticing the pull of distraction, is a very important part of the practice, and one that plays an important role in managing emotions, building good habits, and letting go of old patterns...this is our main topic next week.
- xii. For this week, notice how rich the world when you are fully awake to your life. Savor the texture of experience and notice all the gifts that the world has to offer.

f. Contemplative practice: Inner steadiness + awareness of a visual object

- i. First, begin with a very brief reflection of the benefits of this training: Why am I doing this?
 - 1. I'm going to be more present with my friends and family
 - 2. More focused at work
 - 3. More able to manage my thoughts and emotions
 - 4. With more insight about how the mind works
 - 5. I'll experience more peace of mind and contentment, and less dependent on external circumstance to feel complete.
- ii. Second, set a clear intention: I am going to practice being mindful and attentive today, and as a step in that direction I'm going to devote the next ten minutes to strengthening these qualities.
- iii. Start by bringing awareness to your posture, sitting in an upright, yet relaxed position, then relax into the body with a few deep breaths.

- iv. Next, tune into the qualities of mindfulness. Notice that awareness itself is calm and spacious. As you breathe in and out, see if you can relax the mind and notice this quality of calm presence.
- v. The second quality is clarity. The mind is not only relaxed and calm, but clear and aware. Rest in for a few moments in this calm, aware, state of mind.
- vi. The third and final quality is steadiness. Beneath the thoughts, emotions, and perceptions that often crowd the mind, awareness itself is always present. This calm, clear, steady mind is always with you. In noticing awareness, you become this field of awareness. You don't need to do anything. It's always there.
- vii. In this session, we'll use a visual object as a support for mindfulness. Keep your eyes gently open and direct your gaze slightly downward. Let your awareness rest naturally on something in front of you. It could be a spot on the wall or on the floor, or anything that is naturally in the middle of your field of vision.
- viii. As you look at the object, know that you are looking. That's it. You don't have to focus intensely or analyze the object. Remember, the point here is awareness, not the object.
- ix. When the mind wanders off, don't worry. Gently bring it back. The more you bring it back, the easier it becomes to rest in mindfulness and to remain attentive.
- x. Conclude with a period of resting in open awareness.
- xi. Pause for a moment before you conclude the practice to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to notice the pull of distractions in those situations.

b. Scientific principle: Mindfulness and the training of attention

- i. How is training in mindfulness related to attention? There is evidence that we can train attention through practices like the ones you are learning now. These improvements in attention impact a variety of skills that are important to well-being, like the ability to regulate emotions, to let go of unhealthy thoughts, and to monitor our behavior so we can make healthy choices.
- ii. It also appears that these practices change very specific aspects of attention. Research has shown, for instance, that mindfulness practice increases our capacity to stabilize and sustain our

attention, and also to orient our attention and to monitor what is happening in the field of awareness. This is an area that requires further research, but the work that has been done thus far suggests that these practices may have important implications for the training of attention.

1. Source: Brefczynski-Lewis, J., Lutz, A., Schaefer, H. S., Levinson, D. B., & Davidson, R. J. (2007). Neural correlates of attentional expertise in long-term meditation practitioners. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 104(27), 11483–8.
2. Jha, A., Krompinger, J., & Baime, M. (2007). Mindfulness training modifies subsystems of attention. *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience*, 7(2), 109–119.
3. Lutz, A., Slagter, H. a, Rawlings, N. B., Francis, A. D., Greischar, L. L., & Davidson, R. J. (2009). Mental training enhances attentional stability: neural and behavioral evidence. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 29(42), 13418–27.
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4. Week 4: Attentiveness and distraction

a. Contemplative principle: Mindfulness and attentiveness

- i. Mindfulness is a very important ingredient of well-being, but it's not quite the same as being attentive.
- ii. Mindfulness means we are aware of what we are thinking, feeling, or perceiving while it is happening.
- iii. One of the benefits of strengthening mindfulness is that it enables us to train our attention, to learn to be more attentive to what we are doing and who we are with.
- iv. Whereas mindfulness refers to the heightened awareness of what is happening within us and around us in the present moment, attentiveness means we are directing our attention in the right direction.
- v. You can think of attentiveness as our capacity to point a flashlight in the right direction and to keep it there, and mindfulness as the capacity to know that our flashlight is in fact directed in the right

place, and to notice when it begins to waver or stray to a different object.

- vi. Let me give an example, if you are reading a good novel, you might be attentive to what you are reading, yet completely absorbed in the narrative and unaware – in the moment – that you are reading. In other words, you are attentive, but not mindful.
- vii. You can also be inattentive, but mindful. For example, when you're talking to a friend and your mind wanders off, you might suddenly notice that you're thinking about something else and not paying attention what your friend is saying. In that moment, your mind is inattentive (since you haven't yet redirected your attention back to your friend), but yet you've noticed your inattentiveness and therefore mindfulness is present.
- viii. Ideally, we are both attentive, and mindful. When we have both of these at the same time, our attention is directed it to where we want it to go (to the story we're reading or to what our friend is saying), but we are also aware of the quality of our own mind in the moment; we know that we are being attentive, and therefore also aware when our mind gets pulled away from the story or the conversation.
- ix. Luckily, these are both natural capacities that we all have. In fact, they are happening all the time. Unfortunately, we rarely notice them, much less learn how to strengthen them and use them to their full potential.
- x. These are both important qualities when it comes to well-being. Mindfulness gives us the capacity to regulate our attention, thoughts, emotion, and behavior, while attentiveness helps us to stay focused on the people, activities, and things that are the most important in any given situation.
- xi. In these practices, we learn to recognize and strengthen both of these qualities, and when we do, we experience the mind's innate stability, or steadiness.
- xii. This steadiness of mind is an ongoing experience of the flow of mindfulness; we are fully present, aware of what is happening within and around us; we are able to notice when something pulls our attention away, and if we need to, we can direct it back to what we're doing, or release our attention and rest in a state of open receptivity; but throughout all of these movements attention, we remain awake and aware, not lost in experience.

b. Contemplative practice: Recognizing distraction + awareness of sound

- i. First, begin with a very brief reflection of the benefits of this training: Why am I doing this?
 1. I'm going to be more present with my friends and family
 2. More focused at work
 3. More able to manage my thoughts and emotions
 4. With more insight about how the mind works
 5. I'll experience more peace of mind and contentment, and less dependent on external circumstance to feel complete.
- ii. Second, set a clear intention: I am going to practice being mindful and attentive today, and as a step in that direction I'm going to devote the next ten minutes to strengthening these qualities.
- iii. In this session, we'll use sound as a support for mindfulness.
- iv. Start by bringing awareness to your posture, sitting in an upright, yet relaxed position, then relax into the body with a few deep breaths.
- v. Next, tune into the qualities of mindfulness. Notice that awareness itself is calm and spacious. As you breathe in and out, see if you can relax the mind and notice this quality of calm presence.
- vi. The second quality is clarity. The mind is not only relaxed and calm, but clear and aware. Rest in for a few moments in this calm, aware, state of mind.
- vii. The third and final quality is steadiness. Beneath the thoughts, emotions, and perceptions that often crowd the mind, awareness itself is always present. This calm, clear, steady mind is always with you. In noticing awareness, you become this field of awareness. You don't need to do anything. It's always there.
- viii. Now I'm going to ring a bell. Let your awareness rest naturally on the sound. Simply listen, and know that you are listening. That's it.

- ix. As you listen, notice how other experiences pull your attention away from the sound. Don't worry about stopping or blocking these experiences, just notice their pull. These are distractions.
- x. When the mind wanders off, don't worry. Gently bring it back, and see if you can notice when a distraction begins to pull your attention away.
- xi. Conclude with a period of resting in open awareness.
- xii. Pause for a moment before you conclude the practice to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to notice the pull of distractions in those situations.

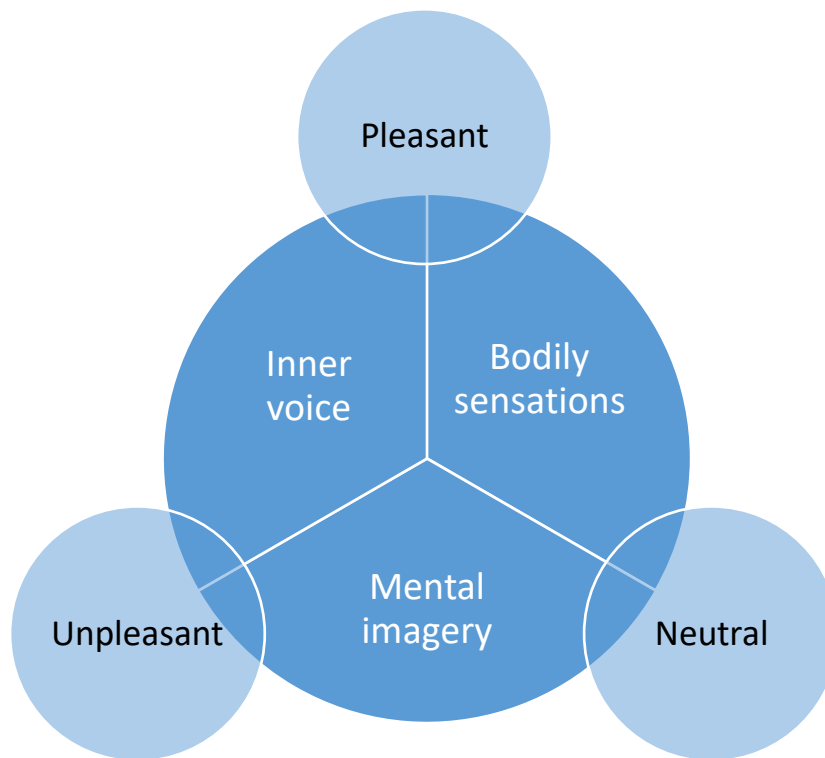
c. Scientific principle: Mind wandering

- i. Research shows that roughly half of our waking life, we are not paying attention to what we're doing.
- ii. Surprisingly, it doesn't matter what we're doing, with the exception of sex, we tend to get distracted no matter where we are and what we're doing.
- iii. This means that when we're at work and trying to get stuff done, half the time we're not even focused on what we're supposed to be doing.
- iv. When we're at home with loved ones or out with friends, half the time we're not giving the people we care about our full attention.
- v. And we only have 50% of our attention to devote to dealing with the problems and challenges that come up in life.
- vi. Given this, it is not surprising that a distracted mind is also an unhappy mind.
- vii. The good news is that we can practice simple skills that decrease the amount of distraction we experience, and there is also good evidence that learning to be more present and aware impacts virtually every area of our lives, including our health, relationships, and overall well-being.
 1. Source: Killingsworth, M. A., & Gilbert, D. T. (2010). A wandering mind is an unhappy mind. *Science*, 330(6006), 932.
 2. Mooneyham, B. W., & Schooler, J. W. (2013). The costs and benefits of mind-wandering: a review. *Canadian Journal of*

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Month 3 – Working with Thoughts and Emotions



Key point: One of the greatest gifts we have as human beings is the capacity to think and reason, to reflect on our life and circumstances and to explore the world of emotions. Yet this gift can feel like a curse at times. We may feel like we can't turn our thoughts off, even when they create more stress in the body and agitation in the mind. And our feelings and emotions can easily get out of control, to the point that they can get in the way of healthy relationships and block our creativity and resilience. In our most challenging moments, our thoughts and emotions may feel like our worst enemies.

This month, we're going to re-learn how to relate to our thoughts and emotions. Though it often feels like thoughts and emotions themselves are the problems, when we are grounded in mindfulness, we can experience their creative energy without feeling hijacked by them. The practice is really quite simple. We use thoughts and emotions as a support for mindfulness in the same way that we use the breath, or a sound. What we find is that thoughts and emotions are constantly shifting and changing, and that they have many different components. There are words and sounds in the mind, especially the inner voice that comments and narrates our experience, and also mental images. Another important component of emotions in particular are bodily

sensations. And all of these words, images, and sensations come with a feeling tone. That is, we find them to be pleasant and we want more of them, or unpleasant and we try to avoid them or make them stop. And many are simply neutral. We don't care about them one way or another.

In conducting this exploration we see that our thoughts and emotions do not define us, and that it is our struggle to control them that often creates tension in the body and distress in the mind. This capacity to step back and observe our thoughts and feelings gives us the capacity to savor and strengthen healthy emotions and thoughts, and to let go of unhealthy habits of mind. We can even transform the many neutral experiences we have into sources of insight, connection, and creativity.

1. Week 1: The power of thought

a. Contemplative principle: The power of thought

- i. Do you remember a trip where you were so focused on getting to the destination that you forgot to enjoy the journey there?
- ii. When we tune in and learn to appreciate what's right in front of us, the journey itself becomes so enjoyable and fulfilling that the destination becomes an afterthought.
- iii. The mind is endlessly fascinating, but rarely do we take the time to peak under the hood to see how it works. By the end of this program, you are going to be a master mechanic of your own mind.
- iv. A key to this whole process is curiosity. We get to know our mind and how it works not because we have to, but because mind is so fascinating that we simply cannot stop wanting to explore it further.
- v. In terms of the journey we're on, curiosity is like the batteries of our trusted flashlight. It helps us find our way through the mind's dark corners and reveals the richness and beauty of the inner landscape.
- vi. To get a sense of how important the mind is, think of three things that make you happy.
- vii. Now think of three things that make you unhappy.
- viii. Chances are that none of those six things was the mind. But get this: you can think of times when you had a big challenge or something that might have really thrown you off, but you were able to handle it with grace. And there are probably other times when everything was going great, maybe you were even on

vacation, but you were miserable. Similarly, there are plenty of examples of people who are sick, maybe even dying, but filled with peace, and also those who were rich and powerful, and seemed to have everything they could ever want, but nevertheless were completely miserable.

- ix. The point here is that we rarely stop to consider how important the mind is, much less how to truly take care of it, but yet it is the single most influential factor in our own well-being.
- x. Our state of mind dictates our level of well-being. Being healthy and financially prosperous won't do us a bit of good if we don't know how to care for the mind. No amount of trying to control the external world will bring us lasting happiness. Conversely, once we know how to care for the mind, and to manage our thoughts and emotions, building healthy relationships, forming habits that lead to physical health, and making good choices in other areas of our lives becomes much easier.
- xi. The bottom line is this: If we want to make meaningful changes in life, we need to start with the mind.

d. Contemplative practice: Exploring the inner landscape

- i. First, begin by reflecting on the benefits of cultivating a healthy mind. Remind yourself of all the ways that learning to be more mindful and attentive can help you to maintain caring relationships and to be creative and resilient. Take a moment to inspire yourself and reaffirm your commitment to practicing these skills.
- ii. Second, set a clear intention: I am going to practice being mindful and attentive today, and as a step in that direction I'm going to devote the next ten minutes to strengthening these qualities.
- iii. Today I'll introduce you to the practice of using thoughts and emotions as a support for mindfulness.
- iv. Start by bringing awareness to your posture. Sit in an upright, relaxed position, and then take a few deep breaths, relaxing as you exhale.
- v. Now let your breath return to normal. Bring a light awareness to the breath for a few moments.

- vi. As you breathe out, let your body and mind relax. For the next minute or so, tune in to the exhalation, relaxing and opening each time you breathe out.
- vii. As you breathe in and out, notice what's going on in your body and mind right now. Are any feelings or emotions present? Are you calm and relaxed, or restless and agitated? What thoughts are present? Whatever is going on, notice it. Rest your awareness on your thoughts and feelings as you would on the movements of the breath. Don't worry about figuring anything out or analyzing. Just observe, as though you are watching someone else's thoughts and feelings.
- viii. There's no particular experience that you need to have here. The practice is to be aware of the state of your own mind, no matter what state it's in. So if there are lots of thoughts and feelings, great. And if not much is going on, that's great too. Just sit back and watch.
- ix. You will get caught up in your thoughts after a few moments. That's natural. Or maybe not much is happening in the mind. No problem there either. Just rest your mindful awareness on whatever thoughts and feelings are present.
- x. Let's end with a few moments of resting in open awareness. You don't need to pay attention to your thoughts, to the breath, or to anything else. Release your attention and rest, without controlling the mind in any way. Just sit.
- xi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice by noticing whatever thoughts are present. You can practice this wherever you are, and no matter what you are doing. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

a. Scientific principle: The default mode of the mind and brain

- i. When scientists first began to scan people's brains, they typically had them perform different tasks, such those related to memory or perception.
- ii. Between tasks, subjects in these studies would be told to take a rest, and the scientists would look at their brains in this "rest" state so they could compare it to the more active state related to whatever task they performed.

- iii. After a while, scientists discovered something interesting. When people were just sitting around with nothing to do, the brain didn't go dark. Quite the contrary, it was actually very active, and they found that there is a specific brain network that becomes active in these periods.
- iv. This came to be known as the "default-mode network."
- v. Next, scientists became curious about this default-mode network. What's going on in the mind when this network turns on? Well, it turns out that we are pretty predictable creatures. When we have nothing better to do, we think, and we don't think about just anything, more often than not, we think about ourselves.
- vi. So this default-mode network is linked to the endless thoughts that crowd the mind when we are not absorbed in some activity.
- vii. Unfortunately, as we learned last month, a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. In fact, some research has shown that when we're left alone with our thoughts, some of us will even choose to give ourselves painful electric shocks to distract ourselves.
- viii. So learning to manage this "default-mode" may be one of the most consequential skills we could ever learn.
 1. Source: Qin, P., & Northoff, G. (2011). How is our self-related to midline regions and the default-mode network? *NeuroImage*, 57(3), 1221–33.
 2. Raichle, M. E., & Snyder, A. Z. (2007). A default mode of brain function: a brief history of an evolving idea. *NeuroImage*, 37(4), 1083–90; discussion 1097–9.

2. Week 2: The third option

a. Contemplative principle: Stepping out of the river

- i. Thoughts and emotions are so pervasive in our lives that we often don't even notice they're present. They are so close to us that we can't see them, like glasses that we never take off.
- ii. When this happens, our thoughts and emotions become fused with our sense of self. When we have angry thoughts and feelings, we *are* the anger. There's no separation between us and our feelings. Similarly, when we have anxiety or depression, or even more ordinary feelings like restlessness or a lack of inspiration or enthusiasm, these thoughts and feelings color our experience.

- iii. On our journey, we can think of this as getting swept away by a river. The river might be turbulent at times and calm and meandering at others, but so long as we are caught in the current, we go wherever the river takes us. Eventually, being swept up in our thoughts and feelings becomes so familiar that the idea of stepping out of the river may not even occur to us, almost as though we're completely submerged in the river and can't even see outside our immediate surroundings.
- iv. At time, our thoughts and feelings feel like our worst enemy. We can't stand our old patterns, but yet we feel powerless to stop them. We might notice that these patterns are getting us into trouble. Maybe they're making it difficult to create or maintain healthy relationships, or to stay focused at work. Maybe they even create health problems. But still, the power of habit keeps us caught in their flow.
- v. In this case, it's as though we've popped our head above water. We can see that we're caught up in a raging torrent, but the current is so strong that we don't know how to get to the shore.
- vi. At this point, our efforts to make the voice in our head shut off or to distract ourselves from our problems don't help. It's as though we try relentlessly to swim upstream. This only serves to wear us out, and leaves us with even less capacity to work with our challenging thoughts and emotions.
- vii. This month, we're learning a third option. What we do is change the relationship to our patterns by exploring the experience of thoughts and emotions. We're not getting caught up in our old habits or indulging them, but neither are we fighting them, repressing them, or trying to distract ourselves and hope that they'll disappear.
- viii. The practice of this builds on the skills we've been learning over the past few months. We use these experiences as a support for mindfulness in the same way that we use the breath or sound.
- ix. The key here is that we don't try to change thoughts and emotions, or make them stop. In fact, for these practices we *need* them.
- x. Although it might seem improbable, we can feel a sense of inner calm even when thoughts and emotions are raging on the surface of the mind. This takes practice, but it is a skill, just like the ability to notice when the mind gets distracted.

- xi. Strengthening this skill has the potential to impact many aspects of your life: your ability to build caring relationships, to recognize and cultivate your strengths, and to feel resilient, confident, and capable of managing your own mind and emotions.

e. Contemplative practice: Observing thoughts

- i. First, begin by reflecting on the benefits of cultivating a healthy mind. Remind yourself of all the ways that learning to be more mindful and attentive can help you to maintain caring relationships and to be creative and resilient. Take a moment to inspire yourself and reaffirm your commitment to practicing these skills.
- ii. Second, set a clear intention: I am going to practice being mindful and attentive today, and as a step in that direction I'm going to devote the next ten minutes to strengthening these qualities.
- iii. Today I'll introduce you to the practice of using thoughts and emotions as a support for mindfulness.
- iv. Start by bringing awareness to your posture. Sit in an upright, relaxed position, and then take a few deep breaths, relaxing as you exhale.
- v. Now let your breath return to normal. Bring a light awareness to the breath for a few moments.
- vi. As you breathe out, let your body and mind relax. For the next minute or so, tune in to the exhalation, relaxing and opening each time you breathe out.
- vii. As you breathe in and out, notice the quality of your mind. Are thoughts occurring, or is the mind calm? If thoughts are present, gently notice them, rest your awareness on them as you would on the movements of the breath.
- viii. The point here is not to stop or even change your thoughts. In fact, for this practice, you need thoughts. The point is to be aware of them as they come and go. To practice stepping out of the stream and observing the flow of thoughts.
- ix. You will probably slip back into the stream after a few moments. That's natural. Or maybe thoughts disappear when you stop to observe them. No problem. Just rest in mindful awareness and let your thoughts come and go naturally.

- x. Let's end with a few moments of resting in open awareness. You don't need to pay attention to your thoughts, to the breath, or to anything else. Release your attention and rest, without controlling the mind in any way. Just sit.
- xi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice by noticing whatever thoughts are present. You can practice this wherever you are, and no matter what you are doing. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

b. Scientific principle: Mindfulness and the default-mode network

- i. Last week we learned a bit about the brain's "default-mode" and especially how the brain doesn't shut off when it has nothing to do, but instead is very active; it's busy keeping the body functioning, but it also keeps the mind turning with thoughts, most of them about everyone's favorite subject: themselves.
- ii. Over the past decade we've also been checking to see if we can change this default-mode, and so far the evidence suggests that we can.
- iii. Mindfulness practices, like the practices you've been doing every day, literally rewire the brain. They form connections between this default-mode and areas of the brain that are associated with heightened awareness – or what scientists call "meta-awareness" – and also areas associated with the regulation of emotion and behavior.
- iv. We still have a lot to learn about mental training and the brain's many complex networks, but the basic principle of neuro-plasticity is cause for hope. But the responsibility is ours. When we take this innate potential of the brain and use it as a basis to nurture our capacity to be aware and attentive, to feel empathy and compassion, and to strengthen our sense of purpose in life, then neuroplasticity becomes our greatest ally, and we can change the wiring of our brain so that these peak states become our "default-mode."
 1. Source: Brewer, J. a, Worhunsky, P. D., Gray, J. R., Tang, Y.-Y., Weber, J., & Kober, H. (2011). Meditation experience is associated with differences in default mode network activity and connectivity. *Proceedings of the National*

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3. Jang, J. H., Jung, W. H., Kang, D.-H., Byun, M. S., Kwon, S. J., Choi, C.-H., & Kwon, J. S. (2011). Increased default mode network connectivity associated with meditation. *Neuroscience Letters*, 487(3), 358–62.

3. Week 3: Exploring emotion

a. Contemplative principle: Exploring emotion

- i. Powerful emotions have a way of appearing very solid and real. We get so caught up in our reactions that the story and feelings that comprise the emotion seem to be a completely accurate depiction of the way things really are.
- ii. We use terms like “fear” and “anger,” or even “stress,” it sounds like an emotion is a simple experience, but when we step back and observe what’s going on, we see that emotions are quite complex.
- iii. Every emotion has different ingredients, but generally we can usually find a particular story or narrative that is playing in the mind comprised of mental words and imagery, sensations in the body, and a general feeling tone. The “feeling tone” is like the “flavor” of the experience and refers to whether we find these thoughts and bodily sensations pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
- iv. When we are caught up in a thought or emotion, we don’t see all of these parts at all. They become the filter or the lens through which we view experience.
- v. We don’t see these parts when we are fighting or trying to repress thoughts and feelings either. At those times, they appear very solid and monolithic, like a formidable enemy that we couldn’t possibly defeat.
- vi. When we see all these parts, we are grounded in mindful awareness. That grounding in awareness gives us a sense of inner steadiness that helps us to see that we don’t need to be overpowered by our emotions, nor do we need to fight them. This

gives us a sense of confidence. We feel fully in charge of our inner world.

- vii. Along with this confidence comes curiosity. We start to see the beauty and creative energy of our thoughts and feelings.
- viii. Similarly, when we're caught in the flow of the river, we have no perspective. All we feel is out of control. But once we're able to step out of the river we can appreciate its beauty. We can see the dynamic force of raging rapids and calm strength of a large river.
- ix. Stepping out of the river takes time. At first, it may be difficult to get our head above water. But eventually it becomes easier and easier, until eventually we can not only tolerate, but even appreciate our most difficult thoughts and challenging emotions.

f. Contemplative practice: Exploring emotions

- i. Last week we focused on bringing awareness to the flow of thoughts that is continually moving through the mind. This week we'll explore the world of emotion. Sometimes emotions are powerful and impossible not to notice. At other times, they may be a subtle movement toward some things and away from others. Let's get started.
- ii. First, begin by reflecting on the benefits of cultivating a healthy mind. Remind yourself of all the ways that learning to be more mindful and attentive can help you to maintain caring relationships and to be creative and resilient. Take a moment to inspire yourself and reaffirm your commitment to practicing these skills.
- iii. Second, set a clear intention: I am going to practice being mindful and attentive today, and as a step in that direction I'm going to devote the next ten minutes to strengthening these qualities.
- iv. Today we'll practice resting awareness on emotions, not to change our emotions – even those we don't like – but rather to change the way we relate to our emotions. What you'll find is that you can experience inner calm even in the midst of turbulent emotions.
- v. But this takes time, so for now, it's best to avoid doing this practice when you are in the midst of an emotional upheaval. Start with something more manageable, like a minor upset or

annoyance. And if you aren't feeling particularly emotional at the moment, that's fine too.

- vi. Start by bringing awareness to your posture. Sit in an upright, relaxed position, and then take a few deep breaths, relaxing as you exhale.
- vii. Now let your breath return to normal. Bring a light awareness to the breath for a few moments.
- viii. As you breathe out, let your body and mind relax. For the next minute or so, tune in to the exhalation, relaxing and opening each time you breathe out.
- ix. As you breathe in and out, notice any feelings or emotions that are present. What does it feel like in the body? Is it a pleasant feeling? Unpleasant? Neutral? Simply notice whatever feelings are present in the body and let them remain in your awareness, like a sound or the breath.
- x. Now check in on the mind. Are there any thoughts associated with the feelings that are present? Are they words? Images? Are they pleasant or unpleasant? Again, no need to stop or change what's happening in the body or mind, just notice it.
- xi. You'll probably notice that it's easy to get caught up in the storyline that accompanies emotions and feelings. That's completely natural. When you experience a flash of awareness in the midst of that storyline, even if it's only a fleeting moment, rejoice. That's a sign that you are beginning to transform your relationship to thoughts and emotions. Those moments are like drops of water, one day they'll form a small stream, and eventually a powerful river.
- xii. Let's end with a few moments of resting in open awareness. You don't need to pay attention to your thoughts, to the breath, or to anything else. Release your attention and rest, without controlling the mind in any way. Just sit.
- xiii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice by noticing whatever thoughts and emotions are present. You can practice this wherever you are, and no matter what you are doing. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

b. Scientific principle: Emotion regulation and the brain

- i. A few decades back, there was very little research on the emotional life of the brain. Emotions were portrayed as villains, as obstacles to rational thought. And consequently, there was not much interest in studying emotions and the brain for some time.
- ii. Science eventually came to realize what we all know. Emotions are a big part of who and what we are as humans. Relationships would be hollow if we could not feel empathy and compassion. Flashes of creativity and insight are experienced as a rush of exhilaration, and challenging emotions like fear and aversion serve useful purposes and even help us survive.
- iii. Unfortunately, we get precious little training when it comes to managing our emotions, and the result of this lack of training is that it often feels as though our emotions are in the driver's seat, not us.
- iv. Thought it may not be obvious, it turns out that the emotions are being regulated all the time. Sometimes we regulate our emotions on purpose, and at other times this happens naturally. This spontaneous regulation of emotion happens when our body and mind returns to baseline, even when we do nothing to make this happen.
- v. As a scientist, I've been fascinated by what happens in the brain when we experience emotions. There is still much we do not understand, but the science has come a long way. One important finding is that there are circuits in the brain that correspond to our ability to manage emotions effectively. When we struggle with powerful emotions, these circuits are not as strong, and become disconnected from emotional centers in the brain. When we are resilient and able to cope effectively with change and adversity, these circuits grow stronger and more connected to regions associated with emotions.
- vi. Another finding corresponds to positive emotions. In the same way that there are networks associated with difficult emotions like fear and anxiety, there are circuits linked to pleasure, happiness, and positive emotions like compassion. These circuits can become inhibited when we experience depression anxiety, or changed for the worse through addiction.
- vii. The next scientific frontier is to explore how practices like the ones you are learning not only help us to regulate destructive emotions, but also to savor healthy emotions. So keep at it. Every step you take is helping us understand the nature of emotion and how we

can strengthen the natural capacities of the mind and brain for the better.

1. Source: Davidson, R. J., Jackson, D. C., & Kalin, N. H. (2000). Emotion, plasticity, context, and regulation: Perspectives from affective neuroscience. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126(6), 890–909.
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4. Week 4: Inner freedom

a. Contemplative principle: Inner freedom

- i. Now that we're a few weeks into our exploration of thoughts and emotions, I bet you've noticed an experience that may have bothered you before, but somehow lost its "charge" even though you found yourself in a similar situation.
- ii. I remember when I first began practicing this skill and how challenging it was to not get caught up in my thoughts and emotions. I also remember moments when I started to glimpse a new relationship with my feelings, when the struggle with my own mind eased up a bit and I saw that I could experience the calm clarity of awareness even when my mind was going nuts.
- iii. This is true inner freedom. The ability to manage thoughts and emotions without being ruled by them; the capacity to remain fully present and aware when the mind reacts, and to make a conscious decision about whether to act; the skill of recognizing and strengthening the best parts of oneself, and letting unhealthy habits of heart and mind fade away from disuse.
- iv. Experiencing this is not rocket science. It just takes practice. And the tools we need are the ones we already have: mindfulness, the ability to direct and sustain our attention, and the skill of letting go and resting in a state of effortless presence.

- v. Here we're taking these simple skills and applying them to thoughts and emotions. In a sense, the practice is really no different than resting awareness on the breath. We bring awareness to the flow of thoughts, to the sensations in the body, and to our reactions to what we think, feel, and perceive. That's it. When we slip into the river, as we will many times, we make our way to shore and try it all over again. Eventually, being out of the river will feel as familiar as being in the river feels now.
- vi. But while finding our way out of the river is simple, it is not always easy, especially with the currents that we've been stuck in for years, or even decades. But every river has currents, and old patterns are just habits. And the beauty of habits is that they were learned, and anything that can be learned, can be unlearned.
- vii. My experience with this process was that moments of awareness first began to occur after I got caught. Sometimes it would be a few hours, or a few days, after I got triggered by a familiar thought or feeling that I realized what had happened. Gradually, those moments of awareness got closer to the period that I was triggered, to the point that I recognized my reactions right after they happened. And eventually, flashes of awareness would happen when I was still reactive. I would notice that the mind was spinning with some thought, or a familiar emotional reaction had taken hold. It doesn't happen overnight, but once you've worked on this skill you can see the conditions that lead to habitual reactions before the reaction occurs, so you're ready for it. When that happens, you can greet the reaction like an old friend. It won't knock you off balance, and you won't need to go to war with your own mind to get it out of your system. That's what we mean by inner freedom, and it's possible for all of us.

g. Contemplative practice: Relaxing with the flow + observing feelings

- i. Great work on getting this far. This week we'll continue with the practice of resting awareness on the shifting landscape of thoughts and emotions.
- ii. Let's begin by reflecting on the benefits of cultivating a healthy mind. Remind yourself of all the ways that learning to be more mindful and attentive can help you to maintain caring relationships and to be creative and resilient. Take a moment to

inspire yourself and reaffirm your commitment to practicing these skills.

- iii. Second, set a clear intention: I am going to practice being mindful and attentive today, and as a step in that direction I'm going to devote the next ten minutes to strengthening these qualities.
- iv. Start by bringing awareness to your posture. Sit in an upright, relaxed position, and then take a few deep breaths, relaxing as you exhale.
- v. Now let your breath return to normal. Bring a light awareness to the breath for a few moments.
- vi. As you breathe out, let your body and mind relax. For the next minute or so, tune in to the exhalation, relaxing and opening each time you breathe out.
- vii. Now, stay connected to the breath, but with a very light touch of awareness, just enough to keep yourself grounded in the present moment.
- viii. As you breathe, bring awareness to whatever thoughts and feelings are present. Do this for a few moments at a time. Rest awareness on the breath, then notice whatever thoughts and feelings are present, and then back to the breath.
- ix. Remember, we're not trying to change anything. Bring awareness to thoughts and feelings just like you would notice a sound. In that simple act of noticing, you are out of the river. There's nothing more to it than that.
- x. Let's end with a few moments of resting in open awareness. You don't need to pay attention to your thoughts, to the breath, or to anything else. Release your attention and rest, without controlling the mind in any way. Just sit.
- xi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice by noticing whatever thoughts and feelings are present. You can practice this wherever you are, and no matter what you are doing. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

b. Scientific principle: Mindful emotion regulation + decentering

- i. Last week we learned a bit about emotions and the brain, and especially how there are distinct circuits in the brain tied to positive emotions, destructive emotions, and also brain networks associated with the regulation of emotion.
- ii. This week I'll tell you about the role that mindfulness plays in helping us to manage difficult emotions and to savor positive feelings.
- iii. Have you noticed how the practices you've been learning help you to be aware of what you are thinking and feeling in the present moment? In scientific terms, this capacity to see a thought as a thought, as opposed to experiencing it as an accurate depiction of reality, is what we call decentering.
- iv. It turns out that this is a pretty important skill. When we are caught up in our thoughts, we take them to be true. There's no sense of separation between our sense of self and what we are thinking or feeling. And because there is no separation, no capacity to step back and observe what is happening in our own mind, we lose the capacity to regulate our thoughts and emotions.
- v. Decentering is a central feature of mindfulness and one of the reasons that mindfulness is so important for well-being.
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Appendix 4

Content Outline for Module 2 of the Healthy Minds
Program

Program Script Outlines - Module 2: A Sense of Purpose

Month 4 – Potential of the Mind

Summary: The assumption many of us bring into the world is that we are missing something important. It's not always clear what that something is, but there is a nagging sense that our relationships should be better, our health or body should be different, we should be more successful, and on and on. This sense of lack drives many of our behaviors, and some of the time the best we can do is distract ourselves so we don't have to feel this hole in our life. This month we'll explore our experience to uncover qualities of the mind that help us to feel a sense of contentment and purpose that do not depend on external circumstances. Along the way, we'll learn to clarify our mostly deeply held values and how we can integrate them at work, in relationships, and in the midst of the ups and downs of everyday life.

1. Week 1: Positive outlook

a. Contemplative principle: Noticing the positive

- i. One way of thinking about cultivating a healthy mind is to assume that we lack certain qualities, and therefore that to cultivate a healthy mind we need to acquire or develop these qualities. This is not the approach we're taking here.
- ii. Our starting point is the assumption that we already have the qualities that constitute a healthy mind. That certainly sounds like a nice idea, but why, you may ask, do we need to train the mind if it already has these qualities? And why are not already flourishing if this is the case? The reason is this: Although we may have these qualities, we don't recognize them. And in not recognizing them, we start seeking fulfillment, meaning, connection, and inspiration outside ourselves – in our relationships and jobs, in our wealth and status, or even in chasing after experiences and "highs" in various forms.
- iii. Think of it like this: If we had a million dollars, it wouldn't do us a bit of good if it was buried in our back yard and we didn't know that we had it. We might do all sorts of things to earn money and secure a livelihood, even working two jobs and straining our relationships and other areas of our life. From the perspective of someone who knows about our buried treasure, all this effort would seem insane, but from our perspective it would seem very logical, even though our efforts were creating suffering and hardship.

- iv. Like our example, the problem is not that we don't have all the ingredients of a healthy mind. The problem is that we haven't known how to find them, or even that we should look. The world around us tells us continually that we should search outside ourselves to be happy, that we should look to our wealth and status, to our relationships, or to other things to feel as though our life has meaning.
- v. Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting that our relationships and work are not meaningful, or that we shouldn't find them fulfilling. I'm suggesting that there is a source of inner wealth that we rarely tap into, and that when we do, it brings even more meaning and fulfillment to the rest of our lives, and when the outside world doesn't meet our expectations, we can work with the ups and downs of life like a champion swimmer swimming in turbulent waters.
- vi. So here's the plan: We're going to shift our perspective and see what we can find within. You don't have to believe a word of what I'm saying. In fact, as a scientist, I'd rather you didn't. But I would like to ask that you are open to looking. We'll go through this together and see what we discover.
- vii. Here are the questions that will guide our exploration: Can we find lasting contentment and inner peace by simply noticing qualities of our own mind? Can we find a source of purpose and inspiration that isn't dependent on what we're doing or who we're with? Can we sow the seeds of healthy connections and flourishing relationships by nurturing some simple skills that we are already familiar with? For now, we don't need to answer these questions. We'll let hands on experience will give us the answers.
- viii. This month we're going to begin the process of exploring the mind to see if we can uncover the most essential qualities for well-being, and in noticing them – like finding a treasure trove in our own attic – we can experience the wealth we've had all along.

b. Contemplative principle: Home base

- i. So what is this "inner wealth" that we're talking about? It probably sounds a bit hokey, or new agey. What we're talking about is actually quite ordinary. These are simple qualities of experience that are with us all the time. The first is the one that you are hopefully quite familiar with by now: awareness. In the following weeks, we'll also see how the seeds of healthy connections with

others are also present in each moment of experience, and how we can also see wisdom and deep understanding as natural capacities that we all have.

- ii. Our exploration begins with awareness. Over the past few months, we've learned some important things about the mind. Hopefully you've seen how mindfulness, the heightened awareness of what you are thinking, feeling, or perceiving, not only feels good, but gives us a range of options that aren't present when we are caught up in what we're doing or what we're thinking and feeling. And you've also worked with basic attentional skills like directing attention, noticing the pull of distractions, and ability to let go and relax attentional focus. These are not mystical experiences. These are simple functions of the mind that we are using all the time, but that usually are operating behind the scenes.
- iii. Once we recognize the importance of mindfulness and attention, it's like discovering a trove of treasure in our back yard. And this is a crucial discovery when it comes to well-being, because this is the one that gives us the tools and resources to search for the rest of our treasure. Without it, we might want to keep looking, but our mind will be so distracted or unstable that we won't get very far, and even if we find something, it will get lost again, buried in the busy-ness of the mind.
- iv. So what is it about awareness that is so important? Well, the first quality that we discover with awareness is that awareness itself is calm and steady. The stuff that we're aware of...well, that can get pretty crazy, but awareness itself is just there. It doesn't matter if we have the most depressing, bleak thought or feeling, or a moment of profound inspiration. Awareness is awareness. It doesn't get better with the nice feeling or worse in our dark moments.
- v. When we're in touch with awareness, we are naturally less caught up in all the experiences that are passing through awareness. When it feels like life is a roller coaster, we're caught up in what's happening in the mind. When we're resting in awareness, the chaos of life is just the surface. It's there, but we can still feel a sense of inner stillness and equanimity.
- vi. You may have gotten a glimpse of this in your practice over the past few months, or maybe when you've been practicing in daily life. What we start to see is that we can feel a sense of fundamental okay-ness, a sense that at our core, we are basically whole and complete.

- vii. We can experience this feeling of basic okay-ness when things are going well, and also in the face of adversity. When things are going our way, we can bring a deeper sense of appreciation to bear on our experience and savor the moment, and when things get tough, we can stay centered, so that our response to adversity is based on clear seeing and care, rather than blind reactivity.
- viii. Unfortunately, there's a catch: While we have this natural capacity to be mindful, attentive, and awake for our life, we also have the capacity – and perhaps even a strong tendency – to be unaware. To lose sight of this most essential quality of our being, and to then live life on the basis of our habits and conditioning. And we know how that feels. We know what it's like when our old habits and cultural condition are running the show.
- ix. The key point is that feeling truly at home in our lives, in our body, in our mind, and with our feelings and emotions, arises naturally the more we stay connected to awareness. And since awareness is always present, this option is always with us, no matter how crazy the world is, or even how crazy our own mind is. Over time, awareness will be so familiar to you that it will feel like your true home, and when you feel at home within yourself, you will feel at home in the world, in your relationships, and at work.

h. Contemplative practice: The gap between breaths

- i. Welcome back. Great to see that you've made it to the second stage of our journey. As we move along the path, we're not abandoning the practices we learned before, but building on them, so from here on we will continue to work with mindfulness and attention, but adding in some new elements.
- ii. Before we start, take a few moments to reflect on the benefits of cultivating a healthy mind. Remind yourself of all the ways that learning to be more mindful and attentive can help you to maintain caring relationships and to be creative and resilient. Take a moment to inspire yourself and reaffirm your commitment to practicing these skills.
- iii. Next, set a clear intention: I am going to practice staying connected to awareness today, and as a step in that direction I'm going to devote the next ten minutes to exploring the mind.

- iv. As always, start by bringing awareness to your posture. Sit in an upright, relaxed position, and then take a few deep breaths, relaxing as you exhale.
- v. Now let your breath return to normal. Bring a light awareness to the breath for a few moments.
- vi. As you breathe out, let your body and mind relax. For the next minute or so, tune in to the exhalation, relaxing and opening each time you breathe out.
- vii. Notice what happens at the end of each exhalation. Do you notice a short pause, or gap, before you breathe in again? Rest in that gap for a few moments. As you breathe out, let go and relax, and at the end of the out breath, just rest naturally.
- viii. In this short gap, there is nothing but awareness. It's very simple, very ordinary, yet quite profound at the same time. Just rest in this open space of awareness for a few moments between breaths and notice what it feels like.
- ix. You don't need to make anything happen. Don't worry about concentrating or focusing. This is not a practice of doing, but of letting go. Give yourself permission to simply be for a few moments.
- x. Let's end with a few moments of resting in open awareness. You don't need to pay attention to your thoughts, to the breath, or to anything else. Release your attention and rest, without controlling the mind in any way. Just sit.
- x. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice by tuning into awareness – using the breath if you find it helpful – whenever you can. You can practice this wherever you are, and no matter what you are doing. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

c. Scientific principle: Psychological well-being – self-acceptance

- i. Self-acceptance is a central quality of a healthy mind. Sense of self-acceptance doesn't mean that we don't acknowledge our shortcomings, or that we aren't interested in growth and learning. Rather, self-acceptance means that we have a positive attitude about our self, warts and all. We recognize that there we all have many different qualities, and no one character attribute or life

experience defines us – good or bad. When we lack self-acceptance, we often feel disappointed with ourselves and with our lives. We wish we were different, and feel trapped by our life and circumstances.

1. Source: Ryff, C. D. (2014). Psychological well-being revisited: advances in the science and practice of eudaimonia. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 83(1), 10–28. <http://doi.org/10.1159/000353263>

2. Week 2: Kindness and care

a. Contemplative principle: The seeds of kindness

- i. Once we're familiar with awareness we can start to explore the mind in more depth. Exploring experience in this way is fascinating. If we go back to our metaphor of the journey, and we think of awareness – including mindfulness and attention – as our flashlight, it should immediately become apparent that where we point our flashlight will change how we experience the journey. If we only point our flashlight at things we don't like – like a muddy path or a big hill we have to climb – then our delightful trip will quickly become a tiresome burden. And if we shine our light on the things that terrify us – like the animals and insects lurking in the forest, or dangerous cliffs and other hazards – then we will feel overwhelmed and anxious. So you can think of what we're doing now is focusing on the beauty of our surroundings. The things that will inspire us and keep us going, so that when we do notice a big hill or a dangerous creature, we can do what we need to do, but without getting overwhelmed.
- ii. Last week we continued our journey of getting to know awareness. Awareness is the most essential aspect of our experience to grow familiar with, because the more we are able to remain mindful and attentive, the easier it is to notice and strengthen other qualities of our mind.
- iii. Once you start to get familiar with awareness – once you know what it feels like to be fully present and attentive to what is going on within you and around you – you may notice a continuous movement that occurs in the mind. In response to what happens in life, we tend to move toward some things and away from others. There are some things that we intuitively think will bring us happiness, comfort, contentment, and security, and there are

others that we perceive as threats, as obstacles to our well-being and impediments to our happiness.

- iv. These tendencies are so pervasive in life that we hardly notice them. If we boil it down, it's very simple: We want to be happy, and we don't want to suffer.
- v. We may not always act skillfully, and a lot of the time it probably seems like the things we do – or that we see others doing – actually lead away from happiness, not toward it. But in the moment, we often assume that all these things we do will lead us to a moment of contentment, or away from hardship.
- vi. Even right now, listening to me, is a reflection of this desire. If you didn't think that this program would lead to more peace of mind, more contentment, or more creativity and inspiration, would you take the time to do this? Probably not.
- vii. As strange as it may sound, these movements in the mind are the seeds of kindness and caring connections. Kindness – in its most essential form – is simply the movement toward happiness. That movement might be for ourselves, for another person, or an expansive feeling of kindness directed toward everyone, but the movement is the same. It's the movement toward happiness, like a cat finding a warm place in the sun.
- viii. And the impulse to care, to feel empathy and compassion, is the movement away from suffering and distress. Again, we might want to experience that for ourselves, or maybe we see another person having a hard time and want the best for them, or even for everyone. The movement is the simple expression of wanting to be free from suffering.
- ix. Like awareness, these basic impulses are present all the time. Even in our darkest moments, there is still a movement toward what we think will bring happiness and away from perceived threats and problems. The trick here is to recognize the wholesome roots of these experiences, and not to get lost in their expression.
- x. When we tune into experience in this way, we are in touch with an inexhaustible source of kindness and compassion. And again, like coming back to awareness wherever we are and no matter what we're doing, we can begin to notice these impulses in ourselves, in others, and in the world around us, and so doing, allow our potential for truly caring for ourselves and the world to come to fruition.

i. Contemplative practice: Seeds of kindness

- i. One of the interesting things about awareness is that when we are fully present and aware of what's happening in the mind, we start to notice things that seem pretty obvious, but that we were completely oblivious to before. Our practice this week will focus on paying attention to our natural desires to experience pleasure and happiness and to avoid discomfort and suffering. Let's get started.
- ii. Take a few moments to reflect on the benefits of cultivating a healthy mind. You should be pretty used to this by now, so recall whatever inspires you and the things you've found helpful about the journey we're on.
- iii. Next, set a clear intention: Today I am going to recognize my capacity to be kind and caring, and as a step in that direction I'm going to devote the next ten minutes to exploring these qualities.
- iv. As always, start by bringing awareness to your posture. Sit in an upright, relaxed position, and then take a few deep breaths, relaxing as you exhale.
- v. Now let your breath return to normal. Bring a light awareness to the breath for a few moments.
- vi. As you breathe out, let your body and mind relax, and resting for a moment or two in the short gap between breaths.
- vii. Notice the state of your own mind right now. Are you feeling calm and peaceful? Restless and agitated? Are there lots of thoughts, or is the body uncomfortable? Simply notice what's going on in your mind and body right now.
- viii. Now notice the tendency to move away from unpleasant experiences, or to stay connected to pleasant ones. Or, if your experience feels neutral, how the mind itself goes into a holding pattern without reacting one way or the other.
- ix. The movement toward what we associate with comfort, contentment and pleasure is kindness in its most basic form. Can you see this in your experience right now? When we move toward something, it is an expression of care, of wanting the best for ourselves. Just notice that. There's no need to change or alter your experience in any way.

- x. The movement away from the things we don't like is compassion, care. We don't want to suffer or experience pain. We want to be free from hardship. Again, simply notice this. No need to change anything or make something happen.
- xi. These simple movements of the mind are kindness and compassion. Now let's extend this wish to be content and free from hardship to someone else. Bring to mind someone that naturally elicits a feeling of warmth and affection. It could be a friend, a parent or child, or even a pet. Feel their presence and the connection you share. Feel a palpable sense of warmth, and think to yourself: "May you be content and free from hardship. May you be content and free from hardship. May you be content and free from hardship." Repeat this in your mind for the next minute or so while holding their presence in your mind.
- xii. Now you can drop the contemplation and rest naturally. How do you feel? What thoughts and emotions are present? Notice any change that has happened in your body or mind.
- xiii. Let's end with a few moments of resting in open awareness. You don't need to pay attention to your thoughts, to the breath, or to anything else. Release your attention and rest, without controlling the mind in any way. Just sit.
- xi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice by noticing the seeds of kindness and compassion, and extending your concern to others, whenever you can. You can practice this wherever you are, and no matter what you are doing. The more you do it, the easier it gets.

b. Scientific principle: Psychological well-being – positive relations with others

- i. It won't come as a surprise to anyone that the quality of our relationships with others is one of the single most important aspects of well-being, and so the qualities of mind that help us to make and sustain healthy connections are incredibly important.
- ii. When we feel positive connections, our relationships are trusting. We feel able to give and to care with an open heart, and we also feel cared for.

- iii. When our relationships with others are troubled, it is very difficult to feel content, especially when find it challenging to trust or be trusted, to care and to be cared for. Without healthy connections, it is easy to feel isolated, and to withdraw to the point where genuine connections are not an option.
- iv. The good news is that the qualities that lead to healthy connections are already present in our minds. From the time we come into this world, we are complex creatures. Infants, like adults, display a range of emotions and behaviors. Among the many qualities we see in babies, we notice very early on that humans possess an innate capacity to express kindness and concern. Even tiny infants show caring behavior, and when we observe their behavior, we can see that they prefer seeing compassionate behavior to actions that are unkind.
- v. Yet although we have this natural capacity from the time we are born, it needs to be nurtured. Without the right circumstances, our capacity for healthy connections can become dormant, and in its place, the tendency to act selfishly, or even maliciously, can take its place.
 1. Source: Ryff, C. D. (2014). Psychological well-being revisited: advances in the science and practice of eudaimonia. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 83(1), 10–28.

3. Week 3: Wisdom

a. Contemplative principle: The inner voice of wisdom

- i. So far, our journey has introduced us to awareness, showing us how ease and contentment can be experienced even in the midst of adversity. Last week we learned to find the seeds of kindness and care in the basic impulses to seek happiness and avoid suffering. This week we'll continue our exploration by noticing the voice of wisdom, another ordinary experience that often goes unnoticed.
- ii. Wisdom is a word that sounds a bit trite these days, it may even sound dated or old fashioned. We aspire toward many things in our lives, but somehow the pursuit of wisdom now seems antiquated, and often we don't even know what the word means.
- iii. Wisdom is not knowledge. It's not knowing about stuff, or being able to explain profound topics. It's not intelligence either. We

certainly have plenty examples of people who are extremely intelligent but who seem to lack basic common sense, forget about wisdom. So what is wisdom? Out of curiosity, I checked the dictionary and found an interesting definition. It defined wisdom as the ability to discern inner qualities and relationships, and the accumulated knowledge gained through experience.

- iv. So wisdom is not knowing about stuff, but knowing about life. It is the intuitive knowing that comes from having looked deeply and lived fully. And when we embody wisdom, there is a sense that we really “get” life. We know what’s important. We understand how the mind works, how relationships unfold, and are able to discern right from wrong and act accordingly. We know how to laugh and enjoy the small things without losing sight of the big things. And all this comes from our own experience, not from memorizing theories and learning concepts.
- v. Wisdom has many angles. One of the most important is our sense of right and wrong. We’re taught this as kids, and it seems so elementary that it’s almost embarrassing to think that we might need to revisit this childhood lesson, but it is a key element of our journey, so bear with me.
- vi. When I talk about right and wrong, I’m not talking about some cosmic principle. I don’t mean right with a capital “R” and wrong with a capital “W.” By right, I simply mean things we think, say, or do that lead toward happiness and contentment, for ourselves and for others, and wrong, conversely, is that which leads away from lasting well-being and toward suffering and states of discontent.
- vii. So how do we discern right from wrong? Do we need to rule book to tell us? Do we have to think through the problem to figure it out? At times an issue might be really complex and require a lot of thinking and consideration, but for most issues, we usually know the answer.
- viii. The challenge we often face is not whether or not we know the right course of action, it’s whether or not we listen to our own voice of wisdom. This is especially difficult when a choice might mean letting go of a short-term fix of pleasure in the service of a more nebulous long term movement toward purpose and healthy connection. But usually we know.
- ix. Like the movement toward happiness and away from suffering, this subtle voice is with us as a steady companion. When we move toward happiness, sometimes we choose the wrong path, one that

leads us away from happiness, not toward it, but if we're honest with ourselves, we actually know in our heart of hearts that we're on the wrong path. And sometimes the right path involves difficulty and hardship, yet we know that we're on the right track, even if our present moment experience may be unpleasant.

- x. Let's take a simple example: We've all had moments with a friend or loved one that we did or said something that hurt them. Maybe we were so hurt, angry, or frustrated that we couldn't restrain ourselves, but usually the moment we speak or act, we know what we did was not right. Even before we act, a voice is there counseling us to step back, to choose a different path, but in these moments the impulse to act is so strong that it often drowns out the voice of wisdom.
- xi. Like awareness, like the movement toward happiness and away from suffering, this is an aspect of our experience that we can begin to listen to. Hearing that voice, and being able to pay heed to it when we need it most, is a skill, just like learning to drive, or playing an instrument. And since it's a natural quality of our being, we can practice anytime, and anywhere.
- xii. In fact, you're practicing right now. There are many more exciting things you could be doing right now, but here you are, sacrificing short term excitement and pleasure for long term meaning and growth. But I bet that before this you may not have thought about it in quite this way.
- xiii. The key here is not that you are doing something different, but that you recognize what is already happening. In this case, you're recognizing the presence of wisdom, a wisdom that doesn't need to be taught or learned, and one that naturally manifests the more it gets noticed.
- xiv. This is what we'll practice this week, and I'll walk you through it step by step. See you in our next practice.

j. Contemplative practice: Discovering wisdom

- i. This week we're going to switch gears again and make a subtle shift. The home base for our exploration is still awareness, but we'll see if we can tune into the wisdom that is playing out in our experience every moment.

- ii. Take a few moments to reflect on the benefits of cultivating a healthy mind. Recall whatever inspires you and the things you've found helpful about the journey we're on.
- iii. Next, set a clear intention: Today I will notice the presence of wisdom in my experience, and as a step in that direction I'm going to devote the next ten minutes to exploring this quality.
- iv. As always, start by bringing awareness to your posture. Sit in an upright, relaxed position, and then take a few deep breaths, relaxing as you exhale.
- v. Now let your breath return to normal. Bring a light awareness to the breath for a few moments.
- vi. As you breathe out, let your body and mind relax, and resting for a moment or two in the short gap between breaths.
- vii. Notice the state of your own mind right now. Are you feeling calm and peaceful? Restless and agitated? Are there lots of thoughts, or is the body uncomfortable? Simply notice what's going on in your mind and body right now.
- viii. This receptive quality of awareness that you are in touch with right now clears the space for noticing the wisdom of the body, and of the mind. So let's explore that a bit.
- ix. First, notice what's going on in the body. The body is breathing right now...the heart is beating...your eyes are seeing and your ears are hearing. It's amazing that the body automatically does all these things. Take a moment to appreciate this profound wisdom of the body.
- x. You don't need to seek out any special experience here. The key point is to be open and receptive, and see what bubbles to the surface of experience.
- xi. Your mind has its own wisdom. Right now, it hears and understands my words. It generates thoughts and organizes experience so we can navigate the world. Notice all the things the mind does every single moment to make this moment possible.
- xii. Again, rest in an open, receptive state. Whatever happens in the body or in the mind, let it unfold naturally. And notice in that unfolding the natural wisdom of your body and mind.
- xiii. Let's end with a few moments of resting in open awareness. You don't need to pay attention to your thoughts, to the breath, or to

anything else. Release your attention and rest, without controlling the mind in any way. Just sit.

- xv. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. The practice is learning to be receptive to what is happening within and around you, and to notice your ability to discern the right action to take. Notice how the mind – even when drawn to an unhealthy choice – still knows that it’s not the best option, and how it naturally recognizes a path or action that leads in a positive direction.

a. Scientific principle: Psychological well-being - Autonomy

- i. Another ingredient of a healthy mind is what we call “autonomy.” What we mean by this is that we have a strong inner compass. We can think for ourselves and are able to discern when it is time to follow the herd and when we need to chart our own course.
- ii. When have a strong sense of autonomy, we are able to resist social pressures. We may not always do so, but our actions are not driven by what others think, but by our own inner values.
- iii. When this quality becomes diminished, the values and opinions of others sway our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and we judge ourselves by how we think others see us.
 1. Source: Ryff, C. D. (2014). Psychological well-being revisited: advances in the science and practice of eudaimonia. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 83(1), 10–28. <http://doi.org/10.1159/000353263>

4. Week 4: Putting insight into action

a. Contemplative principle: Be the change you want to see in the world

- i. A curious thing happens when we start to notice these qualities. The way we behave naturally starts to shift. It’s almost impossible to snap at someone out of anger when you are fully present and aware. When you notice your desire to be content and free from discomfort – and how often you do things that are not getting you any closer to peace of mind – you can’t help but feel more understanding and empathetic with others, even when they are

acting unskillfully. And when your sense of discernment becomes clear, the right course of action is obvious.

- ii. Here's the thing: When we make a change internally, it naturally shifts the way we are in the world, and that includes how we interact with others, how we spend our time, how we conduct ourselves at work, and how we see ourselves in relation to the world as a whole.
- iii. This relationship between our state of mind and the way we behave is very clear when we think of negative examples. When we're having a really bad day, everything goes wrong. It's almost as though we can't help making a mess of things. We say the wrong thing, we do things that get other people upset, and nothing seems to be worthwhile, interesting, or meaningful. Unhappiness is contagious.
- iv. The same is true of awareness, kindness, and understanding. When you've become familiar with awareness and being mindful and attentive is second nature, you don't have to try to be a good listener. You will already be a good listener. And people will naturally enjoy your presence. You won't have to struggle to stay focused at work, and more importantly, to enjoy what you are doing and to find it meaningful and rewarding.
- v. When you've transformed the way you relate to your own mind, body, thoughts, and emotions, everything else follows quite naturally. Being a good friend, a valued team member, and doing your part to make the world a better place will just happen, because you will already embody the qualities that lead to all this.
- vi. In reflecting on this, I remember a story I heard about Gandhi. You've probably heard the bumper sticker phrase "Become the change you want to see in the world," but you may not know the story behind it. It turns out that this famous saying arose from an interaction Gandhi had with a mother who was worried about her son's sweet tooth. This mother took her son to meet Gandhi one day and asked him to tell her son not to eat sweets anymore. As a father, I admire this woman's optimism that Gandhi would have this much influence over a young boy's behavior, but I'll leave that aside for the moment. Anyhow: When she asked him, he told her to come back a few weeks later. I imagine this would have been pretty annoying for the mother, since she was already there with her son, but she dutifully left and came after two weeks. When she did, Gandhi promptly told the boy to avoid eating too many sweets, as his mother requested. The mother then asked him why he didn't

just tell the boy during their first visit. In response, Gandhi replied, "Because I myself was still eating sweets."

- vii. This simple story from one of the world's great spiritual figures points back to this simple lesson. When we make a change in ourselves, our impact on the world around us naturally follows.

k. Contemplative practice: Awareness in action

- i. This week we'll circle back to the practice we began our month with, since it sets the stage for acting with wisdom and compassion. Let's begin.
- ii. Take a few moments to reflect on the benefits of cultivating a healthy mind and set a clear intention for your practice. These should be pretty familiar by now, so go ahead and do whatever works best for you.
- iii. Next, sit in an upright, relaxed position, and then take a few deep breaths, relaxing as you exhale.
- iv. Now let your breath return to normal. Bring a light awareness to the breath for a few moments.
- v. As you breathe out, let your body and mind relax. For the next minute or so, tune in to the exhalation, relaxing and opening each time you breathe out.
- vi. Tune in to the gap between breaths, and rest there for a few moments. As you breathe out, let go and relax, and at the end of the out breath, just rest naturally.
- vii. In this short gap, there is nothing but awareness. It's very simple, very ordinary, yet quite profound at the same time. Just rest in this open space of awareness for a few moments between breaths and notice what it feels like.
- viii. You don't need to make anything happen. Don't worry about concentrating or focusing. This is not a practice of doing, but of letting go. Give yourself permission to simply be for a few moments.
- ix. This ordinary quality of awareness is always present. This is the basis for connecting fully with others, for insight and creativity, and for engaging the world with an open heart and a clear mind. Let yourself relax and rest in the space. Get to know it deeply and fully.

- x. You don't need to seek out any special experience here. The key point is to be open and receptive, and see what bubbles to the surface of experience.
- xi. Let's end with a few moments of resting in open awareness. You don't need to pay attention to your thoughts, to the breath, or to anything else. Release your attention and rest, without controlling the mind in any way. Just sit.
- viii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day and see if you can find a few specific times to practice. When you do, notice how the simple act of being fully present naturally shifts how you interact with others and how feel as you go about your day.

b. Scientific principle: Psychological well-being – environmental mastery

- i. Another key component of a healthy mind is what we scientists call "environmental mastery." What we mean by this is an attitude of confidence, a confidence that we can manage our lives and affairs, make the best of our circumstances, and find a way of life that suits our values and needs.
- ii. When we lack this quality, we feel overwhelmed and incapable of coping with adversity. We may overlook opportunities and focus on things we lack the ability to control or change.
 - 1. Source: Source: Ryff, C. D. (2014). Psychological well-being revisited: advances in the science and practice of eudaimonia. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 83(1), 10–28. <http://doi.org/10.1159/000353263>

Month 5 – A life worth living

Summary: When we think of the most important periods of our life, they are often times that we felt a deep sense of purpose and meaning, when our pursuits and relationships were aligned with our values and goals. This month, we will explore the qualities of mind that contribute to a healthy sense of purpose in life and sharpen the skills that bolster this quality. In particular, we'll learn how a shift in perspective can help us clarify our most deeply held values and how reflecting on our motivation can keep these values front and center in our life and relationships.

1. Week 1: Inner worth

a. Contemplative principle: The importance of motivation

- i. In all the practices we've done over the past few months, we've focused on setting a clear intention, on clarifying what we plan to do and when we plan to do it. The power of intention setting should be very clear by now. When your intention is vague, like "I'm going to get to the gym more this year," it's hard to form a new habit. But when the intention is focused and specific, "I'm going to work out at 5pm every Tuesday for the next month," it's easier to take action. And when we check in with our progress and reaffirm our intention on daily basis, we begin to form stable habits.
- ii. This month we're going to add a new element to the mix: motivation. If intention is the map that helps us find our way, motivation is like a clear mental image of our destination.
- iii. Said differently, motivation is the "why" and intention is the "how." Intention clarifies what we are going to do, and motivation clarifies why we are doing it.
- iv. We can also think of motivation as our vision, our sense of potential; our vision for ourselves, for our relationships, for our pursuits and work, and for the world. Our motivation points us toward our mostly deeply held values and orients us toward what is possible.
- v. Motivation can apply to many different areas of our life, but here we'll focus on one central question: How do I want to live this life? We're not talking about what we want accomplish or achieve, or what kind of partner or job we want. Here we're talking about inner qualities. What kind of person do I want to be?
- vi. We can think about this in four areas of life: How do I want to be toward myself? How do I want to be when I'm with others? How do

I want to be when I'm at work or following my passions? And how do I want to be as part of this world?

- vii. These are big questions, and ones that most of us think about sporadically, if at all. When we keep them at the front of our mind, we start to feel a greater sense of purpose and meaning, and we relate to our accomplishments and setbacks with a wider perspective and a clear sense of direction.

b. Contemplative principle: Our most important relationship

- i. The most important relationship we have is the one we have with ourselves. If we are harsh and judgmental toward ourselves, it's hard to be open and accepting of others. If we see the worse in ourselves, our view of the world changes and see everyone and everything through the lens of our inner critic.
- ii. If we learn to see the best in ourselves, we can acknowledge our shortcomings and recognize where we have room to grow while retaining a hopeful attitude. And in the same way that a critical attitude colors our relationships with others and the way we view the world, strengthening our capacity to see our strengths and natural abilities transforms the way we engage the rest of our life.
- iii. It's important to note here that I'm not saying that we ignore problems or pretend that challenges don't exist. What I'm proposing is that when we only see the negative, we lose sight of crucial inner resources that give us the strength and creativity to work with difficult situations. And when things are going well, we can savor the moment and continue to strengthen the qualities that help us to be our best.
- iv. So any change we want to make in our lives, whether it's with our relationships, at work, or even with our physical health, has to begin with the mind. If we haven't created the right inner conditions for change to occur, no amount of effort or brute force will bring about enduring change in other areas of our life.

c. Contemplative practice: Discovering inner values

- i. In this practice, we will link the practices of forming an inspired motivation with a clear intention.
- ii. Start by bringing your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.

- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can leave the world a better place than I found it."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to clarify my most deeply held inner values and use them to guide my life."
- v. First, rest for a few minutes in open awareness.
- vi. Now, ask yourself: "If I could take a snap shot of my very best moments, how would I feel? How would I relate to my own body and mind, to my setbacks and struggles, to my life journey?" Identify three simple qualities that capture this, such as "when I'm at my best, I am confident and believe in myself" or "I am in touch with my strengths and accepting of my shortcomings."
- vii. ALTERNATE: Now, ask yourself: "If I were at the end of my life looking back, what kind of person would I like to say I was?" not what did I do or accomplish, but how was I as a person?
- viii. If you had to pick one of these qualities and boil it down to its essence, which is the most inspiring or important to you? Take a moment to reflect on this.
- ix. Congratulations! You've just discovered an important personal value. The quality you picked is your personal north star. Take this quality and form a simple phrase that you can use as a personal mantra. The point of this is to keep this value at the forefront of your mind, both now and in your daily life throughout the week.
- x. Use a positive phrase, such as "I am confident and creative," and repeat it in your mind like a mantra. This has a number of benefits: It strengthens your ability to direct and sustain your attention; it helps you to stay connected to this important personal value; and it shifts your perspective away from other habits of mind that may not serve any constructive purpose in your life.
- xi. Alternate periods of slowly repeating this phrase in your mind, savoring the sounds and feelings that arise, with periods of resting in open awareness. When the mind is very active, repeat the phrase, and when the mind naturally settles, let go and rest in awareness.
- xii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your

day and form the intention to continue your practice. Whenever you remember, bring the inner value to mind and repeat the phrase in your mind or, if you are not able to do that because you are engaged in an intellectually demanding task, keep the value in mind as you proceed with the activity.

d. Contemplative exercise: Inner priorities

- i. For this exercise you'll need a pen and paper, or a journal if you keep one.
- ii. Once you have something to write with, take a few moments to relax and settle the mind.
- iii. Now imagine that you have a year left to live. What would you give up if you only had one year left? What would you let go of in your life, or stop doing? List five things, or write a longer list and narrow it down to five things.
- iv. Now think about what you would do? What would focus on? How would you spend your time? What would you prioritize in your last year? Again, try to come up with five things.
- v. Finally, how would you want to *be* for this last year? What kind of person would you want to be? What values and qualities would you strive to embody? Come up with five points.
- vi. Now reflect on your list. You may not be able to take action on everything, but see if you can find one thing that you actually could give up, one thing that you could do, and one quality that you could learn to embody. Circle these on your list and keep the list somewhere you can see it, or rewrite these three things so you can keep them fresh in your mind.

c. Scientific principle: Psychological well-being - personal growth / growth mindset

- i. Another important quality of a healthy mind is view oneself as growing and developing. In psychology, we refer to this as "personal growth." When we have a sense of personal growth, we are open to new experiences and feel as though we are recognizing and learning to actualize our potential. When we make mistakes and encounter challenges, we learn from them.

- ii. When we lack this quality, we feel stagnant and resist new or unfamiliar experiences. We feel stuck in ways of thinking and acting, even ones we don't like.
- iii. We can see the importance of this principle early on. When kids are taught that their success is due to their effort and that they can learn to develop the skills they need to succeed, they perform better than kids who are told that their achievements are due to their innate abilities.
- iv. This lines up with the principle of neuroplasticity, which indicates that the brain is constantly being shaped by experience, and that our predispositions and genes do not define who we are or what our potential is.
 1. Source: Ryff, C. D. (2014). Psychological well-being revisited: advances in the science and practice of eudaimonia. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 83(1), 10–28.
 2. Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). Mindsets That Promote Resilience: When Students Believe That Personal Characteristics Can Be Developed. *Educational Psychologist*, 47(4), 302–314.

2. Week 2: Making a positive impact on others

a. Contemplative principle: Shifting perspective

- i. Last month we learned that our most basic desires to be happy and to avoid suffering are the basis for healthy connections with others. This week, we'll learn to recognize what we value most when it comes to our relationships with others.
- ii. You may have noticed a common theme in the practices we've been working with in this module. All of these practices have involved a shift in perspective. Sometimes this shift alters how we perceive ourselves. Other practices changed the way we view relationships, or our place in the world.
- iii. This capacity to shift our perspective is a critically important skill when it comes to cultivating a healthy mind.
- iv. We always have a perspective. This perspective is like lens that informs the way we see things. If our lens filters out the positive and magnifies flaws and problems, then our view of ourselves and the world will be hopeless and gloomy. If our lens helps us to see our strengths, or the connections we share with others, then we naturally feel confident and resilient.

- v. Here we're working with two related skills: the capacity to shift our perspective intentionally and the ability to identify the perspectives that will be the most useful in any given situation.
- vi. Next month, we'll practice shifting our perspective to strengthen our connections with others. We do this by practicing seeing things from another person's perspective.
- vii. This month is a little different. At this point we're focusing more on our inner values. Before we can set the stage for healthy connections, we need to know what a healthy connection actually feels like, and for that, we need a different shift of perspective.
- viii. For this perspective shift, we can recall a past experience when we really felt a strong, positive connection with someone else and clarify for ourselves how we were in that situation. The focus here is not on what the other person was saying, thinking, or feeling, but on how we related to the other person, on the qualities we demonstrated in that moment.
- ix. This shift in perspective helps us to see the qualities we have that manifest when we feel positive connections. This simple act of recognizing how we relate to others when we are at our best helps us to strengthen them, to make them as familiar to us as the back of our hand so that they become automatic.

b. Contemplative practice: Discovering interpersonal values

- i. In this practice, we will again link the practices of forming an inspired motivation with a clear intention.
- ii. Start by bringing your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can leave the world a better place than I found it."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to clarify my most deeply held interpersonal values and use them to guide my life."
- v. First, rest for a few minutes in open awareness.
- vi. Now, ask yourself: "When I feel the most connected with others in the best possible way, how am I with the people around me? What

qualities do I demonstrate that foster these positive connections?" Identify three simple qualities that capture this, such as "I try to see things from another's perspective" or "I am kind and caring."

- vii. ALTERNATE: Now, ask yourself: "If I was at the end of my life looking back, what would I like to say about how I treated others? Would I like to say that I was kind? That I treated others with respect? That I brought out the best in others?" Come up with three qualities that reflect your most important inner values regarding relationships.
- viii. If you had to pick one of these qualities, which is the most inspiring or important to you? Take a moment to reflect on this.
- ix. Congratulations! You've just discovered another important value. Like before, you can use the quality you picked as your personal north star. Take this quality and form a simple phrase that you can use as a personal mantra. The point of this is to keep this value at the forefront of your mind, both now and in your daily life throughout the week.
- x. Use a positive phrase, such as "I want the people around me to feel cared for," and repeat this phrase in your mind like a mantra.
- xi. Alternate periods of slowly repeating this phrase in your mind, savoring the sounds and feelings that arise, with periods of resting in open awareness. When the mind is very active, repeat the phrase, and when the mind naturally settles, let go and rest in awareness.
- xii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. Whenever you remember, bring the inner value to mind and repeat the phrase in your mind or, if you are not able to do that because you are engaged in an intellectually demanding task, keep the value in mind as you proceed with the activity.

c. Scientific principle: Generosity and well-being

- i. Caring for others is one of the most powerful ways to bolster well-being. Research has shown that spending money on others rather than ourselves, for instance, leads to greater levels of happiness. The positive effects of giving have even been shown in toddlers, and to affect not only our subjective sense of well-being, but also the brain and the body. These findings suggest that orienting

ourselves to the well-being of others indirectly enhances our own well-being.

1. Source: Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2014). Prosocial Spending and Happiness: Using Money to Benefit Others Pays Off. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(1), 41–47.

3. Week 3: Finding meaning at work

a. Contemplative principle: Finding meaning at work

- i. A huge part of our lives is spent at work. Most of us spend more time working than we do with our friends and family, than we spend enjoying our favorite hobbies and pursuits, and that we spend eating, exercising, or other activities. Only sleep rivals work in terms of the amount of time we devote to it. By the end of our lives, some of us might spend more than 100,000 working.
- ii. Since work is such a huge part of our lives, it's no surprise that life becomes a struggle when we don't find our work meaningful or fulfilling, or when the challenges we face at work seem overwhelming.
- iii. In some cases, the nature of the work might be inherently fulfilling. If we love children and work with kids, our passion can help sustain us through the inevitable ups and downs we face in any profession.
- iv. But what happens when we don't find the nature of our work inherently meaningful? Even when we are passionate about our chosen profession, every job involved mundane details that are tedious and boring.
- v. It's clear that if we tie our sense of purpose and direction solely to the task we are engaged in, it will be easy to feel disconnected, uninspired, and as though our efforts are not leading to anything meaningful.
- vi. So why is it that sometimes a mundane task can feel deeply meaningful and worthwhile, and at other times fulfilling?
- vii. The key here is our outlook and motivation. When our motivation is tied to a purpose that is larger than our own narrow self-interests, our efforts feel important. For example, if we have to perform some routine task every single day, the task will quickly become tedious and boring if regard it as some detail that we just have to get over with because it landed on our plate.

- viii. If you take that same task and tie it to a motivation to be of service to others, however, then the same task might feel rewarding.
- ix. Even something as simple as writing an email can become deeply meaningful when we form the motivation to help others, or we see it as contributing to a larger effort to provide a meaningful service to others.
- x. Like learning to strengthen attention, forming an altruistic motivation is a skill, and the more we practice it, the more we feel a sense of purpose and meaning, even with the mundane details of life that we often find tedious.

b. Contemplative practice: Discovering values at work

- i. In this practice, we will again link the practices of forming an inspired motivation with a clear intention.
- ii. Start by bringing your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can leave the world a better place than I found it."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to clarify my most deeply held professional values and use them to guide my life."
- v. First, rest for a few minutes in open awareness.
- vi. Now, ask yourself: "When I feel the most inspired or fulfilled at work, what qualities are present in my mind? What inner circumstances are present that support feeling my best when I'm at work?" The point here is not to emphasize external factors like success or achievement, but inner qualities of the mind. Identify three simple qualities that capture this, such as "I genuinely hope that my work makes a positive impact in the lives of others" or "I am focused and attentive to my most important priorities."
- vii. ALTERNATE: Now, ask yourself: "If I was at the end of my life looking back, what would I like to say about who I was in relationship to my career? Would I like to that I tried to make a difference to the people I worked with? That I found my work meaningful and fulfilling? That my efforts made the world a better

place?” The point here is not to identify what we want to do or accomplish, but rather what kind of person we want to be. Come up with three qualities that reflect your most important inner values regarding relationships.

- viii. If you had to pick one of these qualities, which is the most inspiring or important to you? Take a moment to reflect on this.
- ix. This is another important value. Use the quality you picked as your personal north star. Take this quality and form a simple phrase that you can use as a personal mantra. The point of this is to keep this value at the forefront of your mind, both now and in your daily life throughout the week.
- x. Use a positive phrase, such as “My efforts help everyone around me do better,” and repeat this phrase in your mind like a mantra. Again, the point is not to focus on achieving success externally, but noticing the qualities of mind that lead you to feel fulfilled at work, even when you may not achieve your desired goal.
- xi. Alternate periods of slowly repeating this phrase in your mind, savoring the sounds and feelings that arise, with periods of resting in open awareness. When the mind is very active, repeat the phrase, and when the mind naturally settles, let go and rest in awareness.
- xii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. Whenever you remember, bring the inner value to mind and repeat the phrase in your mind or, if you are not able to do that because you are engaged in an intellectually demanding task, keep the value in mind as you proceed with the activity.

c. Scientific principle: Hedonic and eudaimonic well-being

- i. In the scientific study of well-being, we make a distinction between feeling good, experiencing positive emotions, and being happy, from living a meaningful life that is aligned with one’s deeply held values. When we use the word well-being to mean feeling good, we scientists use the term “hedonic well-being.” And when it comes to the kind of well-being that we feel when we are in touch with the very best within ourselves, we use the term “eudaimonic well-being.” Each of these contributes in different ways to our life and relationships.

1. Source: Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (2006). Know Thyself and Become What You Are: A Eudaimonic Approach to Psychological Well-Being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9(1), 13–39.

4. Week 4: Leaving the world a better place

a. Contemplative principle: Making an impact

- i. In the past few weeks, we've learned about the difference between intention (what we plan to do) and motivation (why we are doing it). More specifically, we've practiced the skills of setting a clear intention and forming an inspiring motivation.
- ii. We've also practiced shifting our perspective. When we step back for a moment and ask ourselves how we want to treat ourselves, how we want to relate to others, and how we want to carry ourselves at work, it can help us to clarify our most deeply held values and beliefs.
- iii. Once we've clarified those values, we can then keep them at the forefront of our mind by forming a motivation to embody these values. The more we do this, the more we can integrate our values with every aspect of our lives.
- iv. As human beings, we have a deep need to feel that our lives matter, that our time spent on this planet was not a waste, and that our efforts made a difference. For this reason, one especially powerful way to bring meaning to our lives is to tie our personal efforts and aspirations to something bigger than ourselves.
- v. We don't need to engage in a dramatic act of generosity to make a difference in the world. Small acts that are motivated by the wish to leave the world a better place than we found it can add up to create real change.
- vi. The key is to imagine the kind of values we'd like to see in the world, and then to lead by example. If we want a more kind and caring world, or a world that is more balanced and sane, we need to start with ourselves. We can link even the most mundane of actions to our vision, and this has the effect of transforming everything we do into something meaningful.

b. Contemplative practice: Discovering global values

- i. Bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- ii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can leave the world a better place than I found it."
- iii. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to clarify my most deeply held values about my place in the world, and use them to guide my life."
- iv. First, rest for a few minutes in open awareness.
- v. Now, ask yourself: "If someone wrote my obituary after I passed away, what would I want them to say about my life? What kind of impact do I hope to make on the world?" Identify three simple qualities that capture this, such as "I am a good friend to everyone I know" or "I focus on the positive and bring happiness into the world."
- vi. If you had to pick one of these qualities, which is the most inspiring or important to you? Take a moment to reflect on this.
- vii. This is another important value. Like before, you can use the quality you picked as your personal north star. Take this quality and form a simple phrase that you can use as a personal mantra. The point of this is to keep this value at the forefront of your mind, both now and in your daily life throughout the week.
- viii. Use a positive phrase, such as "I focus on what is truly important in life," and repeat this phrase in your mind like a mantra.
- ix. Alternate periods of slowly repeating this phrase in your mind, savoring the sounds and feelings that arise, with periods of resting in open awareness. When the mind is very active, repeat the phrase, and when the mind naturally settles, let go and rest in awareness.
- x. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. Whenever you remember, bring the inner value to mind and repeat the phrase in your mind or, if you are not able to do that because you are engaged in an intellectually demanding task, keep the value in mind as you proceed with the activity.

c. Scientific principle: Psychological well-being - purpose in life

- i. Purpose in life is a central component of eudaimonic well-being. It is tied to a number of factors, but is especially linked factors like resilience and altruism. When we lack a clear sense of purpose and meaning in life, we tend to have difficulty recovering from adversity. We also tend to be less engaged with others and to find our work lives less meaningful. Purpose in life is even associated with the quality of sleep.
- ii. Those with a strong sense of purpose have clear goals for their lives and a sense of direction. They feel that life has meaning. Those with less sense of purpose often feel that life lacks meaning, or they lack a sense of direction or have no meaningful goals or aims that guide their actions.
 1. Source: Ryff, C. D. (2014). Psychological well-being revisited: advances in the science and practice of eudaimonia. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 83(1), 10–28.

Month 6 – Embodying values and ideals

Summary: Being clear about our values and priorities in life is not enough. We need to embody them. When we know what our values are but we fail to live by them, there is tension in the mind, and this tension can create unhealthy habits and behaviors. The skills we've been learning over the past few months can help us to embody our values. This month we'll link practices related to attention and awareness with perspective taking skills we worked on last month. The new skill we'll learn this month is self-monitoring. You can think of this as a sort of mental check-up in which we reflect on what we are doing, thinking, or feeling and see how it lines up with our inner values. As we strengthen this capacity, it becomes easier and easier to bring embody our values in everyday life.

1. Week 1: What are you feeding your mind?

a. Contemplative principle: Feeding the mind

- i. As we learned a few months back, we all have the capacity to be aware and attentive, to experience healthy connections with others, and to discern when our thoughts, feelings and behaviors are leading us toward well-being and when they're perpetuating suffering.
- ii. Unfortunately, we also have the potential for the opposite. We all have the capacity to be lost and distracted, to do things that harm others, and to ignore the inner voice that helps us to stay on the path to well-being.
- iii. In this sense, the mind is much like the body. If we eat healthy food, live in a healthy environment, and take the time to exercise, our body will be healthier than when we eat junk food and do not exercise.
- iv. To have a healthy body, however, we need to know what foods are good for the body, and what forms of exercise will have the greatest impact on our health.
- v. The same is true of the mind. If we aren't sensitive to the impact of what the mind encounters, and the impact of how our own thoughts, feelings, and action affect our inner environment, it will be difficult to discern a healthy from unhealthy course of action.
- vi. This week we'll practice tuning into this inner dynamic by observing the mind's inputs and outputs and monitoring how they line up with our values, much in the same way that we can monitor our diet and physical activity to make sure that we're on the path to physical health.

b. Contemplative practice: The inner ripple effect

- i. This week you'll learn the practice of self-monitoring, the process of observing your own experience in light of your most deeply held values.
- ii. There are two ways we can do this practice: One way is to bring awareness to our experience in the present moment and observe how our thoughts, feelings, and actions are impacting our mind. We can also look back on our day, week, year, or our entire life and notice the patterns we see, especially concerning the impact of what we say, think, feel, and do. We'll practice both of these.
- iii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iv. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can leave the world a better place than I found it."
- v. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to observe my own experience and do my best to embody my own ideals."
- vi. First, rest for a few minutes in open awareness.
- vii. Now observe what's going on in your body and mind. Are any thoughts present? Any emotions? Simply observe and note what your experience is in this moment.
- viii. Pay special attention to how your thoughts and feelings play out. Do thoughts create more thoughts, or new emotions? Do they create an impulse to act? How do they impact how content you feel? How do they color your experience?
- ix. Now reflect on your thoughts and actions. Is what is going on in your experience in harmony with your values and ideals? Does it reflect how you see yourself in your best moments? The point here is not to criticize or judge, but to simply notice.
- x. After a few minutes of gentle observation, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- xi. Now reflect on the last 24 hours. Think of the interactions you had and how you spent your time. Think of specific instances, and of what you were thinking or feelings at the time, or how you acted.

How did you feel during those experiences? Were your thoughts and actions in line with your values?

- xii. To conclude the contemplation, form the intention to think and act in a way that embodies your ideals, and specific situations that you can put them into practice.
- xiii. After a few minutes of gentle observation, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two, relaxing with each exhalation.
- xiv. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, observe what's going on in your mind, or your actions, and be attentive to how they impact your sense of well-being.

c. Scientific principle: Neuroplasticity revisited

- i. A few months back we learned about the principle of neuroplasticity, the idea that our brain is constantly being shaped by our experience.
- ii. This sounds like a good thing, but the truth is that neuroplasticity is neither good nor bad; it's neutral.
- iii. If we are in toxic circumstances – whether that means our environment, our relationships, or even the inner environment of our own thoughts and emotions – then neuroplasticity can actually work against us, and our most destructive tendencies can actually go stronger.
- iv. So neuroplasticity presents both opportunities and risks. The invitation here is to use this biological force wisely. To recognize that we can influence the conditions that will shape our brain, our mind, and therefore our experience as a whole.
 - 1. Source: Davidson, R. J., & McEwen, B. S. (2012). Social influences on neuroplasticity: stress and interventions to promote well-being. *Nature Neuroscience*, 15(5), 689–95.
 - 2. Pittenger, C., & Duman, R. S. (2008). Stress, depression, and neuroplasticity: a convergence of mechanisms. *Neuropsychopharmacology*, 33(1), 88–109.

2. Week 2: The inner environment

a. Contemplative principle: Tending to our inner environment

- i. Last week we started the process of paying attention to what we're feeding the mind and how it affects our sense of well-being. We also learned to observe our own thoughts and emotions to see how what we think and feel affects us.
- ii. When we start paying attention, we quickly see how our experience is shaped by what we experience, and especially by what's going on in the mind itself.
- iii. When it comes to well-being, one especially important factor is whether or not we are embodying our values. When we feel that we're falling short of our own ideals, we naturally feel a sense of tension and dissonance, and this inner tension can manifest in unhealthy behaviors and psychological distress.
- iv. So the point here is that once we've clarified our values, we need to bring them to bear on experience and see if what we say, think and do aligns with our values. This takes us back to awareness.
- v. It should be clear by now that the human mind has tremendous potential, but this potential cuts both ways: We have tremendous potential for awareness, for empathy and kindness, and for insight and wisdom, but we also have tremendous potential for harmful behaviors.
- vi. So although we have the potential for positive growth and development, without nurturing this potential, it won't grow.
- vii. There are many external conditions that shape our minds, and that either support or hinder our inner development, but it is the mind itself that can be our greatest ally, or the greatest barrier. When the mind is filled with negative thoughts and destructive emotions, the most supportive external conditions in the world won't make much difference. And when the mind is hopeful, confident, and resilient, even the most challenging circumstances can be catalysts for growth and transformation.
- viii. We all have old thought patterns, emotional patterns, and ingrained behaviors that aren't serving us anymore. But these habits are like a childhood friend who is influencing us in a negative way, yet whom we have trouble parting ways with. Even though we know they are causing us to suffer, these patterns are so familiar that it's hard to let them go.
- ix. The first step in the process of letting go is to watch these patterns in action. What does a particular thought or emotion feel like in the

moment? What's the aftermath of the experience? How long does it linger in your mind?

- x. The most important question to ask is whether or not your thought, emotion, or behavior matches your most deeply held values. This simple inquiry can lead to tremendous insight.
- xi. You can also look back on your life, even the past 24 hours, and review your experience to see how it played out, and especially to see if your actions and values were in harmony. This is a great practice to do before going to bed.
- xii. This week we'll focus on observing how our thoughts, feelings, and actions impact how we feel about ourselves. What you'll find is that how you feel about yourself naturally extends outward, so if you are caring and accepting of yourself, being kind and tolerant toward others will be easier. By checking in to see what's going on in the mind, we gain the capacity to nurture our natural strengths and to let go of old habits that may be getting in the way of our growth and expression.
- xiii. The process of self-monitoring is one of the single most important skills you'll learn when it comes to the cultivation of well-being.

b. Contemplative practice: The inner ripple effect

- i. This week we'll continue the practice of self-monitoring, of learning to be more sensitive to the way our thoughts, feelings, and actions impact our sense of well-being.
- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can leave the world a better place than I found it."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to observe my own experience and do my best to embody my own ideals."
- v. First, rest for a few minutes in open awareness.
- vi. Now observe what's going on in your body and mind. Are any thoughts present? Any emotions? Simply observe and note what your experience is in this moment.

- vii. Pay special attention to how your thoughts and feelings play out. Do thoughts create more thoughts, or new emotions? Do they create an impulse to act? How do they impact how content you feel? How do they color your experience?
- viii. Now reflect on your thoughts and actions. Is what is going on in your experience in harmony with your values and ideals? Does it reflect how you see yourself in your best moments? The point here is not to criticize or judge, but to simply notice.
- ix. After a few minutes of gentle observation, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- x. Now reflect on the last 24 hours. Think of the interactions you had and how you spent your time. Think of specific instances, and of what you were thinking or feelings at the time, or how you acted. How did you feel during those experiences? Were your thoughts and actions in line with your values? Again, simply notice.
- xi. To conclude the contemplation, form the intention to think and act in a way that embodies your ideals, and specific situations that you can put them into practice.
- xii. After a few minutes of gentle observation, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two, relaxing with each exhalation.
- xiii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, observe what's going on in your mind, or your actions, and be attentive to how they impact your sense of well-being.

c. Scientific principle: Self-monitoring and habit formation

- i. Over the past few decades, a fair amount of research has taken place on the science of habit formation.
- ii. This research has been driven in large part by health concerns, and how we can better understand what factors help people form and maintain healthy habits like eating well and exercising.
- iii. There are a number of factors that help us to form healthy habits, and we've been working with many of them in this program – like setting specific goals and focusing on actions.
- iv. One insight from scientific research is that self-monitoring can also help us to form healthy habits.

- v. By self-monitoring, we mean the act of tracking our own progress in following the course we've set for ourselves, so if we've identified important actions to take or things to avoid, we keep track of how we're doing on a day-to-day basis.
- vi. The science suggests that if we do this – and we pair our efforts with clear, attainable goals – we can build new habits in a relatively short period of time.
 1. Lally, P., & Gardner, B. (2013). Promoting habit formation. *Health Psychol Rev*, 7(Supplement 1), 137–158.

3. Week 3: Connecting with care

a. Contemplative principle: Having a positive influence on others

- i. You are probably getting familiar with the process of self-monitoring now. The key is to be clear about your values and to then observe what you think, feel, and do. When these two factors are in place, it will be easy to see when you are on track and when you may have slipped off the rails.
- ii. The starting point for all this is to look within, not in some abstract sense, but to observe how your thoughts, feelings, and actions impact your inner experience. Over time, it becomes more natural to let go of patterns that are getting in the way of your growth.
- iii. Another benefit to this introspective attitude is that it will naturally affect how you relate to others. Tuning in to the dynamics of your interpersonal relationships is the main area we'll explore this week.
- iv. The practice is pretty much the same, except this week you can practice paying attention to how your thoughts, feelings, and actions impact others.
- v. You can also observe your interactions with others to see if you are embodying the values you clarified last month. If you are, you can pat yourself on the back and appreciate your growth. If you aren't, you can reaffirm your intention and see if you can find inner conditions and outer circumstances that will support you on the path.
- vi. The key point here is to be sensitive to how your thoughts, words, and actions affect others, and to use every interaction as an opportunity to embody your own personal ethics and ideals.

b. Contemplative practice: The ripple effect with others

- i. In this practice we'll extend the contemplation we learned in the previous two weeks to our interactions with others.
- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can leave the world a better place than I found it."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to observe my own experience and do my best to embody my own ideals, especially in my relationships with others."
- v. Start by resting for a few minutes in open awareness.
- vi. Now observe what's going on in your body and mind. Are any thoughts present? Any emotions? Simply observe and note what your experience is in this moment.
- vii. Pay special attention to how your thoughts and feelings play out, and how they influence your interactions with others. Do they color the way you see others, or how you view your relationships? Do they create an impulse to act? And how do the actions impact others, or your relationship to them? Can you sense how this affects their contentment, or how at ease they feel?
- viii. Now reflect on your thoughts and actions. Is what is going on in your experience in harmony with your values and ideals? Does it reflect how you relate to others in your best moments? The point here is not to criticize or judge, but to simply notice.
- ix. After a few minutes of gentle observation, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- x. Now reflect on the last 24 hours. Think of the interactions you had and how you spent your time. Think of specific instances, and of what you were thinking or feelings at the time, or how you acted. How did your thoughts, words, or actions affect others? Were these experiences in line with your values? Again, simply notice.
- xi. To conclude the contemplation, form the intention to think and act in a way that embodies your ideals, and specific situations that you can put them into practice.

- xii. After a few minutes of gentle observation, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two, relaxing with each exhalation.
- xiii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, observe what's going on in your mind, or your actions, and be attentive to how they impact the well-being of others.

c. Scientific principle: The science of empathy

- i. Empathy refers to our capacity to share, or resonate with, the inner experience of another individual. What the science shows about this complex phenomenon is that our thoughts and emotions – and even our physical experiences – are contagious.
- ii. When we observe someone else in distress, we feel distressed, and the same networks are active in our brain that are active in the other person. In effect, our mental, physical, and even neural response mirrors what is happening in the people around us.
- iii. One way we could think about this is to think of our own thoughts, emotions, and actions as infectious. What we think, say and do will impact the people we interact with. This happens all the time, and we can take advantage of this capacity by being sensitive to what is happening in our own minds, and doing our best to influence others in a positive direction.
- iv. The more we feel content and at ease, the more we are kind, caring, and wise, the more the people around us will naturally pick up on these cues, and therefore the more they will be able to find these qualities in themselves.

1. Singer, T., & Lamm, C. (2009). The social neuroscience of empathy. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1156, 81–96.

4. Week 4: Think globally, act locally

a. Contemplative principle: Think globally, act locally

- i. Everything we say, think, feel, and do has a ripple effect. It impacts our own mind and experience, the experience of those around us, and indirectly, it can even impact situations and people far beyond our immediate surroundings.

- ii. The sensitivity and care we develop toward ourselves naturally extends to others, and this caring attitude eventually extends to how we view our place in the world.
- iii. And in the same way we can learn to be sensitive to how our thoughts and actions shape our inner experience, we can also wake up to the impact our actions have on global issues like climate change, poverty and inequality, and positive efforts like movements for world peace and local efforts to improve living conditions in the places where we live.
- iv. The practice this week is to take responsibility for our role in shaping the destiny of the planet, to understand that our actions do matter, and that we can take small steps to leave the world a better place than we found it.
- v. As we've learned so far this month, this all starts with awareness. We can learn to be sensitive to the impact of our actions, and even the impact of our thoughts and feelings, and recognize that our experience – when combined with the experience of everyone else on the planet – is actively shaping our collective world.

b. Contemplative practice: The global ripple effect

- i. In this practice we'll extend the contemplation we learned in the previous weeks even further, to our relationship to the whole world.
- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can leave the world a better place than I found it."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to observe my own experience and do my best to embody my own ideals, especially in terms of my place in the world."
- v. Start by resting for a few minutes in open awareness.
- vi. Now observe what's going on in your body and mind. Are any thoughts present? Any emotions? Simply observe and note what your experience is in this moment.

- vii. Pay special attention to how your thoughts and feelings play out, and how they influence how you see yourself and your place in the world. Are you aware of the impact your thoughts, words, and actions have on the world? How might your own thoughts, feelings, and actions impact – whether directly or indirectly – the lives of others?
- viii. Now reflect on your thoughts and actions. Is what is going on in your experience in harmony with your values and ideals? Does it reflect how you relate to world in your best moments? The point here is not to criticize or judge, but to simply notice.
- ix. After a few minutes of gentle observation, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- x. Now reflect on the last 24 hours. Think of your thoughts, words, and deeds and how you spent your time. Think of specific instances, and of what you were thinking or feelings at the time, or how you acted. How did your thoughts, words, or actions affect others? How might the ripple effect of these experiences impact the world? Were these experiences in line with your values? Again, simply notice.
- xi. To conclude the contemplation, form the intention to think and act in a way that embodies your ideals, and specific situations that you can put them into practice.
- xii. After a few minutes of gentle observation, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two, relaxing with each exhalation.
- xiii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, observe what's going on in your mind, or your actions, and be attentive to the potential ripple effect it might have. In particular, think about your experience as part of a global whole and your role in co-creating our experience on this planet.

c. Scientific principle: Well-being and purpose in life

- i. Research on the nature of well-being shows that having a clear sense of purpose in life is an important aspect of well-being, and that being engaged with a purpose that is larger than our own self-interest is conducive to feeling that life is meaningful and rewarding.

- ii. Volunteering, for instance, is related to well-being. Those who volunteer tend to experience higher levels of well-being, and those with higher levels of well-being tend to volunteer more than those with lower levels of well-being.
- iii. From a more general perspective, both psychological well-being and physical health are related to feeling a sense of purpose in life.
- iv. The implications of this work are that finding passions and pursuits that make a difference in the world can not only contribute to the well-being of others, but to our own sense of well-being and contentment as well.
 - 1. Source: Reker, G. T., Peacock, E. J., & Wong, P. T. (1987). Meaning and purpose in life and well-being: a life-span perspective. *Journal of Gerontology*, 42(1), 44–49.
 - 2. Thoits, P. A., & Hewitt, L. N. (2016). Volunteer Work and Well-Being. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 42(2), 115–131.

Appendix 5

Content Outline for Module 3 of the Healthy Minds Program

Program Script Outlines - Module 3: A Kind Heart

Month 7 – Positive Outlook

Summary: One of the most powerful ways we can strengthen healthy connections with others is to cultivate positive outlook through the practice of appreciation. Each of us does countless things throughout the day to care for ourselves, to help others, and to contribute to society. Each of us possesses unique strengths and gifts, and there are universal qualities that we all have in abundance. Yet we usually take all this for granted. The practice of appreciation helps us to notice the positive in life, and this shift in attitude can make an immediate and profound difference in our life and relationships.

1. Week 1: Positive outlook toward ourselves

a. Contemplative principle: Positive outlook

- i. To strengthen the best qualities of ourselves, and to support others in doing the same, we first need to notice these qualities when they are present.
- ii. Many of us have a strong tendency to focus on the negative, to notice our mistakes, our shortcomings, and the things we want to change about ourselves, about others, and about the world.
- iii. Yet this is just a habit, and we can learn to notice the positive things in life and make that a habit as well.
- iv. I'm not talking about ignoring problems and challenges, or pretending that everything is wonderful when in reality it isn't. What I'm getting at here is that there are many things that we usually take for granted, many that we don't even notice, that are within us and around us all the time.
- v. When we tune in to the positive, it gives us a sense of strength and confidence, so that we can tackle our challenges without being overwhelmed by them.
- vi. This probably sounds abstract, so let's give an example. Right now, you've taken time out of your day to listen to this. To learn these practices and to bring them into your life. Take a moment to appreciate the fact that you've made time for this in your life.
- vii. You've probably done many other things this very day to take care of yourself, or to help others. Simple things like brushing your teeth and making breakfast. These may seem inconsequential, but they're not. Life is made up of countless little acts like these.

- viii. This month we're going to make a practice out of appreciating the little things. You'll find that the simple practice of noticing something positive – in yourself, in another person, or in the world around you – immediately transforms how you feel and how you relate to others.
- ix. We'll start by learning to appreciate our own qualities, lives, and actions. You can begin with the most mundane details of your life, noticing the little things that you do to care for yourself and for others. You can take this a bit deeper by recognizing the skills and qualities you have, and innate capacities we all share to be aware, caring, and wise.

b. Contemplative practice: Seeing the positive in yourself

- i. This week you'll practice moments of appreciation. The skills are similar to ones you've already learned. The most important is perspective taking, and this month we'll use this skill to notice the positive – in yourself, in others, and in the world around you.
- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice appreciation – noticing the positive qualities in myself and others."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- vi. Let's begin the practice of appreciation. Start by bringing awareness to the body. Take a few moments to appreciate what an amazing thing the body is. It breathes all on its own, every moment of your life. The heart beats, pumping oxygen filled blood throughout the body. The brain does a million different calculations each and every moment. Even when the body is sick or in pain, it does its best to heal and repair itself. Take a few moments to appreciate the body and all it does.

- vii. Now take a minute or two to reflect on all the little things you do to care for yourself, for others, and to be of service. The fact that you are doing this practice...little things like caring for the body, feeding yourself, cleaning your home or personal space. Little things you do for friend and family. Again, it can be anything. Simply notice and acknowledge the things you do in your life.
- viii. After a few minutes of reflection, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- ix. Finally, reflect on your personal strengths. Maybe you are a great cook, or you love to read. Maybe you're a good listener or great at solving problems and finding solutions. Anything. Just notice and appreciate.
- x. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, notice and appreciate one thing about yourself as you go about your day.

c. Scientific principle: Optimism and well-being

- i. The way we view ourselves and the world has powerful implications for both our subjective sense of well-being and also for our physical health. It turns out that optimism, our sense that the future will turn out well, predicts a host of variables related to health, including our physical immune system and our mental resilience. How is it that a positive attitude has such far reaching benefits? One way that a positive outlook helps is in changing the way we respond to stress. Optimists tend to take action to address challenges and difficulties, and to have a clear plan for doing so, when compared with pessimists. They also tend to accept stressful situations more easily, and to see adversity as a chance to learn and grow. These characteristics bolster important qualities of well-being, such as autonomy, self-growth, and meaning in life.
 1. Source: Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1993). On the power of positive thinking: The benefits of being optimistic. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 2(1), 26–30. <http://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.ep10770572>
 2. Ho, M. Y., Cheung, F. M., & Cheung, S. F. (2010). The role of meaning in life and optimism in promoting well-being.

Personality and Individual Differences, 48(5), 658–663.
<http://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2010.01.008>

2. Week 2: Positive outlook toward those we like

a. Contemplative principle: Positive outlook toward those we like

- i. Cultivating positive outlook is an incredibly important aspect of well-being. It informs how we see ourselves, how we relate to others, and even how we view the world.
- ii. There is also a strong relationship between these different areas. If we learn to see the best in ourselves, it is easier – and more natural – to see the best in others, and the more we see the best in others, the more we see our own positive qualities. And the same goes for the world around us. The more we see the beauty in our environment, for instance, the more we feel at home in the world, and content with who we are.
- iii. So change needs to start within. Last week we learned a simple practice to notice the positive in ourselves. This week, we'll extend this to others, starting with people we have a strong connection with.
- iv. It may seem strange to practice noticing the positive in the people we care about the most. If we love someone, don't we already see the best in them? Well, I don't know about you, but I can very easily forget about all the wonderful qualities of my very favorite people. The key is to recognize the difference between recognizing someone's good qualities in the abstract, and really seeing these qualities in the present moment.
- v. When we see someone's natural gifts and strengths, or acknowledge the little things they do to take care of themselves or others, our attitude in the present moment naturally shifts.
- vi. It feels good to notice someone's strengths, and we all know that it feels good to be recognized by someone else – to feel truly seen and appreciated. So this is a true win-win situation.
- vii. Here, we start with someone we care about because it's easier to feel appreciation in this kind of relationship. What we're doing is getting familiar with what it feels like to notice someone's best qualities, to truly appreciate their gifts and the things they do in life.

- viii. Once we get used to that feeling, and we know how to get back to it, we can gradually extend this to others, even to people that we may find challenging.
- ix. But this takes time, so start with someone that you have an uncomplicated relationship with, someone toward whom you can easily arouse a feeling of affection and concern. It can even be a pet, or someone you've known in the past.
- x. Gradually, this feeling of appreciation will become so natural that it will always be there, right at your fingertips, and you'll be able to tune into the positive no matter who you are with, and what you are doing.

b. Contemplative practice: Seeing the positive in others

- i. For this week's practice, we'll extend moments of appreciation to others, focusing on those we have a positive connection with. The steps are similar to the previous week's exercise.
- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice appreciation – noticing the positive qualities in myself and others."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- vi. Let's begin the practice of appreciation. Bring someone to mind that you have a warm, caring relationship with. This can be a loved one, someone who has helped you in the past, or even a pet. Bring this individual to mind and imagine that they are here in your presence. Feel a sense of warmth and connection with the person.
- vii. Now take a minute or two to reflect on all the little things they do to care for themselves, for others, or to be of service. It could be anything. Things they do for fun. Ways they help others. Even mundane things like going to work or doing household chores.

Simply notice and acknowledge the things they do that usually go unnoticed.

- viii. After a few minutes of reflection, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- ix. Now reflect on their personal strengths. What are their best qualities? Maybe they are honest or hard working. Maybe they are fun to be around, or really intelligent. It can be anything. Just notice and appreciate whatever qualities come to mind.
- x. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, notice and appreciate one thing about the people around you – or bring someone to mind if you are alone – as you go about your day.

c. Scientific principle:

- i. From a scientific perspective, we can think of appreciation as an acknowledgement of the value and importance of a person, action, thing, or event. When we appreciate something or someone, we not only notice its value, we also feel a positive emotional bond or connection with it. The experience of appreciation is thus a positive emotional state that is inherently nourishing and rewarding, and it also creates a positive connection with the person, event, or object that we appreciate. When we study appreciation, we find that it is linked to a host of factors that are important for well-being, including positive and negative affect, optimism, and emotional self-awareness.

1. Source: Adler, M. G., & Fagley, N. S. (2005). Appreciation: Individual differences in finding value and meaning as a unique predictor of subjective well-being. *Journal of Personality*, 73(1), 79–114.

3. Week 3: Positive outlook in challenging times

a. Contemplative principle: Positive outlook in challenging times

- i. This week we'll put our practice to the test. We're going to practice appreciating the people we struggle with, and as a step in that direction we'll start by noticing and learning to appreciate people

that we usually don't notice at all...people that we don't have any strong feelings about one way or another.

- ii. By now, you've probably noticed that feeling appreciative is a deeply nourishing state of mind. It feels good, and it also nourishes our connections with others. And contrary to what it may seem like in the abstract, this capacity to notice the positive helps us deal with adversity and work with challenges more effectively, so we don't tune out the difficulties in life.
- iii. In the same way that we can tune into our own positive qualities and strengths, and acknowledge the things we do in our life to care for ourselves and others, we can also learn to see this in others, even people we don't like.
- iv. The practice is really no different than what we've done in the previous weeks. The only difference is who we're relating to.
- v. You'll probably notice that with "neutral" people – the ones that you don't have any strong feelings about – you have a tendency to tune them out, so with this group the practice will be to notice their presence in your life and see if you can find something that reflects a positive quality. It could be someone doing their job at a coffee shop, or a coworker whom you don't see very often. See if you can notice these people and find something to appreciate.
- vi. The next step is to apply this practice to people you find challenging. It could be in a meeting at work, or a challenging personal relationship. Whatever the case, see if you can notice something positive. Even if they are acting in a harmful manner, you can acknowledge their unskillful behavior and still appreciate that they may be doing what they think will bring them happiness, or help them to avoid discomfort or suffering. The key is to notice the positive in the situation, not to ignore or deny the negative.
- vii. But keep in mind that this is a practice. Don't start with the most difficult situation in your life. The most important thing is to make this a habit. Learn to appreciate what's in front of you in the same way that you brush your teeth or do other things to take care of yourself.

b. Contemplative practice: Noticing the positive in others

- i. The biggest challenge in the practice of appreciation is to find the positive with people or situations that we normally dislike, avoid, or find especially challenging. So take this one slow. You can start

with neutral people and slowly extend your practice to people that you find challenging.

- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice appreciation – noticing the positive qualities in myself and others."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- vi. To begin the practice of appreciation, think of someone that you see on a regular basis, but toward whom you don't have particularly strong feelings – positive or negative. This could be the person who delivers your mail, someone you see at work, or anyone else that you see now and then.
- vii. Bring this individual to mind. Now take a minute or two to reflect on the little things they do to care for themselves, for others, or to be of service. You may not know much about them, so you can be creative, and even imagine what they are likely to do on a day to day basis. It could be anything. Things they do for fun. Ways they help others. Even mundane things like going to work or doing household chores. Simply notice and acknowledge the things they do that usually go unnoticed.
- viii. If you feel confident, you can do this exercise with someone you find challenging, but don't start with the most difficult person.
- ix. After a few minutes of reflection, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- x. Now reflect on their personal strengths. What are their best qualities? Maybe they are honest or hard working. Maybe they are fun to be around, or really intelligent. It can be anything. Just notice and appreciate whatever qualities come to mind.
- xi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those

situations, notice and appreciate one thing about the people around you – or bring someone to mind if you are alone – as you go about your day.

c. Scientific principle:

- i. We tend to think of difficult situations and challenging people as things to avoid. Although no one will deny that adversity is unpleasant, it can have an upside. Adversity can be a catalyst for growth, insight, and self-knowledge. But this isn't always the case. Why is it that sometimes we are at our best when we encounter challenges, and other times we get overwhelmed and struggle. Scientific research on this topic indicates that our interpretation of the situation can have a powerful effect. For instance, if we see the situation as out of our control, we will probably feel overwhelmed, but if we see it as something that we can directly influence, our take on it will be entirely different. Other factors also have a powerful effect on how we work with adversity, including our capacity to accept the situation, optimism, and our capacity to experience positive emotions.

1. Source: Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2004). Positive change following trauma and adversity: A review. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 17*(1), 11–21.

4. Week 4: Positive outlook toward our surroundings

a. Contemplative principle: Positive outlook toward our surroundings

- i. So far we've been focusing on other people in practicing appreciation. This week we'll extend the practice to our environment and surroundings.
- ii. In the same way that we usually take our efforts and good qualities – and those of others – for granted, we often overlook the beauty and positive qualities in the world around us.
- iii. Hopefully you've had a glimpse of how a simple shift in perspective, from noticing the negative or tuning out, to noticing the positive, can change the tone of your interactions with others and how you feel in the present moment.
- iv. We can apply this same principle to the world around us by noticing little things as we go about our day: a soothing sound, the

design of a piece of furniture, and of course the natural beauty that is all around us – the air, light, color, and rich world of the senses.

- v. When we pause for a moment, we quickly see that the world is quite amazing. The complexity and beauty of the natural world. The care and planning that go into every little thing that people make, and that we use. Even things that we normally think of as unpleasant...we can learn to see beauty in everyone and everything.
- vi. How does this work? Well, think about it. When we focus on challenges and problems, our experience in the moment is that we are not fully content with who we are, what we have, or who we're with. Even if we solve the problems we face, we still are left with a habit of being impoverished. When we see the positive, it has the opposite effect. We feel enriched and nourished, so that even when we need to confront a challenge, we do so from a place of strength and inner richness.
- vii. A single moment of appreciation can shift your experience. In a challenging time, it can give you strength and confidence. It can bring depth and meaning to the mundane details of life. And it can make your best moments even better, and help you live from a place of gratitude and abundance.

b. Contemplative practice: Noticing the positive in the world around us

- i. This week we'll shift gears a bit and practice moments of appreciation for our surroundings.
- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice appreciation – noticing the positive qualities in myself and others, and in the world around me."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.

- vi. To begin the practice of appreciation, take a moment to tune in to your surroundings. Feel the temperature of the air against your skin. The light in the room. The colors and textures all around you. Simple notice.
- vii. Now imbue that noticing with a sense of appreciation. Feel the richness and beauty of your surroundings. Notice the little details, whether they are natural, or made created by others.
- viii. Do this for a minute or two at a time, and then take a break and relax, resting in open awareness for a minute or two, or relaxing with the out breath.
- ix. You can alternate between noticing and appreciating the world around you, and resting in open awareness, a few more times before we conclude the practice.
- x. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, notice and appreciate one thing about the world around you. See if you can notice one positive thing, wherever you are, and no matter what you are doing.

a. Scientific principle: Gratitude and well-being

- i. One of the most widely studied positive emotions is gratitude. Gratitude can be thought of as a sub-set of appreciation. In a technical sense, we can think of gratitude as the recognition of something positive in our lives, and simultaneously that this positive occurrence is at least partially due to something or someone else. So feeling grateful is to recognize the kindness of another, and to feel appreciative of this kindness.
- ii. Like optimism and appreciation, gratitude can have a powerful impact on both psychological and physical health. People who practice gratitude tend to be sick less and exercise more. They also feel more content with their life, report experiencing more positive emotions, and even engage in more helping behaviors toward others.
 1. Source: Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377–389.

Month 8 – Kindness

Summary: Appreciation creates a positive connection between us, the people we're with, and our surroundings. We can strengthen this positive connection further by cultivating kindness. Kindness is the natural impulse we all have to want someone to be happy. That someone might be a loved one, a stranger on the street, or even ourselves. This impulse is with us all the time. Every time we move toward an experience that we think will bring us happiness and contentment, we experience the movement of kindness. In the practice of kindness, we learn to notice this basic movement of the heart and mind and to nurture it, and to gradually extend it to others. Strengthening our impulse to be kind naturally impacts how we relate to others and puts us in touch with a feeling of abundance and confidence.

1. Week 1: Seeds of kindness

a. Contemplative principle: Seeds of kindness

- i. When we think of kindness, we typically recall a kind act, something nice that we did for someone, or that someone did for us. While kindness certainly does manifest in our actions – as it should – we can also think of kindness as an attitude, as a perspective that we carry with us throughout the day.
- ii. In essence, kindness is orientation toward happiness and flourishing – toward our own happiness and the well-being of others. When we want the best for ourselves, we experience kindness. When we want a friend to succeed, we experience kindness. And when we actually do something to help someone move toward happiness and fulfillment, that is kindness too. If we take this broad perspective, we could consider every movement toward happiness, fulfillment, and well-being as an expression of kindness.
- iii. This doesn't mean that everything we do – or that others do – will be effective in creating happiness and well-being. We all have many examples of times that the very things we did to be happy ended up creating suffering. But we can say that the initial impulse to be happy is fundamentally wholesome.
- iv. In strengthening our capacity for kindness we learn to see this impulse at work in our own lives, and then to see it manifesting for others. We can clarify this intention and bring it to the surface of our mind, and slowly extend it to others.

- v. Like appreciation, moments of kindness are deeply fulfilling. When we are caught up in our own needs and wants, we often feel as though we do not have enough, as though there is something lacking, and that only through getting whatever it is can we feel happy and content. But this mindset can become a habit, such that our needs are never met, because at the deepest level we have become addicted to the state of wanting and needing.
- vi. Kindness, on the other hand, puts us in touch with a feeling of abundance. We feel that we have enough, that we are enough, that we can give and share with others.
- vii. And needless to say, it feels great to be on the receiving end of kindness, so when we experience kindness and extend it to others, it's a win/win. We feel enriched, confident, and deeply connected to the people around us, and the people around us feel cared for and connected with us.

b. Contemplative practice: Being kind to ourselves

- i. There are many ways to recognize and strengthen our capacity for kindness, but here we're going to focus on seeing in ourselves, and eventually in others, the most basic of human impulses: the desire to be happy, content, and fulfilled. Once we learn to see this in ourselves and others, we can stay connected to the experience of kindness by repeating a simple phrase, using it to strengthen both awareness and kindness at the same time.
- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice kindness toward myself and all living beings."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- vi. Next, take a few minutes to notice the subtle movement toward happiness and contentment in your life. You can see this in all the things you do – big and small – to enjoy yourself, to be content, to

be healthy, and so on. Think of the things you've done so far today, and see if you can notice in your own actions the desire to be happy and content.

- vii. Now reflect on your experience right here in the present moment. See if you can see the movement toward happiness as you do this practice. This could be in noticing your body and wanting to be comfortable, wanting to have a calm mind or a kind heart. It could be anything. Just notice how this simple desire is present in your experience right now.
- viii. The next step is to stay connected to this wish by keeping it at the forefront of your mind. You can do this by repeating a simple phrase: "May I be happy, content, and at ease," over and over in your mind. Repeat this silently to yourself and, as you do, see if you can feel the sense of ease and contentment that is a natural part of your being and a natural quality of awareness itself.
- ix. Every few minutes, take a few moments to relax and rest in open awareness, noticing any feelings that are present, and then return to repeating the phrases and feeling the natural sense of ease and contentment that is part of your true nature.
- x. To conclude, let go of the contemplation and rest your mind in open awareness for a few minutes.
- xi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, notice how the movement toward happiness is manifesting in your experience and repeat the "May I be happy, content, and at ease" as you go about your day.

c. Scientific principle: Social capital

- i. An interesting insight about the nature of well-being comes from the world of economics. Not surprisingly, economists have tended to focus on things like income and other economic factors when they study well-being. So things like physical capital – the things we use to produce goods and services – and human capital – education and skills – are what they think about the most. But more recently economists have started to consider the importance of *social capital* – relationships of trust and mutual kindness.
- ii. This probably comes as no surprise, but it turns out that social capital is one of the most powerful ways to predict how happy

people are, or even how happy groups, societies, and countries are. What economists have found is that people who have close friendships, good relationships with their neighbors, and supportive people at work tend to do better, and feel better. They eat healthier diets and sleep better. They have fewer problems with sadness and low self-esteem. Generally, they seem to be happier about their lives.

- iii. When you ask people about the source of happiness, one of the most common responses is to have thriving connections with other people. The quality of our relationships matters far more than income. Being married, being involved in a regular group or club, volunteering, and participating in religious or spiritual communities can have the same impact as doubling, and in some cases even quadrupling, one's income.
 1. Source: Helliwell, J. F., & Putnam, R. D. (2004). The social context of well-being. *Philosophical Transactions-Royal Society of London Series B Biological Sciences*, (August), 1435–1446.

2. Week 2: Extending kindness

a. Contemplative principle: Extending kindness

- i. Last week we practiced seeing the presence of kindness in our experience by tuning in to the movement toward happiness and well-being. We also practiced strengthening this natural impulse by repeating a simple phrase.
- ii. This week we'll extend this practice to another person, starting with someone that we naturally feel a sense of affection and connection with.
- iii. The process here is an interesting one. We all care about the people we're close to. We want them to be happy, successful, and to be free from suffering and difficulties. At the same time, it's easy to lose touch with these compassionate impulses. In practice, it's easier to be kind and caring in the abstract than it is in actuality.
- iv. What we'll do here is get familiar with the perspective that helps us to stay connected to kindness, so that this sense of connection and care is more stable and consistent.
- v. The skill we're training here is another version of perspective taking. Here, the perspective is learning to see the basic impulse to

be happy, safe, and content. Seeing this in ourselves makes it easier to see in others, and seeing it in others helps us feel a positive connection with them.

- vi. When we notice that someone we care for wants to be happy, we naturally feel a sense of warmth, care, and concern for them. So the more we can tune in to this impulse, the easier it is to be kind, and the more we feel kindness, the more at peace and at ease we feel ourselves.
- vii. This is especially helpful when we run into challenges with the people we care about. In such times, we can easily forget all about our caring connection, and instead focus on what they're doing (or not doing) and trying to get their behavior in line with our expectations.
- viii. We all know the feeling of doing something that undermines our own happiness, and perhaps the well-being of others too, while thinking that what we're doing actually makes sense. So we can act unwisely and at the same time have a very wholesome desire to be happy and content.
- ix. The practice here is to recognize this wholesome impulse in ourselves and in others, and in this case, in someone that we care about. When we do this, we can see it even when they are acting in a way that upsets us, or that creates problems for them.
- x. This doesn't mean we ignore that there may actually be a problematic behavior. Rather, it helps to see the behavior with a wider perspective, and to recognize that we all act unwisely at times.
- xi. The fundamental practice here is one of empathy – in seeing that we all share some very basic desires and impulses, and when we recognize this shared experience, it helps us to stay connected in a positive way.
- xii. This week we're starting this practice of recognizing that others are just like us – which we can call the "just like me" practice – with someone we care about. Later, once we've gotten familiar with the terrain here, we can begin to extend this recognition and the feeling of kindness, to people we have a neutral connection with, and eventually even to those we have difficulties with.

a. Contemplative practice: Just like me

- i. In this practice, we'll extend kindness to a loved one with the same steps we practiced last week, starting with recognizing our basic

desire to be happy, noticing that our loved one shares that same desire, and the extending the wish to be happy and content to this person by repeating a phrase that expresses our desire.

- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice kindness toward myself and all living beings, and today, especially by extending kindness toward someone I care about."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- vi. Next, for a few moments, reflect on the subtle movement toward happiness and contentment in your own life, and remind yourself of all the things you do to secure your own well-being.
- vii. Once you see this clearly in yourself, bring to mind a loved one – someone toward whom you have a natural and uncomplicated feeling of affection. Imagine that this person is here, sitting in front of you, and feel a sense of warmth and connection with them.
- viii. Resting in that feeling of connection, think to yourself: "So and so [insert their name], is just like me. They want to be happy and content. Just like me, they want to be safe, and to enjoy success and prosperity." You can put this in whatever words resonate with you, but the point here is to notice the shared wish you have to be happy and content.
- ix. Think of the things they do in their life to be happy. Reflect on all the steps they take, no matter how mundane, to take care of themselves, and to experience contentment and ease.
- x. Now extend kindness to them by wishing that they truly flourish, and repeat the phrase, "May you be happy, content, and at ease." As you repeat this phrase silently in your mind, feel the presence of your loved one as though they fully embody their very best qualities, as though you can feel them radiating with happiness and contentment.

- xi. Every few minutes, take a few moments to relax and rest in open awareness, noticing any feelings that are present, and then return to repeating the phrases and feeling the care and connection with the person you are focusing on.
- xii. To conclude, let go of the contemplation and rest your mind in open awareness for a few minutes.
- xiii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice when you are with people you like or care about. In those situations, notice how they share with you the same basic desire to be happy, and extend your kindness to them by repeating the phrase “May you be happy, content, and at ease”.

b. Scientific principle: Strengthening social connections

- i. It’s clear from many scientific studies that the quality of our relationships affects many aspects of well-being. So what can we do to strengthen healthy connections? Well, some pioneering studies on the practices that we’re learning in this program show that they do just that.
- ii. One study showed that a very brief period of cultivating kindness changed how people responded to strangers. People who did the practice reported more positive feelings toward strangers, and more feelings of positive social connections.
- iii. Interestingly, studies have found that this training not only affects the quality of relationships, but also how many positive emotions people experience, their sense of purpose in life, and even the symptoms related to illness.
 1. Source: Fredrickson, B. L., Cohn, M. A., Coffey, K. A., Pek, J., & Finkel, S. M. (2008). Open hearts build lives: positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(5), 1045–62.
<http://doi.org/10.1037/a0013262>
 2. Hutcherson, C. a, Seppala, E. M., & Gross, J. J. (2008). *Loving-kindness meditation increases social connectedness*. *Emotion* (Washington, D.C.), 8(5), 720–724.
<http://doi.org/10.1037/a0013237>

3. Week 3: Kindness in challenging situations

a. Contemplative principle: Kindness in challenging situations

- i. Last week got our first glimpse of the “just like me” practice. In essence, what we’re doing here is recognizing that although we are all different in many ways, we share some very basic qualities and impulses.
- ii. One of the most basic desires is the wish to be happy, content, safe, and at ease. We’re not always aware of it, but this impulse drives many of our actions.
- iii. The starting point with this practice is to see this impulse in our own lives and experience, to see how the wish to be happy and content drives even the smallest of actions, things as simple as switching our physical position so we can be more comfortable.
- iv. Once we see it clearly in our own experience, and have made a habit of tuning in to this instinct, we practice seeing it others, first with someone we care about, then with people that we have a neutral relationship with, and finally to those we have difficulties with and then to everyone.
- v. Along with this recognition, we clarify our own desire for everyone – ourselves included – to experience lasting well-being and true peace of mind.
- vi. This week, we’re going to move into some challenging territory by extending this wish to people we may not like.
- vii. As with other challenging practices we’ve done, you don’t need to rush into this. Don’t start with the most difficult person in your life. Work with someone that may be annoying or challenging, but not someone that you have deep or intense unresolved emotions toward. That will come later. For now, the important thing is to pick a situation that seems workable, not one that is likely to be overwhelming.
- viii. When we think of someone we don’t like, we may wonder why on earth we would want to be kind to them. It may even seem like a big mistake, a risk that we’ll end being a doormat or that we’ll be taken advantage of.
- ix. Actually, it’s just the opposite. The experience of kindness is empowering. It puts us in touch with a wellspring of inner strength, confidence, and the capacity to see clearly.

- x. Challenging relationships are usually filled with emotion and reactivity. It's difficult to see clearly or to act wisely. Sometimes we may not even see a situation clearly until months or even years later.
- xi. The experience of kindness naturally calms the turbulence of reactivity and helps us to let go of the endless storyline that plays in the mind. It opens the mind so we can see clearly and act wisely.
- xii. It doesn't mean that we become a doormat. When we see clearly and also care deeply, it may be that we need to take action. So kindness is not passive, and is not necessarily always being "nice." When a child runs into the middle of the street, the caring response is not to smile and wave. Action is needed.
- xiii. The key here is that we can take action with a calm, caring mind, not a mind that is reactive and powerless to resist its own impulses. The practices we're doing this week give us that inner strength and clarity.

b. Contemplative practice: Kindness toward people we find challenging

- i. In this practice, you'll extend kindness to someone we don't have strong feelings about – positive or negative – and if you feel up for it, to someone you don't like, or who you find challenging.
- ii. The steps are the same as what we did last week. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice kindness toward myself and all living beings, and today, especially by extending kindness toward a neutral person, or someone I find challenging."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.

- vi. Next, for a few moments, reflect on the subtle movement toward happiness and contentment in your own life, and remind yourself of all the things you do to secure your own well-being.
- vii. Once you see this clearly in yourself, bring to mind another person. It could be someone you see regularly, but don't know very well, or someone you find challenging if you feel up for it. Imagine that this person is here, sitting in front of you, and let your awareness rest on their presence. Now remember the feeling that you had when you imagined a loved one, and see if you can regard this person with that same sense of affection and warmth. If you imagined a child or a parent, imagine that they are your child or parent – or remind yourself that they have people in their lives who regard them with this kind of affection and see if you can take on that perspective. It doesn't have to be forced, just shift your perspective and let whatever feelings are present naturally bubble up to the surface.
- viii. Resting in that feeling of connection, think to yourself: "So and so [insert their name], is just like me. They want to be happy and content. Just like me, they want to be safe, and to enjoy success and prosperity." You can put this in whatever words resonate with you, but the point here is to notice the shared wish you have to be happy and content.
- ix. Think of the things they do in their life to be happy. Reflect on all the steps they take, no matter how mundane, to take care of themselves, and to experience contentment and ease. If you don't know much about them, then just use your imagination and think of the things they probably do as part of their daily routine.
- x. Now extend kindness to them by wishing that they truly flourish, and repeat the phrase, "May you be happy, content, and at ease." As you repeat this phrase silently in your mind, feel the presence of the other person and imagine that they are in touch with their very best qualities, as though you can feel them radiating with happiness and contentment.
- xi. Every few minutes, take a few moments to relax and rest in open awareness, noticing any feelings that are present, and then return to repeating the phrases and feeling the care and connection with the person you are focusing on.
- xii. To conclude, let go of the contemplation and rest your mind in open awareness for a few minutes.

- xiii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice when you are with people you like or care about. In those situations, notice how they share with you the same basic desire to be happy, and extend your kindness to them by repeating the phrase “May you be happy, content, and at ease.”

c. Scientific principle: The effects of kindness

- i. Studies have found that this training not only affects the quality of relationships, but also how many positive emotions people experience, their sense of purpose in life, and even the symptoms related to illness. One study even showed that people who do these practices regularly show differences in their genetic structure, specifically with a part of the chromosome called a telomere, which is considered a biomarker of the aging process.
 1. Hoge, E. a., Chen, M. M., Orr, E., Metcalf, C. a, Fischer, L. E., Pollack, M. H., ... Simon, N. M. (2013). Loving-Kindness Meditation practice associated with longer telomeres in women. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*, 32, 159–63. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2013.04.005>

4. Week 4: Universal kindness

a. Contemplative principle: Universal kindness

- i. The capacity to feel connected to others is part of human nature. We are social animals, and positive connections are one of the single most important aspects of well-being.
- ii. But we don’t have to look too far to see that we also have a tremendous capacity for *dis*connection. To feel that we’re not close to, or connected with, others, even to whole groups, races, cultures, and societies.
- iii. This capacity for division and disconnect is a major factor in much of the suffering we experience as individuals and as groups.
- iv. The practices we’ve been learning this month bolster our individual well-being and help us to form and strengthen healthy connections with the people around us.

- v. They are also a powerful tool to break down the barriers in our own minds that keep us from feeling connected to other people and groups, even those who may be distant.
- vi. We can do this by removing all limits on our wish for happiness and well-being, forming the desire that all living beings experience peace, contentment and safe conditions so they can truly flourish.
- vii. Removing the barriers in our own hearts and minds is tremendously liberating and uplifting. If feeling connected and caring for one person feels good, both for us and the people around us, then the sense of nourishment that comes from universal kindness is even more dramatic.

b. Contemplative practice: Universal kindness

- i. This week we'll take our practice further – much further – and extend kindness to everyone, dropping every barrier and limit to our feeling of connectedness.
- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice kindness toward myself and all living beings, extending kindness without limit or barrier."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- vi. Next, for a few moments, reflect on the subtle movement toward happiness and contentment in your own life, and remind yourself of all the things you do to secure your own well-being.
- vii. Once you see this clearly in yourself, bring to mind the recognition that all living beings share this same desire to be happy, content, and safe. If it helps, you can think of specific examples, even thinking of animals or groups of people in faraway places.
- viii. Imagine that all of these people and creatures are cared for and loved, and see if you can feel that sense of affection and concern

yourself, extending it to all forms of life. If it helps, you can bring to mind the loved one you meditated on a few weeks ago to elicit a feeling of kindness, and then drop all boundaries and imagine you are extending that feeling of kindness to everyone, everywhere.

- ix. Now extend kindness to all living beings by wishing that they truly flourish, and repeat the phrase, "May all living beings be happy, content, and at ease." As you repeat this phrase silently in your mind, feel a sense of connection with all living beings and imagine that this causes everyone to get in touch with their very best qualities, as though you can feel the happiness and contentment radiating from them.
- x. After a few minutes, take a short break and relax the mind, resting in open awareness. Let any thoughts or feelings – whether pleasant or unpleasant – move freely through your mind and body. Return to the contemplation and again repeat the phrase after a few moments or minutes.
- xi. To conclude, let go of the contemplation and rest your mind in open awareness for a few minutes.
- xii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. When you remember, open your mind to the connections you share with others – those around you and those more distant – and repeat the phrase, "May all living beings be happy, content, and at ease."

c. Scientific principle:

- i. One of the most powerful factors in present-day society is the presence of bias and prejudice between people of different economic classes, races, religions, genders and with different sexual preferences. There has been a great deal of research into this phenomenon and what causes it. There have also been studies to investigate how we can reduce prejudice. Studies have shown that the skill of perspective taking can help reduce prejudice between different groups. Perspective taking can increase two important factors: empathy and what scientists refer to as attribution. Let me explain: When we see a person from a different racial group doing something we don't like, we might attribute their actions to their character, rather than their circumstances. If we find ourselves in the same situation, or someone from our own group, we might do just the opposite, and interpret their actions as

not being indicative of a character flaw, but as a necessity of their situation. When we practice taking the perspective of people outside of our own social or racial group, we tend to attribute negative actions to their character less than when we don't have this skill, and we tend to view them and their actions as we view ourselves, or someone from our own group or social class. Research on the kindness practices you've been learning this month have also shown this effect.

ii. In group out group bias and LK

1. Source: Kang, Y., Gray, J. R., & Dovidio, J. F. (2014). The nondiscriminating heart: lovingkindness meditation training decreases implicit intergroup bias. *Journal of Experimental Psychology. General*, 143(3), 1306–13. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0034150>
2. Vescio, T. K., Sechrist, G. B., & Paolucci, M. P. (2003). Perspective taking and prejudice reduction: The mediational role of empathy arousal and situational attributions. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 33(4), 455–472. <http://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.163>

Month 9 – Compassion

Summary: One of the most powerful forces in the world is compassion. In its most elemental form, compassion is simply the wish to alleviate suffering. Like kindness, the movement of compassion is always present in our experience, though it often goes unnoticed. When we move away from discomfort, or feel the impulse to help someone in need, that is compassion. Even mundane experiences like wanting to eat when we feel hungry, or rest when we feel tired, contain the seeds of compassion. Compassion is a highly engaged state. When we feel compassion, we are prepared to act, to do something if and when the opportunity arises. Compassion is also a nourishing experience. When we tune into suffering – either our own or the suffering of those around us – it can be overwhelming, but compassion puts us in touch with a source of inner strength and confidence that helps us to navigate challenges and difficulties. This month we'll learn to recognize the presence of compassion and strengthen it, and eventually to extend our wish to be free from suffering and distress to others.

1. Week 1: Seeds of kindness

a. Contemplative principle: Seeds of compassion

- i. Compassion is the flip side of kindness. Both kindness and compassion are oriented toward well-being. Kindness is the positive orientation – the movement toward happiness and flourishing.
- ii. Compassion is also rooted in the wish for well-being, but the orientation is toward suffering, distress, and discomfort. The movement of compassion is the wish to be free of these experiences, and like kindness, it can be directed toward someone we care about, toward a stranger, toward ourselves, or even to all living beings.
- iii. Compassion is a constant presence in our lives, but rarely do we notice it. Shifting our posture to avoid feeling uncomfortable is the movement of compassion. Opening up the door for someone on our way in to work is compassion. And of course, when we encounter suffering and feel an opening of the heart and an impulse to help, that too is compassion.
- iv. To boil it down: Compassion is the active desire to relieve suffering. Even when we are at our most neurotic, compassion is present. When we feel intense anxiety, or when we judge ourselves critically, there is an unpleasant experience that we want to be free from. When act out of anger, we do so from an impulse of wanting to protect ourselves, or to escape a threatening situation.

- v. So we can see here that compassion – the wish to be free from suffering – is always present, but that the mere presence of compassion does not mean that we will act wisely, or even kindly. Our most compassionate impulses, when we are not seeing clearly, can actually create suffering and confusion.
- vi. The critical piece in this puzzle is that we need to be in touch with compassion as it manifests. What often happens is that we're caught up in the emotions and thoughts that are swirling around on the surface, and we lose touch with the wholesome instinct underneath.
- vii. This month we'll practice noticing, strengthening, and extending that wholesome impulse. What you'll see is that compassion – like appreciation and kindness – is a deeply nourishing state. Compassion is an empowered, and empowering, state of mind, one rooted in deep care and concern, but also a shared sense of humanity, not pity. Compassion brings with it confidence, resilience, and a sense of inner richness. It feels good to experience compassion, and it feels good to be around people that are kind and caring.

b. Contemplative practice: Caring for ourselves

- i. The practices we'll do this month follow the same progression as the kindness practices from last month, except we'll be strengthening compassion. The basis for our practice is to see in ourselves, and eventually in others, the most basic of human impulses: the desire to be free from suffering, distress, discomfort, and other challenging situations. Once we learn to see this in ourselves and others, we can stay connected to the experience of compassion by repeating a simple phrase – just as we did last month – using it to strengthen both awareness and compassion at the same time.
- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."

- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice compassion toward myself and all living beings."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- vi. Next, take a few minutes to notice the subtle movement away from suffering and discomfort in your life. You can see this in all the things you do – big and small – to enjoy yourself, to be content, to be healthy, and so on. Think of the things you've done so far today, and see if you can notice in your own actions the desire to be happy and content.
- vii. Now reflect on your experience right here in the present moment. See if you can see the movement toward happiness as you do this practice. This could be noticing uncomfortable feelings in your body, agitation in the mind, or something in your surroundings that you find unpleasant. It could be anything. The key here is to notice your tendency to pull away or shield yourself from these experiences, not to dwell on the situation itself. Notice how this simple desire is present in your experience right now.
- viii. The next step is to stay connected to this wish by keeping it at the forefront of your mind. You can do this by repeating a simple phrase: "May I be free from suffering and distress," over and over in your mind. Repeat this silently to yourself and, as you do, see if you can touch in with the part of yourself that is beyond the suffering and adversity you have encountered in your life. Feel the sense of ease and contentment that is a natural part of your being and a natural quality of awareness itself.
- ix. Every few minutes, take a few moments to relax and rest in open awareness, noticing any feelings that are present, and then return to repeating the phrases and feeling the natural sense of ease and contentment that is part of your true nature.
- x. To conclude, let go of the contemplation and rest your mind in open awareness for a few minutes.
- xi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, notice how the movement away from suffering is manifesting in your experience and repeat the "May I be free from suffering and distress" as you go about your day.

c. Scientific principle: The benefits of compassion

- i. The scientific study of compassion, and of its cultivation, is still very much in its infancy. Pioneering studies of the cultivation of compassion suggest that this quality can indeed be cultivated, and in relatively short periods of time, and that it may have far reaching effects on the body, mind, and brain.
- ii. One area that compassion training seems to help is the regulation of thoughts and emotions, even in psychological disorders like anxiety and depression.
- iii. It also seems to decrease the incidence and duration of distressing emotions, to increase positive emotions, and to shift thoughts in a positive direction.
- iv. Not surprisingly, compassion training also seems to increase factors that bolster healthy relationships with others, and to decrease feelings of loneliness and alienation.
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 2. Klimecki, O. M., Leiberg, S., Lamm, C., & Singer, T. (2013). Functional neural plasticity and associated changes in positive affect after compassion training. *Cerebral Cortex*, 23(7), 1552–61.
 3. Shonin, E., Van Gordon, W., Compare, A., Zangeneh, M., & Griffiths, M. D. (2015). Buddhist-Derived Loving-Kindness and Compassion Meditation for the Treatment of Psychopathology: a Systematic Review. *Mindfulness*, 6(5), 1161–1180.

2. Week 2: Extending compassion

a. Contemplative principle: Extending compassion

- i. This week we'll practice the same skill, and we'll extend it to other people – just as we did last month in cultivating kindness.
- ii. The basis for this practice is to have an intimate familiarity with our own mind and how it works. In particular, what we need to get

familiar with is our own instinct to avoid suffering, distress, and discomfort. This instinct is so pervasive in our lives that we hardly notice it.

- iii. Hopefully the practices you learned last week helped you to recognize the presence of compassion in your life, not in an abstract sense, but in a very concrete, practical sense. The key is that we see the movement to avoid suffering in the mundane minutia of our everyday life, and especially when we encounter challenges and our old thought habits and emotional patterns get activated.
- iv. This week we'll see that other people – just like us – are constantly thinking, feeling, and doing things that are rooted in this basic impulse. And just like us, sometimes they do things that lead straight toward suffering rather than away from it. This is an important insight. Every single one of us wants to avoid suffering, but despite our best efforts, we often think, say, and do things that actually create suffering for ourselves and others.
- v. Yet we also have good moments, when we see things clearly, and care deeply, and act wisely. When our movement away from suffering takes us in the right direction, and perhaps even makes a difference in the lives of others.
- vi. Step one, as we've seen, is to see how this plays out in our own lives. Step two – our practice for this week – is to notice this in someone we care about. This is a continuation of the “just like me...” practice that we worked on last month.
- vii. What we do here is take as our starting point the feeling of deep care and connection that we feel toward someone we have a trusting, warm relationship with. We learn to arouse that feeling so that it becomes second nature, to the point where we stay connected to the feeling of care and connection even in circumstances that we might have lost it in the past.
- viii. For instance, we may have a spouse that we care deeply about, and that we want to flourish, to be free from challenges and difficulties, and so on. But there are always moments when even those closest to us – or perhaps *especially* those closest to us – drive us crazy. In those moments, we do not typically feel an abundance of affection, care, and connection. We may even feel the opposite.

- ix. Here, we're practicing staying grounded in caring connections so that we cannot lose our sense of connection when we need it the most, and when others need us the most.

c. Contemplative practice: Just like me

- i. In this practice, we'll extend compassion to a loved one with the same steps we practiced last week, starting with recognizing our basic desire to be free from suffering, noticing that our loved one shares that same desire, and the extending the wish to be free from suffering to this person by repeating a phrase that expresses our desire.
- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice compassion toward myself and all living beings, and today, especially by extending compassion toward someone I care about."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- vi. Next, for a few moments, reflect on the subtle movement toward happiness and contentment in your own life, and remind yourself of all the things you do to secure your own well-being.
- vii. Once you see this clearly in yourself, bring to mind a loved one – someone toward whom you have a natural and uncomplicated feeling of affection. Imagine that this person is here, sitting in front of you, and feel a sense of warmth and connection with them.
- viii. Resting in that feeling of connection, think to yourself: "So and so [insert their name], is just like me. They want to be free from suffering and distress. Just like me, they want to be safe and not overwhelmed by stress and adversity." You can put this in whatever words resonate with you, but the point here is to notice the shared wish you have to be free from suffering.

- ix. Think of the things they do in their life to be free from suffering. Reflect on all the steps they take, no matter how mundane, to take care of themselves, and to deal with the problems and adversity they encounter in their lives.
- x. Now extend compassion to them by wishing that they truly flourish, and repeat the phrase, "May you be free from suffering and distress." As you repeat this phrase silently in your mind, feel the presence of your loved one as though they fully embody their very best qualities, as though you can feel their strength and resilience, and as though any suffering and burdens they are carrying naturally vanish.
- xi. Every few minutes, take a few moments to relax and rest in open awareness, noticing any feelings that are present, and then return to repeating the phrases and feeling the care and connection with the person you are focusing on.
- xii. To conclude, let go of the contemplation and rest your mind in open awareness for a few minutes.
- xiii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice when you are with people you like or care about. In those situations, notice how they share with you the same basic desire to be free from suffering, and extend your compassion to them by repeating the phrase "May you be free from suffering and distress."

d. Scientific principle: Empathy and compassion

- i. In common usage, the difference between empathy and compassion may not be all that clear, but we scientists tend to think of these as very different psychological experiences. Empathy, simply put, is our capacity to share the feelings of others. This is an important skill to have, but empathy on its own can lead to distress and feelings of overwhelm when we see the people around us are suffering. In neuroscience, some studies have even shown that feelings of empathy can activate networks in the brain associated with distressing emotions.
- ii. Compassion, on the other hand, is not sharing the suffering of another person, but rather a feeling of connection in which we feel warmth, concern, and are motivated to help, in which we are ready and willing to actually do something – if the situation calls for it –

to help alleviate their suffering. Compassion is reflected very differently in the brain compared to empathy. Compassion is linked to networks associated with positive emotions and feelings of affiliation.

- iii. Some research has shown that we can train compassion, and that doing so can shift our emotional experience, and corresponding activity in the brain, from negative, distressing feelings to those that are experienced as positive and nourishing.
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 2. Loggia, M. L., Mogil, J. S., & Bushnell, M. C. (2008). Empathy hurts: compassion for another increases both sensory and affective components of pain perception. *Pain*, 136(1-2), 168–76. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.pain.2007.07.017>
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3. Week 3: Compassion in challenging situations

a. Contemplative principle: Compassion in challenging situations

- i. One of the most difficult times to feel empathy for another person is when we're upset by their actions. At such times, we tend to feel very different from them, and we see their actions as being rooted in a fundamental character flaw that they possess, rather than as the product of conditions and circumstances.
- ii. When we feel disconnected from a person, or even a group of people, it doesn't help anyone. Feelings of anger, self-righteousness, competition, envy, etc. are depleting, unpleasant experiences. They feel bad, and often prompt us to do things and say things that leave us feeling even worse.
- iii. These mental and emotional states don't help anyone else either. They obviously don't help the person or people they're directed toward, and they put us in a state of reactivity in which we have very little capacity to care for others, to think clearly, or to act wisely.
- iv. It might seem counterintuitive that to intentionally cultivate kindness and compassion for people we don't like, especially when

these people may actually be doing things to harm us or make our lives difficult. But being angry, hurt, jealous, and reactive does not make us better equipped to deal with challenging situations. It's just the opposite.

- v. Compassion, on the other hand, is an empowered state, one in which we feel confident, and one in which we can see our situation clearly and choose a course of action that will serve our own needs, and those of others, in a skillful way.
- vi. In this sense, compassion is the most effective way to deal with injustice, whether it's directed toward us, or a situation we see in the world. It doesn't mean we need to become passive and accept whatever happens. Quite the contrary, sometimes the most compassionate thing to do is to take action, but the important thing is that the action we take is not based in reactivity, in a state where we are blindly acting out our emotional response, but instead is based in care and clear seeing.

b. Contemplative practice: Compassion toward someone we find challenging

- i. In this practice, you'll extend compassion to someone we don't have strong feelings about – positive or negative – and if you feel up for it, to someone you don't like, or who you find challenging.
- ii. The steps are the same as what we did last week. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice compassion toward myself and all living beings, and today, especially by extending compassion toward a neutral person, or someone I find challenging."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.

- vi. Next, for a few moments, reflect on the subtle movement away from suffering in your own life, and remind yourself of all the things you do to secure your own well-being.
- vii. Once you see this clearly in yourself, bring to mind another person. It could be someone you see regularly, but don't know very well, or someone you find challenging if you feel up for it. Imagine that this person is here, sitting in front of you, and let your awareness rest on their presence.
- viii. Now remember the feeling that you had when you imagined a loved one, and see if you can regard this person with that same sense of affection and warmth. If you imagined a child or a parent, imagine that they are your child or parent – or remind yourself that they have people in their lives who regard them with this kind of affection and see if you can take on that perspective. It doesn't have to be forced, just shift your perspective and let whatever feelings are present naturally bubble up to the surface.
- ix. Resting in that feeling of connection, think to yourself: "So and so [insert their name], is just like me. They want to be free from suffering and distress. Just like me, they want to be safe and not overwhelmed by stress and adversity." You can put this in whatever words resonate with you, but the point here is to notice the shared wish you have to be free from suffering.
- x. Think of the things they do in their life to be free from suffering. Reflect on all the steps they take, no matter how mundane, to take care of themselves, and to deal with challenges and adversity. If you don't know much about them, then just use your imagination and think of the things they probably do as part of their daily routine.
- xi. Now extend compassion to them by wishing that they truly flourish, and repeat the phrase, "May you be free from suffering and distress." As you repeat this phrase silently in your mind, feel the presence of the other person as though they fully embody their very best qualities, as though you can feel their strength and resilience, and as though any suffering and burdens they are carrying naturally vanish.
- xii. Every few minutes, take a few moments to relax and rest in open awareness, noticing any feelings that are present, and then return to repeating the phrases and feeling the care and connection with the person you are focusing on.

- xiii. To conclude, let go of the contemplation and rest your mind in open awareness for a few minutes.
- xiv. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice when you are with other people, and especially when you are around strangers or people you find challenging. In those situations, notice how they share with you the same basic desire to be free from suffering, and extend your compassion to them by repeating the phrase “May you be free from suffering and distress.”

c. Scientific principle: Compassion and the stress response

- i. Although adversity and stress can help us to grow in various ways, intense and/or persistent stress can adversely affect our well-being and physical health. Research on the relationship between compassion and stress is beginning to show that training in compassion may help us to deal with toxic stress and to mitigate its impact on the mind and body. One recent study, for instance, investigated the impact of compassion training on biomarkers of the body’s stress response system. Interestingly, this study didn’t show any differences between a control group and a group that trained in compassion in these biomarkers. When researchers looked more closely at the data, however, they found that those within the group that received the training, those who spent more time practicing reported lower levels of stress and also had lower levels of an important biomarker of stress. This preliminary research has given us hope that training in compassion can help us deal with the toxic effects of stress more effectively.

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4. Week 4: Universal compassion

a. Contemplative principle: Universal compassion

- i. Now that we're a few weeks into our exploration of compassion, hopefully you've experienced what an empowered, nourishing state compassion is. This week we'll take this further by working at the edges of the heart and mind, the places where our feelings of care and connection usually break down.
- ii. As social animals, we have a very strong tendency to seek out and form bonds with people that are like us. This is the most natural thing in the world. If we're passionate about basketball, we want to spend time with others who share our passion, but if we are into knitting, then spending time throwing a ball through a small hoop may be the last thing we want to do.
- iii. Sharing experiences, passions, and activities creates powerful bonds, bonds that grow into trusting, caring relationships. In this sense, our tendency to affiliate with others who are like us in some important way is a very positive thing.
- iv. The dark side to this tendency is that also have a tendency to promote our own interests, or those of our group, above others. We may not understand the experience of other groups, or even make assumptions about them that are not true. In extreme cases, we can fight with people, or go to war as societies and cultures, because of the distrust, and misunderstanding, between peoples.
- v. This has always been a corrosive element in human culture, but it was not until quite recently that this tendency was linked to technological developments that have given us the power to create massive destruction, and even to endanger our entire species.

- vi. As corrosive as the feeling of distrust and prejudice are, when we learn to let go of the boundaries of our feeling of care and concern, we experience a state of empowered compassion that is tremendously nourishing, both for ourselves, for those around us, and for the world.
- vii. It may seem like an unattainable goal to feel such boundless compassion, but the people who embody this – people like Mother Theresa, the Dalai Lama, and Nelson Mandela – were not born saints. They practiced, and practiced a lot. They trained their minds, softened their hearts, and learned to see the boundaries and blockages in the mind that keep us from feeling connected to others. This week we'll do the same practices.

b. Contemplative practice: Universal compassion

- i. This week we'll take our practice further – much further – and extend compassion to everyone, dropping every barrier and limit to our feeling of connectedness.
- ii. To begin, bring your mind into the present by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to practice compassion toward myself and all living beings, extending compassion without limit or barrier."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- vi. Next, for a few moments, reflect on the subtle movement away from suffering and distress in your own life, and remind yourself of all the things you do to secure your own well-being.
- vii. Once you see this clearly in yourself, bring to mind the recognition that all living beings share this same desire to be free from suffering, stress, and adversity. If it helps, you can think of specific examples, even thinking of animals or groups of people in faraway places.

- viii. Imagine that all of these people and creatures are cared for and loved, that they are safe and free from suffering and overwhelming adversity. Arouse a sense of care and concern and extend it to all forms of life. If it helps, you can bring to mind the loved one you meditated on a few weeks ago to elicit a feeling of compassion, and then drop all boundaries and imagine you are extending that feeling of compassion to everyone, everywhere.
- ix. Now extend compassion to all living beings by wishing that they truly flourish, and repeat the phrase, "May all living beings be free from suffering and distress." As you repeat this phrase silently in your mind, feel a sense of connection with all living beings and imagine that this causes everyone to get in touch with their very best qualities, as though you can feel their strength and resilience, and as though any suffering and burdens they are carrying naturally vanish.
- x. After a few minutes, take a short break and relax the mind, resting in open awareness. Let any thoughts or feelings – whether pleasant or unpleasant – move freely through your mind and body. Return to the contemplation and again repeat the phrase after a few moments or minutes.
- xi. To conclude, let go of the contemplation and rest your mind in open awareness for a few minutes.
- xii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. When you remember, open your mind to the connections you share with others – those around you and those more distant – and repeat the phrase, "May all living beings be free from suffering and distress."

c. Scientific principle: The science of altruism

- i. One of the obvious effects of cultivating compassion, one would hope, is an increase in what we scientists call "prosocial" behaviors, which basically refers to behaviors that enhance social bonds. One of the way that we measure these behaviors is through observing people playing games, where we can see evidence of helping behaviors, and also of antisocial behaviors like punishing and revenge.
- ii. Research on the cultivation of compassion has shown that people do indeed act more altruistically as a result of compassion training.

We can even see these altruistic impulses reflected in brain activity. What we find is that people who have trained in compassion tend to give more as a result of their training. We also find that people who have trained in compassion exhibit less anger and are less likely to punish others in economic games. Altogether, these data suggest that compassion may help individuals, groups, and even entire cultures to promote values and behaviors that support well-being.

1. Source: Leiberg, S., Klimecki, O., & Singer, T. (2011). Short-term compassion training increases prosocial behavior in a newly developed prosocial game. *PloS One*, 6(3), e17798.
2. McCall, C., Steinbeis, N., Ricard, M., & Singer, T. (2014). Compassion meditators show less anger, less punishment, and more compensation of victims in response to fairness violations. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, 8(December), 424.
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Appendix 6

Content Outline for Module 4 of the Healthy Minds Program

Program Script Outlines - Module 4: A Healthy Sense of Self

Month 10 – Getting to know the self

Summary: One of the most important ingredients of a healthy mind is self-knowledge – an understanding of how the mind works. When we understand our own mind from the inside out, we can see how our beliefs and expectations shape our experience. This insight helps us distinguish what we think and believe from what we directly experience, and also to tell the difference between what we experience and what is really going on. This month we'll learn some simple practices to explore our sense of self and to uncover unconscious beliefs about ourselves, about others, and about the world and our place in it.

1. Week 1: The practice of self-inquiry

a. Contemplative principle: Self-inquiry and the healthy mind

- i. One of the most important aspects of well-being is self-knowledge – an understanding of how one's own mind works. This kind of understanding doesn't come from readings books or listening to lectures by important people. The only way we can truly get to know the mind is by exploring it first hand, by observing our own thoughts, emotions, and perceptions and seeing how these experiences inform our sense of self and how we understand our place in the world.
- ii. We call this practice of exploring experience self-inquiry. This practice is really an extension of the practices we've been learning over the past months. Mindful awareness is our starting point, and here we use this present-centered awareness to ask questions and investigate, to look deeply into the nature and dynamics of our own mind to see what's really going on.
- iii. The point of all this is not to come up with a better theory or belief system about ourselves or the world. Rather, we're learning to experience the world directly, rather than viewing everything through the lens of our pre-existing beliefs and opinions. In the process, we learn to question our own assumptions about ourselves, about our relationships, and about the world.

- iv. Something interesting happens when we start to notice all our unconscious beliefs. The hold that our assumptions have on us begins to ease and we develop a more fluid sense of self, a sense of self that allows for growth and transformation, and that is able to respond to challenges with clear seeing and kindness.
- v. This is critically important for well-being, because much of the suffering we experience is because our expectations and assumptions about what should be happening don't match up with what actually is happening. This mismatch creates tension and suffering, and the antidote to this suffering is to let go of our unquestioned assumptions and habitual expectations, and to relate to the world as it is.

b. Contemplative practice: Windows into the self

- i. This week we'll learn to shift from a space of open receptivity to a more active stance of inquiring, questioning, and actively observing. The practice is quite simple. Before you start, find something to write with and some paper. You'll need to take a few notes. Don't worry, I'll walk you through it step-by-step.
- ii. Once you have a pen and some paper, you can begin. As always, start by checking in with your posture and breath.
- iii. Next, uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iv. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to explore my own mind and learn how it works."
- v. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- vi. As you rest in awareness, notice the thoughts that arise in your mind. You don't have to change them or control them. Just note thoughts as they arise. When you see a clear line of thinking emerge, make a short note about the content of the thoughts. It doesn't have to be long, just a few words that note the content, like, "thinking about a meeting later today," and any emotional tone that surrounds the thought, like, "anxious."

- vii. Once you note the thought, rest in awareness again and note the next line of thought that arises.
- viii. After a few minutes of reflection, relax and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- ix. For the final step of this practice, pick one of the lines of thinking that you noted in the first part, ideally one that had an emotion or feeling attached. Now ask yourself, "What beliefs and assumptions underlie this thought?" Ask yourself this question and see what bubbles to the surface of your mind. As you engage in this inquiry, continue to maintain awareness of your thoughts, including when you are actively inquiring into the thought pattern and its underlying beliefs.
- x. As you explore your thoughts and beliefs, notice that all the words and images in your mind – and all the beliefs and assumptions that underlie them – are just thoughts. Notice that they are nothing more than subjective impressions and not objective reality, that they are nothing more than habits of the mind.
- xi. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for another minute or two.
- xii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, notice the thoughts that you carry with you into the situation and inquire into the beliefs and assumptions that underlie them.

c. Scientific principle: Looks can deceive

- i. It is a deeply human quality to assume that we experience the world *as it is*, and that our perception is a perfect representation of reality. Most of us never question this basic principle of experience. Yet, at the same time, most of us have also had a basic education in modern science. Even if we can't explain Einstein's theory of relativity, we know that the seemingly solid world around us is actually composed of atoms, and that these atoms are not static, but constantly in motion. So even at the most basic level, there is a mismatch between what we know to be true and what seems to be true based on experience.
- ii. The world of perception is even more mysterious than it seems. It turns out that our impressions of the world are actually highly

subjective, and that even the most mundane experiences we have are shaped by many factors that are not “out there” but rather “in here,” inside our own minds and brains.

- iii. There are countless examples of this. People who kick a field goal will see the same goal as larger than those who miss their kick. And then there are classic perceptual tricks, like the Ebbinghaus illusion, that show us that our perception is oftentimes way off the mark, and that our emotions can further distort our already distorted perception. All of this shows us that our reality is constructed, and that while we cannot say that everything we experience is a complete fantasy, it is also not “real” in quite the same way that we tend to assume it is.
 1. Source: Koch, C. (2010). Looks Can Deceive. *Scientific American Mind*, 21(3), 16–17.
 2. McKay, R. T., & Dennett, D. C. (2009). The evolution of misbelief. *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 32(6), 493–510; discussion 510–561.
 3. Van Ulzen, N. R., Semin, G. R., Oudejans, R. R. D., & Beek, P. J. (2008). Affective stimulus properties influence size perception and the Ebbinghaus illusion. *Psychological Research*, 72(3), 304–310.

2. Week 2: Living in a dream

a. Contemplative principle: Living in a dream

- i. Last week we learned about the practice of self-inquiry, the process of questioning our beliefs and assumptions and observing what we directly experience. When we do this, one of the first things we notice is that often there is a disconnect between what we think, what we directly experience, and what is really going on. In other words, the stories we tell ourselves don’t always reflect what we experience, and the way we see things is not always the same as what is really happening.
- ii. This may seem quite abstract, so let me give an example, and one that most of us experience every night: the dream. Dreams are amazing. Every night we lie down in bed and – while our body lies motionless for hours on end – our minds create entire worlds. If you ever doubt the mind’s capacity to make stuff up, just remember what happens every night when you dream.

- iii. What if you dreamed about hitting a rough patch at work? Maybe you – in your dream – haven't been performing as well as you'd like and you're starting to worry that you might get fired. Your fear prompts you to think that everyone is watching you and judging what you are doing, but maybe in the dream no one really cares and you are just being paranoid.
- iv. There are a number of things at work here. In the dream, what you think is happening is that people are spying on you and trying to find flaws in what you are doing, but these dream people are actually just going about their normal routines – so there is disconnect between what you think is happening and what you can actually observe when you stop to look around. But there is also a huge disconnect between what you observe and what's really happening, because of course this is all just a dream. Even though it seems as though there are real people and that you are working with them, in reality this is all just a projection of your own mind. So there are three things: what you think is happening, what you directly experience and observe, and what is really going on.
- v. In the practice of self-inquiry, we can take any of these three aspects of our experience as starting point for a journey of exploration. And the insight and self-knowledge helps us to loosen up the rigidity in our sense of self and leads to a more dynamic, fluid way of being with ourselves, with others, and fully in the world.
- vi. In the following few months, we'll follow a three-step process to help us disentangle our personal fantasies and unconscious interpretations from what we are actually experiencing, and to then learn to tell the difference between what we directly experience and what is actually going on.
- vii. This month we'll do some practices that bring our underground beliefs and opinions up to the surface of the mind. One of the main insights from this particular practice is that we learn to see these beliefs as concepts and nothing more. Second we look directly at experience to get to know the dynamics of our own subjective experience – that's what we'll work on next month. And finally, we'll learn to see the gaps and holes in experience that help us to see that the way things appear is not necessarily indicative of what's really going on, like the experiences we have in a dream. We'll see that experience is much more open, dynamic, fluid, and flexible than we normally think it is.

- viii. We'll start by getting clear about the stories we tell, and for this, the easiest place to begin is with ourselves – everyone's favorite subject.

b. Contemplative practice: What do I think about myself?

- i. Last week we practiced noticing thoughts and inquiring into their relationship to our sense of self. This week we'll continue this process, looking more deeply into all the ideas and beliefs we have about ourselves. As before, you need a pen and some paper.
- ii. Begin by checking in with your posture and breath, then uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iii. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to explore my own mind, and especially all the beliefs and assumptions I have about myself."
- iv. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- v. As you continue to remain aware and present, ask yourself, "Who am I?" and then let go and see what ideas and thoughts naturally emerge. When you notice a pattern or theme, take a moment to note the content of the thoughts. It doesn't have to be long, just a few words, like, "I am a man," "I am lazy," or "I like to be outdoors."
- vi. Treat these thoughts as neutral words or concepts, almost as though they are about someone else. Don't worry about how true they are, or even how reflective of what you really think or feel. Just ask the question and notice what naturally surfaces in your mind.
- vii. Once you note the thought, rest in awareness again and note the next line of thought that arises.
- viii. As you explore your thoughts and beliefs, notice that all the words and images in your mind – and all the beliefs and assumptions that underlie them – are just thoughts. Notice that they are nothing more than subjective impressions and not objective reality, that they are nothing more than habits of the mind.

- ix. From time to time, relax and rest in open awareness for a few moments.
- x. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for another minute or two.
- xi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, ask yourself, “Who am I in this situation?” and see what rises to the surface of your mind. You don’t have to judge or investigate what comes up, simply let any thoughts or feelings arise and fade away naturally.

c. Scientific principle: Cognitive insight

- i. Research in the realm of clinical psychology points to the connection between our beliefs about the self, how we view the world, and how this informs our expectations about the future. When we view ourselves as helpless, for instance, this feeds into a belief that the world is overwhelming and threatening, and this – understandably – prompts us to form pessimistic views about what will happen in the future.
- ii. Another important principle from this field is the understanding that our ability to step back and identify, and also to question, what we think and perceive is an important constituent of well-being. In extreme psychological disorders, such as schizophrenia and psychosis, this ability is severely impaired, and this impairment makes it difficult to pinpoint when our mind has gotten off track and disconnected from reality.
 1. Source: Beck, A. T. (2005). The Current State of Cognitive Therapy: A 40-Year Retrospective. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62, 953–959.
 2. Palmer, E. C., Gilleen, J., & David, A. S. (2015). The relationship between cognitive insight and depression in psychosis and schizophrenia: A review and meta-analysis. *Schizophrenia Research*.

3. Week 3: Expectations and reality

a. Contemplative principle: Expectations and reality

- i. Reality rarely conforms to our expectations. The suffering we encounter in life often comes from the tension between these expectations and what actually happens. When these two don't line up, we suffer, but we tend to blame our suffering on the situation, not on the fact that we were expecting things to turn out differently than they actually did.
- ii. One of the most powerful tools we have in our well-being toolbox is the capacity to bring these expectations into the light of conscious awareness. We don't have to change these beliefs or do away with them. Simply being aware of them is liberating.
- iii. When we can see an expectation clearly, it doesn't have the same hold on us. We can see that it is just a thought, a belief, an assumption, and in recognizing this important point, the expectation does not color our perception in the same way than it does when we are not aware of it.
- iv. One area of life that is filled with unquestioned assumptions and expectations is the world of relationships. We have all sorts of ideas about the people we know and interact with, and oftentimes these expectations are based on old, outdated information, and sometimes they are based on our own past and history, and therefore have nothing to do with the person him or herself.
- v. We all know how it feels to be perceived in a way that doesn't reflect who we are. One example of this is going home for the holidays and we spend time with people who have known us all our lives. When we have long standing relationships, the accumulated experience and memories can act as a filter, shaping how we perceive others, and they perceive us. Sometimes it can feel like a straight-jacket. Maybe we have changed and grown, yet still others view us as though we are the same person we were five years ago, or fifty years ago.
- vi. For this reason, unearthing all our old beliefs and expectations is incredibly illuminating and liberating. It is also a gift to others. When we loosen the hold of our expectations, it allows others to grow and change as well, and to feel fully seen and appreciated as they are, rather than feeling that they need to conform to the expectations of someone else.
- vii. So this is what we'll work with this week. We'll do an inner excavation, seeing the beliefs that we carry around with us and that shape our relationships.

b. Contemplative practice: What do I think about others?

- i. In this exercise, we will continue our practice of excavating our unconscious beliefs and expectations by inquiring into our relationships with others.
- ii. Begin by checking in with your posture and breath, then uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iii. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to explore my own mind, and especially all the beliefs and assumptions I have about others, and about my relationships."
- iv. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- v. As you continue to remain aware and present, bring someone that you care about to mind, ideally someone with whom you do not have a conflicted or complicated relationship. Ask yourself, "Who is so and so [insert their name]? What kind of person is he/she?" Then let go and see what ideas and thoughts naturally emerge.
- vi. When you notice a pattern or theme, take a moment to note the content of the thoughts. It doesn't have to be long, just a few words, like, "She is honest" or "he is very active and athletic."
- vii. Treat these thoughts as neutral words or concepts. Don't worry about how true they are, or even how reflective of what you really think or feel. Just ask the question and notice what naturally surfaces in your mind.
- viii. Once you note the thought, rest in awareness again and note the next line of thought that arises.
- ix. As you explore your thoughts and beliefs, notice that all the words and images in your mind – and all the beliefs and assumptions that underlie them – are just thoughts. Notice that they are nothing more than subjective impressions and not objective reality, that they are nothing more than habits of the mind.
- x. From time to time, relax and rest in open awareness for a few moments.
- xi. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for another minute or two.

- xii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, notice the people around you, or the people who you have interacted with, or will interact with, that day, and ask yourself, “Who is this person? What is she like?” and see what rises to the surface of your mind. You don’t have to judge or investigate what comes up, simply let any thoughts or feelings arise and fade away naturally.

c. Scientific principle: Thoughts are just thoughts

- i. The inner storyline in the mind is so pervasive that we oftentimes do not even notice its presence, much less question how true or accurate our thoughts are. Recent scientific research has taken a keen interest in the capacity to “defuse” or “distance” oneself from one’s thoughts. The ability to see thoughts for what they are – words and images in the mind – rather than assuming they are true representations of reality is seen as an important aspect of mental health. When this capacity is impaired, we can easily become disconnected from reality and lost in a world of thoughts and feelings. For this reason, many strategies used in contemporary psychotherapy train the ability to recognize one’s own thoughts and emotions, and to see them as mental events rather than letting them function as one’s lens through which one views the world.
 1. Source: Bernstein, A., Hadash, Y., Lichtash, Y., Tanay, G., Shepherd, K., & Fresco, D. M. (2015). Decentering and Related Constructs: A Critical Review and Meta-Cognitive Processes. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(5), 599–617.
 2. Hayes, S. C., Luoma, J. B., Bond, F. W., Masuda, A., & Lillis, J. (2006). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Model, processes and outcomes. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 44, 1–25.
 3. Teasdale, J. D., Moore, R. G., Hayhurst, H., Pope, M., Williams, S., & Segal, Z. V. (2002). Metacognitive awareness and prevention of relapse in depression: Empirical evidence. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 70(2), 275–287.

4. Week 4: At home in the world

a. Contemplative principle: At home in the world

- i. Just beneath the surface of awareness, our minds are filled with ideas. These ideas shape how we think of ourselves and how we see others. They also shape how we see the world and our place in it. When we see the world as a threatening place, or as devoid of any meaning or value, then our entire existence can be filled with fear, anxiety, or a feeling of hollowness.
- ii. By now, hopefully you've started to see some of your personal storylines and narratives, and how your sense of self is largely a construction of all these interwoven concepts and beliefs. These concepts are very helpful. They enable us to navigate a complex world and to learn from experience. But when we don't realize that these stories are just stories, and not necessarily reflective of what is actually happening in our lives, they can get us into trouble.
- iii. This week we'll continue our excavation process by inquiring into the stories we tell ourselves about the world, and our place in it. This is a big area to explore, but it can shed great insight into how we view our relationship with our surroundings, with the wider world, with work and money, with other cultures, and even with the notion of being human and our role in the universe.
- iv. As I've mentioned in previous weeks, the point is not to change all these concepts. We need them to navigate and make sense of the world. What we're doing here is to be aware of them and to see the influence they have clearly. We learn to see them as useful assumptions rather than truths, and in the process we open ourselves up to the world as it is, and the tension between our expectations and reality begins to dissolve.

b. Contemplative practice: What do I think about the world?

- i. This week we'll turn our attention to how we view the world and our place in it.
- ii. Begin by checking in with your posture and breath, then uplift the mind by forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iii. Then link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to explore my own mind, and especially all the beliefs and assumptions I have about the world and my place in it."

- iv. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- v. As you continue to remain aware and present, ask yourself, "What is the world like?" Then let go and see what ideas and thoughts naturally emerge.
- vi. As before, when you notice a pattern or theme, take a moment to note the content of the thoughts.
- vii. You can also ask, "What is my place in this world? Why am I here?" and again, let go and see what thoughts and feelings arise.
- viii. As you explore your thoughts and beliefs, notice that all the words and images in your mind – and all the beliefs and assumptions that underlie them – are just thoughts. Notice that they are nothing more than subjective impressions and not objective reality, that they are nothing more than habits of the mind.
- ix. From time to time, relax and rest in open awareness for a few moments.
- x. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for another minute or two.
- xi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, ask yourself, "What is the world like? What kind of place is it?" and see what rises to the surface of your mind. You don't have to judge or investigate what comes up, simply let any thoughts or feelings arise and fade away naturally.

c. Scientific principle: The stories we tell ourselves

- i. The stories we tell ourselves have a profound impact on our sense of well-being. We are constantly interpreting what we experience, linking it to memories from past experience, and forming expectations about the future. Usually we are completely unaware of this interchange between our thoughts, perception, and emotions, but occasionally we are able to step back, recognize the story we're telling ourselves, and to flip the script.
- ii. This ability to change our interpretation impacts our ability to regulate emotion and recover from adversity. When we get stuck in an old storyline, we also tend to get stuck in old emotional habits,

and this makes it difficult to work with challenging situations. Fortunately, evidence suggests that cognitive reappraisal can be learned, and that the practices that we're learning in this program can help us to strengthen this capacity.

1. Source: Buhle, J. T., Silvers, J. A., Wager, T. D., Lopez, R., Onyemekwu, C., Kober, H., ... Ochsner, K. N. (2014). Cognitive Reappraisal of Emotion: A Meta-Analysis of Human Neuroimaging Studies. *Cerebral Cortex*, 24(11), 2981–2990.
2. Garland, E. L., Gaylord, S. A., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2011). Positive Reappraisal Mediates the Stress-Reductive Effects of Mindfulness: An Upward Spiral Process. *Mindfulness*, 2, 59–67.
3. Gunaydin, G., Selcuk, E., & Ong, A. D. (2016). Trait Reappraisal Predicts Affective Reactivity to Daily Positive and Negative Events. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7(June), 1–9.

Month 11 – The changing self

Summary: One of the most pervasive aspects of our sense of self is our gut feeling that there is some part of us that is enduring. On one level, we know that things change, and the fact that our bodies and minds are aging is sometimes painfully obvious, but at a deeper level we often harbor a belief that things will last, and this disconnect between our hope that things will stay the same – and the reality that they never do – can create tremendous stress in the body and mind. One way to loosen this tendency and to ease into a more fluid way of being in the world is to explore the dynamics of our subjective experience, to notice the shifting constellation of psychological processes and physical experiences that comprise our sense of self. Simply noticing the complexity of the body and mind – and how they are constantly changing – is itself an important insight, and one that helps us to respond to the ups and downs of life with a clear head and open heart.

1. Week 1: Building blocks of the self

a. Contemplative principle: Building blocks of the self

- i. What is the self? When you say “I,” what exactly are you referring to? Are you your body? Your mind? Both of these together? Or is there some other aspect of experience that holds everything together?
- ii. This month we’re going to ask this challenging question and use it as a basis for exploring how we conceive of our sense of self. We’re not going to search for a new theory or philosophy. Rather, we’re going to let our experience give us the answers. In the process, we’ll notice all the different factors that comprise our sense of self, and perhaps some surprising things about our own identity.
- iii. At a very general level, we experience ourselves as having a body and a mind. This is pretty obvious. But when we peak under the hood things get a little more interesting. Our experience of the body is quite complex. We have sensations and feelings in the body, which are constantly changing, and a visual perception of the body (i.e., we can actually see our body). And then of course we have all our thoughts, beliefs, and opinions *about* the body. From moment to moment, how we experience the body changes, sometimes quite dramatically.
- iv. And now onto the mind. The mind is even more complex. One very basic function of the mind is to react to experience. In the last module we got in touch with the desire to be happy and free from

suffering. If we strip that experience down to its essence, what we're left with is the bare feeling tone of experience. When we see, hear, or feel something, we experience it as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. We react and respond. We move toward pleasant things, away from the unpleasant, and we often tune out the neutral. This capacity to feel – as opposed to the bare sensation we have in the body – is one of the most important functions of the mind.

- v. We also have perception, which at a very basic level is the mind's capacity to organize experience. In other words, we don't experience the world as a random mish-mash of shape, color, and sound, our mind puts everything in nice little boxes and organizes things. This conceptual overlay that the mind projects onto the world is such a constant thread in our experience that we don't even notice it.
- vi. And then we have the constant flow of thoughts, emotions, and other mental events. We think, we emote, we react and respond, and all of this plays out in the mind. The sheer volume and complexity of the mind's movements is quite amazing, when we step back to observe.
- vii. And finally, there is awareness itself, the simple fact that we have a point of view, a perspective. I don't mean a point of view in terms of opinion, but rather we experience being an observer, an agent, someone who does things. So we have thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, but we also have the subjective sense that we are the one who has all these thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. We are the experiencer of our own worlds. This is one of the most central aspects of our sense of self.
- viii. We can see from this short investigation that the self is quite complex. Given everything that's going on, it's actually quite amazing that we still have the sense of being a single person who endures across time. This insight is important, however, because we can see that the self is actually fluid. We may feel as though we are the same person from day to day, and year to year, but when we observe our experience, we can see that we're not even the same person from second to second. Our experience of ourselves and the world is always changing.

d. Contemplative practice: Deconstructing the self

- i. The starting point for our practice this week is our sense of self. What we'll do is peak under the hood of our inner experience to see what we find, to investigate all the different aspects of our body and mind that we lump together and call the self.
- ii. You can start by checking in with your posture and forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iii. Next, link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to explore my own mind and learn how it works."
- iv. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- v. As you rest in open awareness, turn your attention to the body. With your mind's eye, observe the experience of the body: the shape and form you see with your eyes, the flitting sensations that you feel, and anything else that rises to the surface of your mind. Let's do this for the next minute or two.
- vi. Now bring your awareness to the feeling tone of experience. Notice how some things feel pleasant, some feel unpleasant, and some don't feel anything, one way or the other. Take another minute or so to be with these feelings.
- vii. Next, notice how your mind organizes experience. When it sees, hears, smells, tastes, or feels, there is an immediate recognition and classification that happens. The mind immediately labels things – a chair, an arm, the sound of a dog barking – notice how the mind navigates the complexity of the world.
- viii. And now notice all the mental events that continually unfold. Attention shifts and moves from object to object...words and images arise and fall away...emotions and reactions occur. Simply notice this shifting constellation of mental processes as they manifest.
- ix. Now, finally, notice awareness itself, the simple knowing quality of mind that is always present. There is sound, and the knowing of sound, sensation, and the knowing of sensation. Notice how awareness is the backdrop for everything you experience.
- x. Finally, let all of these experiences unfold and notice how they all come together to create the sense of identity, how a sense of there

being an “I” emerges from this shifting flow of sensations, thoughts, etc.

- xi. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- ix. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, notice all the different experiences that underlie your sense of self in the present moment.

b. Scientific principle: The manifold self

- i. One challenge in studying the self is knowing where to look. What scientists have begun to discover is that the self may not be a single thing, but rather a manifold process. From a psychological perspective, we can identify many aspects of the self: our thoughts and memories, our knowledge and experience, the subjective sense of enduring across time, and also the feeling of being an agent or one who experiences. We also have the capacity to reflect on ourselves, and also of being an embodied being.
- ii. We see the same complexity from the point of view of the brain. There doesn't appear to be in any one place in the brain where the self resides. Rather, the networks and regions that correspond to different self-related processes are themselves scattered throughout the brain, and are themselves tied to many different psychological factors, not all of which pertain to the self.
- iii. The bottom line is that the self is complex, and the feeling of their being a single, unitary, enduring self belies the complicated mosaic of shifting psychological and physiological processes.
 1. Source: Klein, S. B. (2010). The self: as a construct in psychology and neuropsychological evidence for its multiplicity. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 1(April), 172–183.
 2. Legrand, D., & Ruby, P. (2009). What is self-specific? Theoretical investigation and critical review of neuroimaging results. *Psychological Review*, 116(1), 252–82.

2. Week 2: Allowing for change – the body

a. Contemplative principle: Experiencing the body

- i. Our physical bodies are one of the most important aspects of our sense of selves. We have a tremendous amount of psychological energy wrapped up in the body. We have feelings and beliefs about the body. Expectations and hopes – as well as fear and anxiety – about what will happen to it. Every culture has a different set of attitudes about the body, and these values shape our own perception.
- ii. Think about how much time you spend on the body – feeding it, clothing it, exercising and changing your diet so that it's healthy, or feeling bad or guilty that you don't – we spend an inordinate amount of time obsessing about the body. Our experience of being in a body colors just about everything we do, and most of this is completely unconscious.
- iii. Typically, we don't explore our experience of the body. This unreflective stance opens the door to all the beliefs and expectations that we learn from our families, cultures, and our own personal experience. When we explore this experience, however, we begin to shift from a way of being that is dominated – and often distorted – by unconscious values and beliefs, to a way of experiencing the body as it is in the present moment. In other words, we experience the body with openness and acceptance, rather than fear, anxiety, pride, or unquestioned assumptions and expectations.
- iv. One of the most interesting things about the body is that it is constantly changing, as is our perception of it. Sensations flit in and out of our awareness. Perceptions and judgments crowd the mind every time we look in the mirror. And all of this changes continually. Our experience of the body is not stable for even a moment.
- v. When we tune into this dynamic unfolding, something shifts. We start to feel at home in the body, rather than seeing it as an ongoing problem that we have to solve. The hold of our old beliefs and habits begins to lessen, and an attitude of open acceptance starts to emerge. This is a gradual process, but we can begin to get a taste of this simple through exploring our experience of the body with an open mind.

e. Contemplative practice: Experiencing the body

- i. This week we'll take our experience of the body as a starting point for our exploration of the self.
- ii. You can start by checking in with your posture and forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iii. Next, link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to explore my own mind and learn how it works, and especially my experience of the body."
- iv. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- v. As you rest in open awareness, turn your attention to the body. With your mind's eye, observe the experience of the body: the shape and form you see with your eyes, the flitting sensations that you feel, and anything else that rises to the surface of your mind. Let's do this for the next minute or two.
- vi. Notice how the sensations in the body are constantly changing.
- vii. Let your awareness move through the body and notice all the different parts of the body, all interconnected and dependent on one another.
- viii. And relax your attention a bit and rest your awareness gently in the body. Simply note whatever arises.
- ix. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- vi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, bring your awareness to the body and notice how your experience of the body is constantly changing.

b. Scientific principle: Distorted views of the body

- i. One topic that has been of interest to scientists is the way in which our subjective impressions are shaped by external forces. Of course, this happens all the time, every time we turn on the television, see a billboard, or hear our friends chatting about their favorite pastimes. The media is one of the most pervasive forces in

our lives, and one that can impact the way we see ourselves, and even the way we view our bodies. For instance, one study showed that showing people images of thin people made them significantly more critical of their own bodies compared to when they viewed images of average or plus size models.

1. Source: Blaivas, J. G., Levine, M. P., & Murnen, S. K. (2002). The effect of experimental presentation of thin media images on body satisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 31(1), 1–16.

3. Week 3: The inner landscape of thoughts

a. Contemplative principle: The inner landscape of thoughts

- i. Back in the first module of the Healthy Minds program, we learned to step back and observe our thoughts as they arise and dissolve into awareness. This week we're going to take this one step further and explore the nature of the inner landscape of our thoughts.
- ii. Like the body, our thoughts are constantly changing. Words and images crowd the mind, and oftentimes we do not even notice what's happening. When we aren't aware of what is happening in the mind, our thoughts essentially serve as the lens through which we view ourselves, others, and the world. If we're having a good day, everything looks great, and we see the best in everyone and everything. But when things aren't going so well, our thoughts can warp and distort our experience in a negative direction – and we only see flaws.
- iii. What are thoughts? When we feel oppressed by our thoughts, they can seem overwhelming. But when we take the time to look, we see that thoughts are ethereal, almost like a cloud or a rainbow.
- iv. Where do thoughts happen? Are they in the head? In the body? Or somehow outside of the body? When explore thoughts, we quickly see that they are quite insubstantial. The more we look for them, the less we find.
- v. The power of this exercise is in the looking. This is not an intellectual or theoretical process, but a deeply experiential one. We're getting to know thoughts – one of the most quintessentially human aspects of our being – from the inside, and this journey transforms the way we experience thoughts.

f. Contemplative practice: Exploring thoughts

- i. Last week we inquired into our experience of the body. This week we'll continue our journey by investigating the nature of thoughts.
- ii. You can start by checking in with your posture and forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iii. Next, link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to explore my own mind and learn how it works, and especially my experience of thoughts."
- iv. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- v. As you rest in open awareness, turn your attention to whatever thoughts are present in your mind. Simply observe thoughts as they come and go.
- vi. Next, look more deeply into thoughts. Where are they located when they arise? Are they in the head, in the heart, somewhere else in the body? Do they have a center or edge? Are they solid or are they more like mist, or a mirage? Feel the texture of thoughts and see what you find.
- vii. Notice how thoughts are constantly changing, and how they dissolve when you look into them.
- viii. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- vi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, bring your awareness to your thoughts and notice how they are constantly changing.

b. Scientific principle: Split-brains

- i. In some cases, medical procedures have been performed in which the corpus callosum, a brain region that links the right and left hemispheres of the brain, is cut, functionally separating these two regions. Scientists have studied people who have undergone this procedure and have discovered some interesting things. One of the

most fascinating discoveries is that the left hemisphere seems to be linked to the human capacity to weave a coherent story about experience, unifying the disparate elements of experience. It may be that this running commentary on our experience helps create the feeling that there is an independent “I” that is running the show, and that observes and controls everything that the mind and body do.

1. Source: Gazzaniga, M. S. (2005). Forty-five years of split-brain research and still going strong. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 6(August), 653–659.
2. Roser, M., & Gazzaniga, M. S. (2004). Automatic Brains-Interpretive Minds. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13(2), 56–59.

4. Week 4: Allowing for change – emotions

a. Contemplative principle: The inner landscape of emotions

- i. Our bodies, our thoughts, and our emotions – these three spheres of experience play a major role in shaping our sense of self. Over the past few weeks we’ve explored the body and thoughts. This week we’ll turn our attention to emotions.
- ii. As we saw with thoughts, the starting point for this exploration is to strengthen our capacity to notice our feelings and emotions when they manifest and to let them move through our field of awareness without getting hijacked by them. This is easier said than done, but as we grow more familiar with the awareness of emotions, we can begin to explore them in more depth.
- iii. And there’s another parallel between our bodies, thoughts, and emotions. When we inquire into the experience of the body and of thoughts, we see that at first they seem very solid and substantial, but the more we look, the more we notice change, space, and movement. Emotions are very similar. An emotion like anxiety, anger, or even intense lust or desire can seem completely solid and compelling...even overwhelming.
- iv. When we look deeply into the experience of emotions, we see lots of moving pieces. There are thoughts and stories spinning in the mind, feelings and sensations in the body, and also a background feeling tone, a sense of wanting to move toward something, away from it, or of fear or anxiety.

- v. Usually we get caught in the web of our emotions. When we feel something in the aversion family – perhaps anger, frustration, or aggression – we only see the negative, and we often want to lash out or do something in response to what we experience. When these states of mind take hold, we are incapable of seeing the whole picture. There is no capacity to see the positive, to sense opportunities or openings, or for warmth and connection.
- vi. When we experience desirous states of mind – lust, attachment, wanting, etc. – it’s just the opposite. We only see the things we like, and often exaggerate them, and at the same time we completely tune out the things we don’t want to see. What this shares with states of aversion is the inability to see clearly. Our desire can so distort our experience that we can become emotionally blinded, and end up making disastrous decisions that hurt ourselves, others, or both.
- vii. And the list goes on and on. Anxious states of mind see only threats and problems. Ignorant and oblivious states of mind don’t see anything clearly at all. Every emotional state is unique, and some – like kindness and compassion – are beneficial.
- viii. Given the harmful role that emotions can play, it would be easy to conclude that we should do our best to rid ourselves of destructive emotions. But these states are also filled with energy and creativity. They add color and energy to our lives. The invitation with our practice this week is to explore the experience of emotions so that you can use their creative energy without falling prey to their destructive capacity.

g. Contemplative practice: Exploring emotions

- i. For this exercise, we will explore the experience of emotions, much as we did last week with thoughts.
- ii. You can start by checking in with your posture and forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, “I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place.”
- iii. Next, link this motivation with a clear intention: “To do that, I am now going to explore my own mind and learn how it works, and especially my experience of emotions.”

- iv. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- v. As you rest in open awareness, turn your attention to whatever emotions are present. Simply observe your emotions and feelings as they come and go.
- vi. Next, look more deeply into the experience of emotions. What are they made of? Are there words or images in the mind? Feelings and sensations in the body? What are emotions comprised of?
- vii. Where are emotions located? Are they in the head, in the heart, somewhere else in the body? Do they have a center or edge? Are they solid or are they more like mist, or a mirage? Feel the texture of your emotions and see what you find.
- viii. Notice how emotions are constantly changing, and how they dissolve when you look into them.
- ix. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- ix. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, bring your awareness to your emotions and notice how they are constantly changing.

b. Scientific principle: Primed by emotions

- i. Emotions shape our experience in many ways. One of the more interesting examples of the influence of emotions is what we scientists refer to as "emotional priming." This phenomena occurs when we are exposed to an emotionally loaded word or image, and without our knowing it, this spills over into a subsequent action or task. For instance, one study showed that people who are primed by seeing words associated with feelings of guilt will subsequently engage in more helping behaviors than those who are exposed to words associated with sadness. There are many examples of this affect, and it can influence us in many ways. Luckily, when we are consciously aware of the emotionally charged word or image, it doesn't have the same impact. So this may suggest that learning to be more aware of the things we encounter in daily life could help us to be less susceptible to their influence.

1. Source: Lapate, R. C., Rokers, B., Li, T., & Davidson, R. J. (2014). Nonconscious Emotional Activation Colors First Impressions: A Regulatory Role for Conscious Awareness. *Psychological Science, 25*(2), 349–357.
2. Zemack-Rugar, Y., Bettman, J. R., & Fitzsimons, G. J. (2007). The Effects of Nonconsciously Priming Emotion Concepts on Behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 93*(6), 927–939.

Month 12 – Connections

Summary: One of the most basic qualities of our sense of self is our experience of being separate and independent from other people and the world around us. When we dig deeper, however, we begin to see that we are intimately connected to the people in our lives and to our environment, so much so that it can be difficult to tell where we end and the world begins. Indeed, our perceptions, our thoughts, and our emotions are so deeply conditioned by our interactions and relationships that our sense of being completely independent may be an illusion. This month we will explore these connections and see how our experience of the world is shaped by a constantly shifting web of relationships. We will end our journey by turning our attention to the basic question of well-being, and explore the idea that our individual quest for lasting happiness is intimately bound up with the well-being of others.

1. Week 1: Seeing connections

a. Contemplative principle: Seeing connections

- i. One of the most painful feelings we can have as human beings is to feel alone, to feel as though we are cut off, ostracized, or completely on our own with no one to rely on. This is an extreme feeling, but even when we are doing ok we can still feel as though we are fundamentally cut off from everyone and everything around us.
- ii. This feeling of isolation and independence could hardly be farther from the truth. We are deeply interconnected with everyone and everything around us. Every sensation, every thought, every feeling, and everything we encounter arises in dependence on a myriad of conditions. Our beliefs and expectations are shaped by other people, by our culture, by our upbringing, and by many other factors.
- iii. When we start to wake up to these connections, we start to feel more at home in the world. We start to see that our feeling of isolation is an illusion, and that we could not remove ourselves from the web of life even if we tried. Noticing the intricate web of connections at work in every moment loosens up the rigidities of thought and emotion that are often rooted in simplistic, and often inaccurate, views of the world. It also frees up a tremendous amount of inner resources and helps us to see things more clearly, rather than through the distorting lens of our preconceptions and unconscious beliefs.

- iv. One simple way that we can tune in to these connections is by inquiring into the surrounding conditions of any particular experience. Where are we? Who are we with? What are we doing? How is all this influencing my experience in the present moment? These are the kind questions we can ask to gain insight into the inter-relatedness of our lives.
- v. This is what we'll focus on this week. In future weeks, we'll focus on the way in which we are shaped by our interactions with others, and also by our surrounding environment and culture. These simple inquiries are powerful methods to gain insight into the workings of the mind and the dynamics of subjective experience.

h. Contemplative practice: Noticing connections

- i. So far, our practice of getting to know the self has taken us through a variety of landscapes. We've explored how our beliefs and expectations shape our reality, and how our perception is not always a perfect representation of what's really going on. We've also inquired into the nature of the self, peeking under the hood to discern all the different parts of our experience that comprise the self. This month we'll continue this journey by exploring all the connections and conditions that shape our experience. This week, we'll dip our toes in the water by waking up to the conditions that surround us and see if we can notice how they influence our sense of well-being.
- ii. As always, you can start by checking in with your posture and forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iii. Next, link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to explore my own mind and learn how it works."
- iv. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- v. Next, bring a gentle awareness to all the conditions that are present within you and around you right now, and notice how they are influencing your experience. How does your body feel right now? Is this influencing your mood or the way you see things, or are were you unaware of the body until I mentioned it?

- vi. What thoughts and emotions are present? What impact are they having on your sense of well-being? On how you see yourself and the world?
- vii. Where are you right now? What are your surroundings like? Is it sunny and light, or dark? Is it noisy or quiet? Are you surrounded by beautiful things or things you find unattractive? Notice all this and how it influences how you feel, and how you think, right here and right now.
- viii. From time to time, you can relax the mind and rest for a few moments, and return to the inquiry when it feels natural to do so.
- ix. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- vi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, notice what is happening within and around you, and how each factor that you experience shapes who you are, and how you feel, in the present moment.

b. Scientific principle: The internet age and well-being

- i. A few decades ago, we could go long periods each day without much exposure to the media or to electronic devices. These days, there might not be a single hour of our day – with the exception of sleep, of course – where we are not online in some way. The landscape is shifting so fast that it's difficult for us scientists to keep up. Research shows that being online can have a profound impact on our lives, relationships, and overall well-being. For instance, one early study on internet usage from the late nineties showed that greater internet usage was linked to less communication with family members at home, a smaller social circle, and increased psychological problems, like depression and loneliness. This phenomenon has been especially well studied with children, where it has been shown that increased media exposure, especially online content, has many adverse effects on well-being and development.

1. Source: Brown, J. D., & Bobkowski, P. S. (2011). Older and newer media: Patterns of use and effects on adolescents' health and well-being. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 95–113.

2. Mathers, M., Canterford, L., Olds, T., Hesketh, K., Ridley, K., & Wake, M. (2009). Electronic Media Use and Adolescent Health and Well-Being: Cross-Sectional Community Study. *Academic Pediatrics, 9*(5), 307–314.
3. Kraut, R., Patterson, M., Lundmark, V., Kiesler, S., Mukopadhyay, T., & Scherlis, W. (1998). Internet Paradox. *American Psychologist, 53*(9), 1017–1031.

2. Week 2: The self in relationship

a. Contemplative principle: The self in relationship

- i. We are constantly being shaped by interactions and relationships with the people in our lives. Although we like to think of ourselves as being independent and autonomous, our beliefs and ideas, as well as our thoughts and emotions, are continually being shaped by the people around us.
- ii. When someone walks into the room, the thoughts and feelings that are moving through his or her mind will influence everyone else in the room. If she is fully of joy, people will perk up and lean forward. If she is enraged or gloomy, people will contract and begin to put up their guard.
- iii. These connections don't disappear when someone leaves the room. Every interaction stays with us and impacts our experience in some way. We might remember a random smile or an act of kindness years, or even decades, after we experienced it. And this is just what we're aware of. There are likely countless ways that we continue to be shaped by these experiences long after we've had them.
- iv. Like thoughts and feelings, these connections can play a positive, constructive role in our lives, and they can also be destructive. When we are not aware of them, we really don't have any control over their influence, and often we are not even aware that it's happening.
- v. The practice of self-inquiry is one way we can bring these connections to the surface of our minds. When we are aware of them, we can strengthen the connections that are conducive to well-being and meaningful pursuits, and decrease the power that negative influences have on our mind. Awareness – it turns out – is a powerful force in de-conditioning the mind.

- vi. To do this, we can bring awareness to the dynamics of our relationships. When we are around people, we can notice the influence that what we see, hear, and feel has on our experience, and also take responsibility for the way that our thoughts, emotions, and actions influence others. And even when we're alone, we can notice our thoughts and emotions and reflect on all the people and relationships that have helped to shape our experience in the present moment.
- vii. This kind of inquiry generates self-knowledge and understanding that gives us a sense of empowerment. It helps us to see the forces at work in our lives so that we can live with more confidence, compassion, and wisdom.

i. Contemplative practice: Noticing connections with others

- i. This week we'll continue our practice of noticing all the conditions that shape our experience, but we'll pay special attention to our interactions with others.
- ii. As always, you can start by checking in with your posture and forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iii. Next, link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to explore my own mind and learn how it works, and in particular I'm going to bring awareness to my connections to others to learn how these connections shape my experience."
- iv. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- v. Next, bring to mind the last person you saw. What was the interaction like? What did you do or say? What did the other person do or say? How did this influence how you felt? Is this feeling still with you? Are there any thoughts in your mind? Notice what arises when you do this inquiry. There is no need to change or alter any of the thoughts or feelings that arise. Simply notice what comes up and let it move through your awareness naturally. Allowing it to be there as long as it needs to.
- vi. Now bring to mind the next interaction you will have. Who is the next person you will likely see? What do you expect the interaction

will be like? What will you likely say or do? How do you think it will influence the other person? How might their actions influence you? Again, simply notice what comes up. The practice here is not to change, but to gain insight into the dynamics of your own experience. Just watch and observe what comes up as you inquire.

- vii. From time to time, you can relax the mind and rest for a few moments, and return to the inquiry when it feels natural to do so.
- viii. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- viii. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, notice who you are with – or who you have been with – and bring awareness to how these interactions shape who you are, and how you feel, in the present moment.

b. Scientific principle: The importance of caring relationships

- i. Most of us don't need science to tell us that having harmonious, trusting, caring relationships is an important factor in well-being. Nevertheless, scientists have studied the relationship between interpersonal dynamics and well-being and research suggests what most of us have experienced in our own lives: that our interactions with others shape how we feel. When we experience conflict or have strained relationships, we experience high levels of distress, and this is true for both women and men. And when we feel fully supported, we feel less distress. This is all pretty obvious. It also turns out that our relationships impact our physical health, even our life expectancy. So this all goes to show that being sensitive to the quality of our relationships is one of the single most important factors in our individual well-being.
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and Women Really So Different? *American Sociological Review*, 61(5), 837–857.

3. Week 3: The self in context

a. Contemplative principle: The self in context

- i. Our environment – both immediate and distant – is another factor that shapes our experience. Sometimes this influence is obvious. We feel different when we are in the mountains compared to being in the city, and even the color of a room can impact our mood.
- ii. As with other influences in our lives, we usually only notice how embedded we are in our environment in extreme circumstances, when a shift in context leads to a dramatic shift in our mood or thinking. But these influences happen all the time. When we get in our car, when we walk into work, and when we step outside on a bright sunny day...all of these changes in our surroundings transform our experience.
- iii. In getting to know the self, we learn how deep these connections go, and how nebulous the boundary between the self and its surroundings truly is. Look around you right now. What do you see? Every single thing that you see changes you in some way. Every single thing is registered in your mind, and influences your experience. Together, all of these tiny details of your world shape who you are in this present moment.
- iv. When we practice noticing these connections and conditions, and how they impact our thoughts, emotions, and perception, we loosen up some of the rigidities of our mind and open up into a more fluid way of relating to the world. We can see conditions that exacerbate destructive habits and steer clear of them, or lessen their impact through our awareness. And conversely, we can see the circumstances that prompt awareness, feeling at home in our own skin and with the people around us, and to see clearly and with wisdom. In particular, tuning into the conditions we're surrounded by gives us insight into the nature of the self – that the feeling of being isolated and cut off from others and the world is an illusion, and in fact that we are deeply interconnected in every moment of our lives.
- v. The practice for this week involves noticing these connections and how they shape our experience. This is an extension of the foundational mindful awareness practices we learned months ago,

but here we're turning our attention specifically to the interdependence between our inner and outer worlds.

j. Contemplative practice: Noticing connections with your surroundings

- i. Our practice this week will take us deeper into our connections with our surroundings. We'll learn to notice what is going on in our environment and inquire into the influence it has on our experience in the present moment.
- ii. As always, you can start by checking in with your posture and forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place."
- iii. Next, link this motivation with a clear intention: "To do that, I am now going to explore my own mind and learn how it works, and in particular I'm going to bring awareness to my surroundings to learn how my environment shapes my experience."
- iv. Now that you've set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- v. Bring awareness to your environment. Where are you right now? What are your surroundings like? Is it sunny and light, or dark? Is it noisy or quiet? Are you surrounded by beautiful things or things you find unattractive? Notice all this and how it influences how you feel, and how you think, right here and right now.
- vi. Notice the amount of light where you are and how it makes you feel. Notice whatever sounds are present and see how they impact your mind. What objects and things are you surrounded by? Notice these things and how they too shape your experience.
- vii. From time to time, you can relax the mind and rest for a few moments, and return to the inquiry when it feels natural to do so.
- viii. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- vi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. In those situations, notice all the details of your surroundings and bring

awareness to how they shape who you are, and how you feel, in the present moment.

b. Scientific principle: Biophilia and attention restoration

- i. The great naturalist and biologist Edward O. Wilson popularized the notion of biophilia. What this fancy sounding term means is that – according to this idea – we humans have a natural affinity for nature and being around other forms of life. This idea has been studied scientifically, and it has also influence other areas, such as design an architecture, leading to the incorporation of nature and natural elements in buildings and structures.
- ii. What science tells us about this idea is, perhaps obvious, at least to those of us who enjoy the outdoors. The finding is simple. We feel better when we're in nature, and we naturally gravitate to natural settings. Research has even found that spending time in nature is restorative, and that those who spend short periods in nature perform better on basic cognitive tasks compared to those who spend a comparable period of time in an urban environment.
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 2. Gullone, E. (2000). The biophilia hypothesis and life in the 21st century: increasing mental health or increasing pathology? *Journal of Happiness Studies*, (June), 293–321.
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4. Week 4: Global well-being

a. Contemplative principle: We're in this together

- i. If you're anything like me, when you first started this program you were probably thinking about your own well-being. Maybe you had some challenges or issues you were facing – or maybe you were stressed out and struggling to cope – and wanted to find a better way to deal with the ups and downs of life. Or maybe you were just curious, about your own mind and the practices we've been working with.
- ii. By now, hopefully it is clear that our personal well-being is deeply interconnected with the well-being of everyone else, and with the

planet we call home. There is no true, lasting contentment when our brothers and sisters suffer. There is no peace of mind when the earth is not in balance and cannot heal itself. We cannot feel truly at home in this world when we are divided from each other, or divided within. Our personal well-being is intimately connected with the well-being of the whole world.

- iii. Now that we've reached the last week of our yearlong journey, let's bring everything that we've learned together and affirm our commitment to live a life of awareness, compassion, and wisdom. To bring these basic human qualities into our lives and relationships, and to devote ourselves not only to our own well-being, but also to leaving this world a better place than we found it.
- iv. Hopefully one of the things that you've learned over this past year is that true, lasting change is not the product of dramatic gestures and huge life changes. The path to flourishing – our own and that of the world – is all the small steps we take each day, from the moment we wake up to the time when we end our day. We can view our entire life as a practice. We can practice being fully present for ourselves and for others. We can practice embodying our most deeply held values and beliefs. And we can practice living with a kind, open heart, and a wise, clear mind. These are all skills, and we can practice them until the day we leave this earth.
- v. As we conclude our time together, please give some thought to how you want to bring everything we've done and learned together into life. Are there areas that you want to return to, to deepen your practice and learn more? Are there areas of your life that you'd like to integrate with your practice? The clearer your intention is, the easier it will be to stay connected to all the skills you've strengthened over the past year.

k. Contemplative practice: Who do I want to be in this moment?

- i. This is our last week, so we're going to bring everything we've been doing over this past year together in one simple practice. In this exercise, we'll practice embodying the core qualities we've been cultivating over the course of this program: a calm, clear mind, a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives, a kind heart, and with wisdom and a healthy sense of self.
- ii. Start by checking in with your posture and forming an inspiring motivation for doing this practice, "I am doing this practice so I can

transform the way I relate to my own mind, so I can have rich, healthy relationships with others, and so I can do my part to make the world a better place.”

- iii. Next, link this motivation with a clear intention: “To do that, I am now going to practice living with a clear mind, with purpose, with a kind heart, and with wisdom and insight.”
- iv. Now that you’ve set a clear intention, let your body and mind relax with each out breath and rest for a short moment in the short gap between breaths.
- v. As you rest in awareness, ask yourself one simple question: “How do I want to be in this moment?” Relate this question to your capacity to be aware and attentive versus unaware and distracted. In other words, in this very moment, do you want to be fully present? If so, clarify and affirm this commitment to yourself.
- vi. Having clarified this intention, return to the breath and rest for a few moments, letting yourself feel deeply grounded in the commitment to be fully aware and attentive, no matter where you are and what you are doing.
- vii. Asking yourself again – “How do I want to be in this moment?” – bring to mind the question of purpose and meaning in life. In this very moment, do you want to embody your most deeply held values, and to focus on what is truly meaningful? If so, clarify and affirm this commitment to yourself.
- viii. Having clarified this intention, return to the breath and rest for a few moments, letting yourself feel deeply grounded in the commitment to focus on what is truly meaningful in life.
- ix. Ask yourself a third time – “How do I want to be in this moment?” – and reflect on your capacity to connect in a healthy way with others. In this very moment, do you want to have a kind, open heart? If so, clarify and affirm this commitment to yourself.
- x. Having clarified this intention, return to the breath and rest for a few moments, letting yourself feel deeply grounded in the commitment to live with kindness and compassion.
- xi. Ask yourself one final time – “How do I want to be in this moment?” – and bring awareness to the question of wisdom, insight, and your sense of self. In this very moment, do you want to embody wisdom and live with a fluid, healthy sense of self? If so, clarify and affirm this commitment to yourself.

- xii. Having clarified this intention, return to the breath and rest for a few moments, letting yourself feel deeply grounded in the commitment to live with wisdom and insight.
- xiii. To conclude, let go and rest in open awareness for a minute or two.
- vi. Before you return to your daily routine, pause for a moment to set a clear intention for the day. Think of a few situations during your day and form the intention to continue your practice. When you remember to practice, ask yourself this simple question – “How do I want to be in this moment?” – and reaffirm your commitment to the four qualities of a healthy mind, or whichever of the four seems the most relevant for you in the moment.

b. Scientific principle: World Happiness Report

- i. Every year the United Nations releases a report on global well-being. It’s called the “World Happiness Report.” There are many insights that we can glean from these reports, but there is one in particular that is especially relevant for the journey we’ve shared together over this past year. The insight is this: When you look around the world, you see a great deal of variability when it comes to how happy people are, and even when it comes to entire countries and cultures.
- ii. Why is this important? Well, if we found that different countries are pretty much the same when it comes to happiness, it would not give us a lot of hope that we could strengthen the factors that contribute to well-being. But the data shows just the opposite. Well-being is not fixed. It is something that can change. We can do things as individuals, and as communities and cultures, that lead us toward greater and more enduring well-being, or away from it.
- iii. As scientists, we have a lot to learn about well-being. I’d like to say that we have it all figured out and that we can tell you exactly what it is and how you can optimize your own well-being. The reality is that there is much we don’t know.
- iv. But we are learning more and more every day, and the skills you’ve been learning and the qualities you’ve been strengthening are not only contributing to your own well-being, and to building healthy, thriving communities – your dedication and effort over this past year will help us to fully understand how we can truly flourish and how we can make a positive impact on the world we share.

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